

Muslim-Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean

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Muslim-Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean

The *Splendid Replies* of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī
(d. 684/1285)

By

Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella



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In memoriam

Joseph (Sjef) Donders, MAfr
(1929–2013)



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Arabic words are transliterated according to the system employed by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. The different editions of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* are abbreviated as *EI1*, *EI2*, and *EI3* respectively. Similarly, the *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān* appears in notes as *EQ*, and the series *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History* as *CMR* followed by a number indicating the volume. Double dates are given according to the Hijrī/Common Era format. Where only one date is given, it refers to the Common Era. Non-English titles are left untranslated unless they are related to the central focus of this study. Unless otherwise noted, qurʾānic quotations follow M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qurʾān: A New Translation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Biblical quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version*. Documents from the Second Vatican Council are quoted from Austin Flannery's edition, *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, Northport: Costello; Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996.

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Introduction

To the extent that similar doctrines or positions prevent us from seeing the more far-reaching differences inherent in the way in which doctrines and concepts combine into an integrated whole to form a perception of man, of God and of their relations with one another—to precisely this extent—such similarities obstruct understanding. The matter of importance is the thrust of the whole, its distinctive character. Here the difference is so great that one may well ask whether in truth there is any hope of Christian-Muslim dialogue ever progressing beyond the stage of registering the differences with one another.¹

This book focuses on a polemical work written by the Egyptian Mālikī jurist Shihāb al-Dīn Abū l-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Ṣanhājī al-Qarāfi (626–684/1228–1285). The title of the work is *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira ‘an al-as’ila al-fājira* (‘Splendid Replies to Insolent Questions’).² As will become apparent from discussion of its historical and literary context, this work represents much more than an isolated attempt by a Muslim scholar in thirteenth-century Cairo to respond to a letter written in Arabic by Paul of Antioch, the Melkite writer and Bishop of Sidon, to a Muslim friend from the same city. Not only was the *Ajwiba* the first of three major Muslim refutations provoked by this letter, but both Paul’s letter and al-Qarāfi’s reply incorporate substantial amounts of material and arguments from previous works that other Christian and Muslim writers had composed about the other faith. Seen from this viewpoint, the *Ajwiba* constitutes a moment in a protracted conversation that involved a considerable number of Christian and Muslim actors over a period of several centuries and across distant lands: Nisibis, Toledo, Cordoba, Maragha, Sidon, Cairo, Cyprus, and Damascus.

My study of al-Qarāfi’s work is inscribed within a wider interest, namely, the conditions for a Christian-Muslim theological conversation that may help set the relationship between these two faiths on a less confrontational course

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- 1 Charles J. Adams, “Islam and Christianity: The Opposition of Similarities,” in *Logos Islamikos*, ed. R.M. Savory and D.A. Agius (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), 306.
 - 2 Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfi, *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira ‘an al-as’ila al-fājira*, ed. Bakr Zakī ‘Awaḍ, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1987). Henceforth all references to the *Ajwiba* will be to the superior, yet unpublished, edition by Nājī Muḥammad Dāwūd (PhD diss., Umm al-Qurā University, Mecca 1985), followed by ‘Awaḍ’s edition in parenthesis.

than that which has characterized most of their shared history. In this introductory chapter, I elaborate on the main intellectual and theological concerns that underlie my study. Although this book is not proposed as a work of comparative theology as such, the perspective adopted is heavily indebted to the insights of this new discipline.³

1 Islam, Irrelevant for Christianity?

It is somewhat paradoxical that we have so little firm historical information about Paul of Antioch, who initiated one of the most fecund episodes in the history of Christian-Muslim relations.⁴ This exchange began with the letter-treatise that Paul wrote to a likely fictitious Muslim friend about 1200. Approximately a century later, an anonymous (possibly Nestorian)⁵ Christian in Cyprus undertook a revision of Paul's original work. This revision was sent to two Muslim personalities in Damascus, first to the Ḥanbali scholar Taqī l-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and then, in a slightly amended version, to the Sufi author Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī (d. 727/1327), each of whom responded with a voluminous reply.⁶ Before the

3 See Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); idem, ed., *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

4 On Paul of Antioch's life and the circumstances of the composition of his *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, see below, chapter 2, where the textual sources of the *Ajwiba* are discussed in detail.

5 Alexander Treiger, "The Christology of the *Letter from the People of Cyprus*," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 65 (2013): 21–48.

6 Ibn Taymiyya's reply is his well-known *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ* ('The Correct Reply to Those who have Changed the Religion of Christ'), ed. 'Alī ibn Ḥasan ibn Nāṣir et al., 7 vols. (Riyadh: Dār al-Āṣima, 1993–1999), partial trans. Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawab al-sahih* (Delmar, NY: Caravan, 1984). As for Ibn Abī Ṭālib's reply, it is his *Jawāb risālat ahl jazīrat Qubruṣ* ('Reply to the Letter of the People of Cyprus'), ed. and trans. Rifaat Y. Ebied and David Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades: The Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī's Response* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). For an analysis and comparison of these two refutations of the Cypriot reworking of Paul's *Letter*, see David Thomas, "Christian-Muslim Misunderstanding in the Fourteenth Century: The Correspondence between Christians in Cyprus and Muslims in Damascus," in *Towards a Cultural History of the Mamluk Era*, ed. M. Haddad et al. (Beirut: Orient-Institut; Würzburg: Ergon, 2010), 13–30. See also, by the same author, "The Letter from Cyprus or Letters from Cyprus?," in *Cultures in Contact: Transfer of Knowledge in the Mediterranean Context: Selected Papers*, ed. S. Torallas Tovar and J.P. Monferrer Sala (Córdoba: CNERU; Beirut: CEDRAC; Oriens Academic, 2013), 263–274.

Cypriot revision was sent to Syria, however, Paul's original composition (or at least a summary of it) had already captured the attention of al-Qarāfi in Cairo, who composed his own answer in reply. Paul's letter-treatise was also summarized by al-Qarāfi's younger contemporary and fellow Cairene, the Coptic polymath al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl (d. between 1253 and 1275), in a work that he wrote in answer to an earlier Muslim refutation of Christianity.⁷ Indeed, Ibn Taymiyya himself witnesses to the popularity of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* among Christian scholars who were engaged in arguing for the integrity and superiority of their religion, indicating his awareness that the letter arriving from Cyprus was yet another elaboration of Paul's original work:

That which they state in this book [arrived from Cyprus] is the basic support upon which their scholars depend, both in our time and in previous ages, although some of them may elaborate further than others depending upon the situations. We have found them making use of this treatise before now; their scholars hand it down among themselves, and old copies of it still exist. It is attributed to Paul of Antioch, the monk, Bishop of Sidon. He wrote it to one of his friends, and had previously written works about the supremacy of Christianity.⁸

What made this work of the Melkite bishop so attractive to Christians living in close contact with Islam and, at the same time, so provocative in Muslim eyes, to the point of eliciting three major refutations? A recent commentator describes it as “one of the most accomplished and disconcerting works from the history of Christian-Muslim relations that is known,” pointing out that “beneath its irenic surface it reveals a logic that threatens to subvert the whole basis of Islam.”⁹ As has been remarked, the strength of Paul's argument lies in not accusing Islam of being a false religion, the work of a pseudo-prophet, but of being irrelevant and superfluous to Christianity, and this in contrast to earlier Christian polemics against Islam.¹⁰ While the prophecy of Muḥammad is not denied, it is restricted to the pagan Arabs, to whom he came bearing a book written in their language. This concession allows the Melkite writer to present a number of qurʾānic proofs for the permanent validity and even the superiority of the Christian dispensation, effectively turning the Qurʾān into a “crypto-Christian document” that confirms the central affirmations of the

7 On Ibn al-ʿAssāl's borrowing from Paul of Antioch, see below, chapter 2.

8 Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 1:99–100; trans. *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 140–141.

9 David Thomas, “Paul of Antioch,” in *CMR4*, 79.

10 Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 88.

Christian faith.¹¹ In addition to these qur'ānic arguments, the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* also included a series of biblical proofs of the Trinity (considerably expanded in the Cypriot version) and various rational arguments for the truth of Christianity. Thus, one can understand why this letter, which al-Dimashqī described as “exemplary in politeness but alien in intention and shocking in purpose” (*risāla ḥasanat al-talaṭṭuf, gharībat al-maghzā, ‘ajībat al-marmā*),¹² should have occasioned such important reactions on the Muslim side.

The fruitfulness of the exchange occasioned by Paul of Antioch's composition alone makes it worthy of historical attention. Beyond its historical interest, however, this exchange is also worth exploring in connection to the theological issues raised within it and the wider question of the possibility of Christian-Muslim theological conversation. Indeed, from the perspective of the contemporary Christian theology of religions, the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* can be said to anticipate some features of the so-called ‘inclusivist’ position, which remains by and large the favored position among Christian theologians. Unlike others who saw Islam and its prophet as part of Satan's ploy to oppose God's true religion, the Melkite writer appears to grant a qualified prophetic role for Muḥammad. And yet, not unlike today's inclusivists, due to his Christian faith, he could not possibly admit the universal and decisive character of Muḥammad's message, which he saw not as contradicting, but as falling short of God's self-disclosure in Christ. Because of its emphasis on God's strict justice, Islam appeared to Paul to be comparable to the first dispensation, the Mosaic Law, even if chronologically Islam came after Christianity. What good news, what further revelation of God or about God, is there in Muḥammad's preaching, Paul seems to ask his potential Muslim readers, that should require Christians to pay attention to the Arab prophet? Thus, he effectively challenged his Muslim respondents to reflect in turn on their own understanding of religious history, that is, to think theologically of Islam alongside other monotheistic traditions and to respond to Paul's implicit questions: On what basis does Islam lay claim to universal relevance? What does Muḥammad's prophetic message bring to those to whom the divine word had already been addressed?

11 The expression is from Thomas, who explains how Paul of Antioch achieves his purpose by carefully selecting verses of the Qur'ān, or even parts of verses, and isolating them from their original context. See examples of this exegesis in David Thomas, “Paul of Antioch's *Letter to a Muslim Friend* and *The Letter from Cyprus*,” in *Syrian Christians under Islam*, 208–211, and idem, “Apologetic and Polemic in the *Letter from Cyprus* and Ibn Taymiyya's *Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*,” in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Y. Rapoport and S. Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 248–249.

12 Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic*, 155.

Perhaps not so much for the historian, or at least not in the same degree, but for the theologian these are sensitive issues. One has only to recall the reactions provoked by the 2006 Regensburg lecture in which Pope Benedict XVI quoted a remark made by the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologus (d. 1425) during a conversation with an educated Persian: "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."¹³ This brings us to the question of the perspective adopted in this study. Since this book pays close attention to certain normative claims that intellectual representatives of Christianity and Islam have formulated about the other, it is appropriate to be clear about the inspiration for this project.¹⁴ The starting-point of my inquiry is the "mood of sober realism" that characterizes the current phase of Christian-Muslim dialogue, according to Christian Troll.¹⁵ He attributes this mood to an awareness of the *recurrent* problems encountered in dialogue over the past decades, "such as a lack of honesty and clarity; failure to show real interest in one's dialogue partner, his or her faith perspectives and their roots in history; anxious tendencies to focus on the reinforcement of one's own identity and the strengthening of the political influence of one's own group."¹⁶ This is not a mere sociological observation, but one that concerns my interest in fostering better understanding between Christians and Muslims. It is this commitment that is at the basis of my intellectual study of the history of Christian-Muslim relations and it would be dishonest to invoke a purely intellectual curiosity, even if the latter is also present and enhances the former.

13 Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections." Lecture delivered at the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg on Tuesday, 12 September 2006. Official text available at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html (accessed July 2, 2014).

14 I subscribe to the view that openness about our interests and agendas is "the postmodern equivalent to the modern stance of objectivity, inasmuch as it does the same work that objectivity was intended to do, only better" (Jeffery D. Long, *A Vision for Hinduism: Beyond Hindu Nationalism* [London: I.B. Tauris, 2007], 4).

15 Christian W. Troll, *Dialogue and Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 3.

16 Troll, *Dialogue and Difference*, 2.

2 The Church Has Also a High Regard for the Muslims

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was a turning-point in the history of the way Catholics view other religions.¹⁷ The official teaching of the Catholic Church moved away from a “default position of hostility”¹⁸ and, for the first time, spoke respectfully about other religious traditions in general and Islam in particular:

The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, first among whom are the Muslims: they profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge humanity on the last day (*Lumen Gentium*, 16).

The church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity. They endeavor to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own (*Nostra Aetate*, 3).

Magisterial documents always include references to previous church teaching and papal statements on the issue at hand with a view to emphasizing the continuity of tradition. Significantly, in the case of Islam, the only positive reference that the redactors of *Nostra Aetate* were able to produce was a letter sent in 1076 by Pope Gregory VII to the Muslim ruler of Béjaïa in present-day Algeria, a letter that stands in dissonance with the ‘crusading spirit’ of the time.¹⁹ In it, the Pope expressed his conviction that Muslims and Christians owed charity to one another more particularly than to the remaining peoples, “for we believe and confess one God, although in different ways, and praise and worship him daily as the creator of all ages and the ruler of this world.”²⁰ This nuanced recognition of the Muslim faith in the one God did not become,

17 In this section, (as well as in the conclusion of the book), I write as a Roman Catholic committed to the vision of the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council. My tendency to identify Christianity instinctively with the Catholic Church is in no way intended as a diminishing of other expressions of Christianity.

18 The expression is from Douglas Pratt, “The Vatican in Dialogue with Islam: Inclusion and Engagement,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21 (2010), 247.

19 See Tomaž Mastnak, “Gregory VII,” in *CMR*3, 196.

20 Quoted from Josef Neuner and Jacques Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 7th rev. ed. (New York: Alba House, 2001), no. 1002. The original Latin text of the letter is found in *Patrologia Latina* 48, 450–452.

however, the official position of the Catholic Church. Only in 1959 did the Vatican suppress a paragraph from Pope Leo XIII's 'Consecration of the human race to Christ the King' in which the faithful entreated Christ to be "King of all those who are still involved in the darkness of idolatry or of Islamism (*qui in tenebris idolatriae aut islamismi adhuc versantur*), and refuse not to draw them into the light and kingdom of God." In the same year were abolished several formulas for the baptism of adults in which the former Muslim now seeking baptism was warned to abhor the Mohammedan perfidy (*Mahumeticam perfidiam*) and to reject the wicked sect of unbelievers (*pravam sectam infidelitatis*).²¹ When read against the backdrop of these texts, Vatican II statements on Islam take on a more profound significance and it becomes clear how the council marked a before and an after in the history of Catholic engagement with Islam.²²

The new orientation found almost immediate expression in numerous initiatives of Christian-Muslim encounter. Many of these were promoted, on the Catholic side, by a special department of the Roman Curia for relations with believers of other religions established in 1964. Known at first as the Secretariat for Non-Christians, it was subsequently renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The enthusiasm was high and many thought that the hostility of past centuries could be definitively replaced by a fraternal desire

21 Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary (Office of Indulgences), "Actus dedicationis humani generis Iesu Christo Regi," in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 51 (1959), 595–596. Sacred Congregation of Rites, "Variationes in Missali et in Rituali Romano in precibus pro Iudaeis," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 74 (1960), 133–134. On the significance of these changes, see José Oscar Beozzo, "The External Climate," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, *Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II*, ed. G. Alberigo and J.A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis; Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 393–395.

22 Paradigm changes do not happen overnight, however. Vatican II sanctioned a change in theological perspective which had commenced long before. Emilio Platti summarizes the essentials of this process in *Islam, Friend or Foe?* (Louvain: Peeters, 2008), 121–133. He points out how this change of perspective was often connected with the 'confusion' that Christian missionaries and visitors experienced when confronted with the human and religious integrity of Muslim populations in their own world. As Western scholars began to pay more interest to Islamic sources beginning at the end of the seventeenth century, the conviction slowly grew that the Qur'an belongs to the same religious universe as the Bible. This change of ideas eventually crystallized and, by the beginning of the twentieth century, voices were beginning to call for respect for Muslims, "not only as members of the human community enjoying universal rights, but because they were worthy of respect simply as Muslims" (p. 124).

to know each other and work together for the sake of a brighter future.²³ The last decade or so, however, has seen an ever-growing disenchantment with the tangible results (or rather lack thereof) of post-conciliar Christian-Muslim engagement. Troll's remark that the current phase of dialogue is characterized by a "mood of sober realism" was cited above. José Luis Sánchez Nogales notes that it is not infrequent nowadays to meet a strong skepticism among Catholics with regard to their church's engagement in interreligious dialogue in general, and especially, with Islam. This skepticism, at times open opposition, revolves around two major objections: first, interreligious dialogue is seen as an abandonment of the task of evangelization thereby posing a threat to the church's own sense of identity; and, second, interreligious dialogue is simply inefficacious, not producing the desired fruit.²⁴

Thus, it is no surprise that many saw a manifestation of this disenchantment taking place when the Vatican announced in March 2006, almost a year after the beginning of Benedict XVI's pontificate, the decision to place the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue under the leadership of the Cardinal President of the Pontifical Council for Culture. Most interestingly, in terms of the present investigation, the President of the latter council linked the decision with the difficulty of holding a "meaningful" doctrinal dialogue with those who do not share the Christian faith in Jesus Christ:

For those who are very familiar with Benedict XVI's thought, this choice [of bringing together interreligious and intercultural dialogue] is logical. In fact, when one speaks of interreligious dialogue, one often thinks of a reflection of a doctrinal nature on common religious topics, such as the idea of God, sin, salvation, etc. However, this doctrinal dialogue calls for a common foundation, and this is not always the case with other religions.

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- 23 The literature dealing with Vatican II's statements on Islam, as well as on post-conciliar Catholic engagement on dialogue with Muslims, is vast. Two good entry points are Christian W. Troll, "Catholic Teachings on Interreligious Dialogue: Analysis of Some Recent Official Documents, with Special Reference to Christian-Muslim Relations," in *Muslim-Christian Perceptions of Dialogue Today: Experiences and Expectations*, ed. J. Waardenburg (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 233–275; and Mahmut Aydin, *Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims since the Second Vatican Council* (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2002), 9–131.
- 24 José Luis Sánchez Nogales, "Del Vaticano II al Foro Católico Musulmán," in *Cristianismo, Islam y Modernidad*, ed. J.L. Sánchez Nogales et al. (Granada: Facultad de Teología, 2011), 33–34. See also a very negative appraisal of the current phase of Muslim-Christian dialogue in Édouard-Marie Gallez, *Le malentendu islamo-chrétien* (Paris: Salvator, 2012), 13–27.

For a Buddhist, for example, God is not a person; for others, salvation consists in the dissolution of the “I,” while for a Christian it is always the salvation of his own person. Thus dialogue is very difficult. Doctrinal dialogue is meaningful among Christians of various confessions with whom we share faith in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, with believers of other religions dialogue is always possible on the basis of culture. This is the intuition that is the foundation of the Pontifical Council for Culture: Culture is a common terrain in which believers and nonbelievers or believers of diverse religions can dialogue. The common topic that unites us, John Paul II said in UNESCO, is man; about whom we certainly can dialogue. Pope Benedict XVI therefore wishes to lead the dialogue with believers of other religions to the terrain of culture and of relations between cultures.²⁵

The above statement is taken from an interview that Cardinal Paul Poupard gave to a news agency and it should therefore not be given more weight than it can bear. It is nevertheless significant that the Cardinal shares a still-wide-spread tendency to identify interreligious dialogue with doctrinal dialogue. This tendency, which reflects an understanding of religion that prioritizes the intellectual content of the faith traditions, explains the assumption that such a dialogue is only meaningful among Christians, since it requires a robust “common foundation” on which to build.²⁶

The same emphasis on the doctrinal level of dialogue appears in a book-length interview first published in German in 1996 in which then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger expressed an important practical difficulty affecting Christian-Muslim dialogue, namely, the question of representation: “No one can speak for Islam as a whole; it has, as it were, no commonly regulated orthodoxy.” At a deeper level, the Cardinal also emphasized the fact that “the interplay of society, politics, and religion has a completely different structure in Islam as a whole . . . Islam has a total organization of life that is completely different

25 “Christ and Religions, According to Cardinal Poupard,” Zenith, 26 March 2006, <http://www.zenit.org/article-15559?l=english> (accessed July 2, 2014).

26 Yet, the Secretariat for the Non-Christians had published in 1984 a document entitled *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* in which four levels of interreligious dialogue were famously distinguished: the dialogue of life, the dialogue of common works for the liberation and advancement of humankind, the dialogue of experts, and the dialogue of religious experience. English text in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 75 (1984): 816–828. The four levels of dialogue are treated in nos. 29–35.

from ours; it embraces simply everything.” It is this all-encompassing aspect of Islam as a socio-religious system that led him to conclude that “the question of dialogue with Islam is naturally much more complicated than, for example, an internal dialogue among Christians.”²⁷ In light of this comment, the decision to merge the presidencies of the two pontifical councils could be seen to rest upon a desire to expand, not to reduce, the field of exchange between Christians and other believers (Muslims in particular), a desire motivated by the awareness that religion and culture are not as easily distinguishable from one another as a secularized West often tends to think. As it happened, however, Benedict XVI restored the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to its previous status in June 2007.²⁸

Even so, some voices have continued to question the possibility of a real theological conversation between Christianity and Islam and to point out the meager results that post-conciliar dialogical engagement with Muslims has produced, the most quoted evidence in this respect being the precarious situation of Christian minorities in several Muslim-majority countries. It is argued that there cannot be a properly theological dialogue with Islam, except in the broad terms of moral values.²⁹ Christianity and Islam are two religious visions so profoundly different that the chances of finding common ground are greater in the terrain of culture and social concerns than on theological issues.

Why this loss of enthusiasm hardly a few decades after Vatican II? Is it a temporary loss of momentum or should we take it as a confirmation that theological dialogue between Christianity and Islam is indeed impossible, a chimera? Must we accept the paradox that these two religious traditions, in spite of their commonalities, represent in fact two radically opposing conceptions of the human-divine relationship destined for perpetual disagreement?

3 The Exclusionary Dimension of Religious Identity

The insights of Hugh Nicholson can be very helpful in understanding the sense of stagnation that currently surrounds Christian-Muslim dialogue. In a series

27 Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 244–245.

28 This was not a modification of his theological views, I believe, but rather the realization that, at the level of public opinion, his previous decision had been interpreted as a downgrading of the Vatican’s commitment to dialogue with Islam.

29 See in this respect the comments of Samir Khalil Samir in <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Benedict-XVI-and-Islam-5998.html> (accessed July 2, 2014).

of recent publications, in which he explores the continuity and discontinuity between the new comparative theology and its nineteenth-century namesake, this scholar has developed a thought-provoking analysis of the modern history of religious discourse in the West.³⁰ Nicholson focuses his study on what he calls “the inescapability of the political” in religious discourse, by which he means the exclusionary—the ‘us’ versus ‘them’—dimension of religious identity. It is precisely this inevitable political dimension of religion that the tradition of liberal theology has vainly sought to overcome since the Enlightenment. This effort of liberal theology to defuse the conflictive potential of religion explains the rise of the nineteenth-century comparative theology as opposed to traditional apologetics; as it also explains the twentieth-century development of pluralism in the Christian theology of religions as opposed to both exclusivism and inclusivism.

On the terrain of the academic study of religion, this effort to eliminate antagonism from religious discourse is also connected with the unwillingness of many a scholar of religion today to engage in comparisons, invoking the incommensurability of religious traditions and/or the perverse effects of cultural hegemony. Nicholson, however, rightly questions the ethical and intellectual responsibility of the tendency to take religious differences as simply substantive, rather than contrastive, that is, to presume that they “are simply ‘there,’ rather than being the contingent products of the complex processes

30 Hugh Nicholson, “Comparative Theology After Liberalism,” *Modern Theology* 23 (2007): 229–251; idem, “The Reunification of Theology and Comparison in the New Comparative Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77 (2009): 609–646; idem, “The New Comparative Theology and the Problem of Theological Hegemonism,” in *The New Comparative Theology*, 43–62; and idem, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). ‘Comparative theology’ was the term used by a large body of literature in the latter half of the nineteenth century to describe its self-perceived novelty in relation to previous writings on religion in the Christian West. This novelty consisted in the explicit intention to be a ‘fair’ empirically-based discourse on other religions. Comparative theology set out to prove that a neutral work of comparison showed that non-Christian religions, even with their great achievements, remained, in the last analysis, unable to rise above their own historicity and particularity, and therefore incapable of fulfilling the human aspiration to what is transcendent and universal, a privilege reserved for Christianity alone. Still, these authors were generally more positive about the value of other religions than earlier Christian authors, who often conceived of non-Christianity as the expression of human error and sinfulness. See Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 72–104.

of selection, emphasis, and recognition through which religious communities situate themselves ‘politically’ in relation to proximate rivals.”³¹

Nicholson’s analysis can also be fruitfully applied to the question of Christian-Muslim relations. In effect, much of the post-conciliar Christian engagement in this area appears as a conscious or unconscious attempt at ‘depoliticizing’ the relations between the two faith communities either by emphasizing commonalities or, more recently, by attempting to move away from the doctrinal to supposedly less problematic terrain. If Nicholson is right, however, the oppositional dimension of religious belonging does not disappear by simply ignoring it or trying to bypass it. Post-conciliar supporters of Christian-Muslim dialogue thought, perhaps a bit too ingenuously, that a change of attitude on the Christian side, together with an invitation to our newly-found friends to do the same, would suffice to lay to rest once and for all centuries of mutual antagonism. Nicholson helps us see that the issue is larger and more complex than just a question of attitude (readiness to forget historical grievances versus attachment to historical grudges), or a new theological perspective (inclusivism versus exclusivism; or pluralism versus inclusivism) from which to evaluate other religions in general.

There is something deeply entrenched in the very processes by which Islam and Christianity came to define themselves in relation to one another that, if ignored, will necessarily thwart any attempt at bringing Christians and Muslims together. One of the aims of this work is to propose ways of softening some of the sharpest edges of Christian-Muslim oppositional discourses while developing an outlook that sees the others not as enemies to be neutralized (theologically speaking), but as believers deserving respect. Before that, however, we need to explore further what Nicholson means by the inescapability of the political and how the new comparative theology opens perspectives in the study of the history of Christian-Muslim relations that are worth exploring.

4 Carl Schmitt and the Inescapability of the Political

The “inescapability of the political” is a concept that Nicholson takes and adapts from the controversial (because of his Nazi associations) German thinker Carl Schmitt (d. 1985), who made it central to his critique of modern liberalism.³² Briefly stated, Schmitt defines the political as the grouping of human beings

31 Nicholson, “The New Comparative Theology,” 57.

32 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George D. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), originally published as *Der Begriff des Politischen, mit einer Rede*

into 'friend' and 'enemy,' something that he sees as an intrinsic dimension of human interaction. For Schmitt, the history of Western modernity can be read as a series of failed attempts to depoliticize social relations, that is, to eliminate antagonism from social relations. This liberal project was born in reaction to the Wars of Religion in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Thus, it is no coincidence that the first and paradigmatic expression of liberalism was the attempt of the Enlightenment to replace religion with reason as the guiding principle of social organization. However, Schmitt points out, every time a previously conflict-free terrain of human interaction (science, economics, politics, culture, etc.) is invested with social capital, it becomes ineluctably the basis for new antagonisms. Thus, by deliberately refusing to admit the inescapability of the political, liberals become blind to the worst cases of domination, which are ironically those carried out under cover of liberal ideals, such as the 'civilizing mission' of European colonialism.

Although Nicholson accepts Schmitt's core intuition, he nevertheless adds an important nuance by limiting the inescapability of the political to "an adversarial relation between an 'us' and a 'them' that stops short of declaring the 'them' an enemy."³³ In other words, he refuses to endorse Schmitt's Hobbesian view of human beings as essentially warlike by nature. For Nicholson, who follows here the political theorist Chantal Mouffe,³⁴ there is no need to go that far to explain the inescapability of the political, which can be seen to rest upon the essentially relational nature of social identity, that is, on the fact that group identity always requires a political (but not necessarily violent) moment of exclusion.

With this conceptual tool in hand, Nicholson goes on to challenge two common narratives that tend to dominate the history of modern Western religious discourse. The first one narrates the rise and consolidation of the science of religion or *Religionswissenschaft* as a progressive emancipation from theology. The second reads the history of modern theology as the debate on the extent to which traditional Christian claims should be recast in terms of the broader culture (cultural accommodation versus cultural irrelevance). This second narrative is directly relevant to our interest, since Christian engagement with Islam

über das Zeitalter der Neutralisierungen und Entpolitisierungen (2nd ed., Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1932).

33 Nicholson, *Comparative Theology*, 8–9.

34 Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993); and idem, "Carl Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy," in *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, ed. C. Mouffe (London: Verso, 1999), 38–53.

is inseparable from Christian *theological* discourse on religions in general and Islam in particular.

5 Freeing Religion from Social Antagonism

A more helpful way of looking at the history of modern theology, Nicholson suggests, is seeing it as a series of attempts on the part of liberal theology to depoliticize religion, or, in other words, to rid it of all the characteristics that made religion despicable in the eyes of “its cultured despisers” to whom Schleiermacher, the father of modern theology, addressed his famous *Speeches on Religion* in 1799, namely, “that it is bent on persecution and spitefulness, that it wrecks society and makes blood flow like a river.”³⁵ Nicholson proceeds to deconstruct different strategies that modern theologians have employed in order to free religion from social antagonism, starting with the Enlightenment notion of natural religion in perfect accord with the demands of reason, and finishing with recent post-liberal incarnations of the same project, such as George Lindbeck’s Geertzian-inspired notion of religions as self-contained cultural systems.³⁶

While the quest in modern theology to eliminate the political from religious discourse can be seen in different areas of theological concern, it is understandably more manifest in the so-called theology of religions, that field of theology that takes religious plurality as its primary object of reflection.³⁷ It is true that the three main paradigms that have dominated the history of this discipline—exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism—are excessively broad and in need of further nuance. For the sake of Nicholson’s argument, however, it suffices to note that the different variants of inclusivism (Christian universalism, fulfillment theory, anonymous Christianity, etc.) were all at their inception liberal reactions against Christian exclusivism in its various expressions (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, *sola scriptura*, *sola fides*, etc.). And yet, inclusivism, once considered the beacon of Christian liberalism, came eventually to be rejected by the pluralist theologians as being no more than a covert exclusivism, incapable of transcending its own parochial notion of truth (the truth of

35 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 27–28.

36 Nicholson, *Comparative Theology*, 49–78.

37 An accessible yet thorough presentation of the main trends in Christian theologies of religion is found in Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

others is what resembles our truth). For the pluralists, inclusivists are no less guilty of Christian absolutism than exclusivists inasmuch as both affirm God's saving act in Jesus Christ as constitutive of all salvation. As Mark Heim has perceptively noticed, however, pluralism is first of all an ethical stance, thus confirming Nicholson's reading of the trajectory of the theology of religions as an evolving expression of the liberal project of freeing religion from the political: "The pluralist's Copernican revolution begins with revulsion at the crimes of religious pride . . . Before it is any kind of theory, pluralism is a commitment to exorcise the religious sources of human oppression."³⁸

Ironically, pluralism's own claim to have definitively overcome Christian absolutism found itself under attack by critics who exposed its own unrecognized acts of hegemony.³⁹ David Ray Griffin has conveniently summarized the charges raised against Christian pluralism under four counts: "... that it falsely claims a neutral universality, that it is not really Christian, that it is not even truly pluralistic, and that it entails a debilitating relativism."⁴⁰ As a result of this recognition of the unacknowledged exclusions of inclusivism and pluralism, there has emerged a feeling of having reached a dead-end in the Christian theology of religions, with no sense of how to proceed. This has led some theologians to call for a moratorium on the Christian theology of religions and propose comparative theology as a more fruitful way to engage religious diversity, at least for the time being.

6 The New Comparative Theology and Christian-Muslim Polemics

This new discipline constitutes a remarkable attempt to reunify theology and the comparative method. It needs to be recalled here that the adoption of the comparative method by the nineteenth-century comparative theology was a short-lived trend within the modern history of theology. During the first decades of the twentieth-century, while comparison became the trademark of the science of religion, it progressively disappeared from the purview of theology. The process is connected, no doubt, to the rise of Neo-Orthodoxy in reaction precisely to the liberal theology of the nineteenth century. Karl Barth's radical distinction between faith (as response to revelation) and religion

38 S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 72.

39 See, notably, Gavin D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), and Heim, *Salvations*.

40 David Ray Griffin, ed., *Deep Religious Pluralism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 4.

(an entirely human affair, unconnected with revelation) bears much responsibility for the subsequent divorce between theology and the comparative method.⁴¹

The new comparative theology, for its part, avoids any a priori theologizing on religions in general. This latter approach easily leads to one-size-fits-all positions that either reject religions as human expressions of unbelief or accept them as equally valid ways of salvation without considering that religious visions are extremely varied and sometimes mutually incompatible. Hence the appeal to comparison as a constituent element of this new type of theologizing: “Comparative theology,” writes James Fredericks, “entails the interpretation of the meaning and truth of one’s own faith by means of a critical investigation of other faiths.”⁴² Francis Clooney fleshes out for us how this process usually takes place:

It ordinarily starts with the intuition of an intriguing resemblance that prompts us to place two realities—texts, images, practices, doctrines, persons—near one another, so that they may be seen over and again, side by side. In this necessarily arbitrary and intuitive practice we understand each differently because the other is near, and by cumulative insight also begin to comprehend related matters differently too. Finally, we see ourselves differently, uncovering dimensions of ourselves that would not otherwise, by a non-comparative logic, come to the fore.⁴³

It thus becomes clear that these two pioneer comparative theologians understand their work as theological in character and, therefore, rooted in a particular faith tradition. And yet, because comparison is such an essential element of the project, this type of theologizing is, perhaps more than any other, intrinsically connected with the academic study of religion. This can be seen in their demand that comparative theology be done according to the academic standards of scholarship and their wish to include secular scholars among its intended audience and potential critics.

More profoundly, however, the theological character of this discipline is seen in the aims that comparative theologians propose for their work of

41 Why should Christians pay attention to other religions when they could know a priori, as Barth famously asserted, that Hinduism was an expression of unbelief, of human rebellion against the Creator? See James L. Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 21–22.

42 James L. Fredericks, Introduction to *The New Comparative Theology*, ix.

43 Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 11.

comparison, namely, the rectification of theological perceptions of the uniqueness of one's faith and of previous evaluations of the religious texts and practices of others. In this regard, Clooney speaks of the "purification" and "intensification" of the theologian's faith. The first refers to the corrective role of comparative theology in terms of clearing up misconceptions about others and chastening the theologian's excessive self-confidence about the uniqueness of his or her tradition: "This new learning disabuses us of false ideas about the other. In doing so, it changes our self-image, the truth about ourselves that is always connected with and distorted by habitual ways of thinking about self and other."⁴⁴ As for the intensification of the theologian's faith, it refers to the fact that, as we engage in comparative theology, "we find that our own tradition is not the only one that is reasonable, committed, or open to God, that we have real choices about religious belonging, because the other traditions are neither foolish nor inaccessible. Even if we choose to remain in our original tradition, remaining is now a real choice in the face of real alternatives."⁴⁵

It should also be clear by now how this comparative theology differs from its nineteenth-century namesake. The latter set out to explore other religions with the aim of confirming 'scientifically' what was already held as a conviction of faith, namely, the uniqueness and superiority of Christianity. The "vulnerability" to the truth of other religions and the readiness to revisit long-held assumptions about one's faith that Clooney posits as the hermeneutical requirements of comparative theology would have seemed rather eccentric demands to his nineteenth-century predecessors.

Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski has critically remarked that the first wave of comparative theologians has chosen to engage with religious traditions that originated in Asia—Hinduism and Buddhism having received the most attention to date. More proximate others, such as Judaism and Islam, have been largely neglected.⁴⁶ Following this call to include the Abrahamic monotheisms within the purview of comparative theology, I suggest that attention should also be paid to the main texts in the history of Christian-Muslim polemics, those texts that, because of the status of their authors in their respective

44 Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 156.

45 Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 156.

46 He then provides a stimulating example of how a re-reading of the Christian tradition after a serious reading of a rabbinical Jewish text (the Mishnah *Avot*) might lead Christians to see the Torah as the very ground inspiration of Jesus' own ministry and thus to move away "from a depiction of Jesus as one who overturns the Law to his depiction as a keeper of the Torah" (Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, "Comparative Theology and the Status of Judaism: Hegemony and Reversals," in *The New Comparative Theology*, 107).

traditions or because of the popularity they achieved as literary compositions, have played and continue to play a decisive role in building up the mutual perceptions of these two religions. These texts are worthy of attention precisely inasmuch as they contain an intensification of the political, the 'us' versus 'them,' that features in all religious discourse.

Writing in the middle years of the twentieth century, Harry Gaylord Dorman noticed how one expression of the reinvigoration of religious thought taking place in the Islamic world at the time was the renewal of a literary polemic against Christianity and especially against Christian missionary activity. Dorman considered it a natural response to the growth of Protestant missions in Muslim lands since the middle of the nineteenth-century: "Most of this Muslim polemic," he writes, "is a reaction to Protestant work, much of it being in direct answer to and in attempted refutation of books and tracts distributed by Protestant missionaries."⁴⁷ He then goes on to notice how this modern Muslim polemic was based very largely upon the earlier Muslim polemical writings of the Middle Ages, among which he cites two of the three refutations provoked by Paul of Antioch's *Letter to a Muslim Friend*. In this way, he provides yet another witness to the extraordinary repercussion of the work of the Melkite Bishop of Sidon:

In fact, several of the best medieval works have been printed and circulated popularly as they stand. Three such classics are available in good modern editions, *Al-ajwiba al-fākhira* of Qarāfī, the encyclopaedic *Al-jawāb as-sahīh* of Ibn Taymiyya in four volumes, and *Hidāyat al-hayārā* of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. But a fresh vitality is evident in the new works. While it is true that the great majority of the material is taken directly from the medieval writings, and the same arguments and illustrations are used again, there is nevertheless a rearrangement of the subject matter with the modern situation in mind, and especially with reference to particular modern books or pamphlets of Christian missionary origin.⁴⁸

47 Harry Gaylord Dorman, *Toward Understanding Islam: Contemporary Apologetic of Islam and Missionary Policy* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1948), 43.

48 Dorman, *Toward Understanding Islam*, 43–44. After analysis of 65 books on Christianity published in Egypt by Muslim authors between 1940 and 1980, Goddard remarks that just over half of the total "is similar in content and style to the medieval material, concentrating, for example, on the irrationality of Christian beliefs, and the change and development which has taken place in reference to both beliefs and practices during the course of Christian history" (Hugh Goddard, "The Persistence of Medieval Themes in Modern Christian-Muslim Discussion in Egypt," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)*, ed. S.Kh. Samir and J.S. Nielsen [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 228).

Two modern Muslim authors who acknowledged borrowing from the *Ajwiba* for writing their own polemical works are the Iraqi Nu'mān Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1899), author of *al-Jawāb al-fasīḥ li-mā laffaḡahu 'Abd al-Masīḥ* ('The Full Reply to the Patchwork of 'Abd al-Masīḥ'), written in reaction to the London edition in 1880 of the *Apology of* ['Abd al-Masīḥ] *al-Kindī*, a ninth-century anti-Muslim work which al-Ālūsī thought to be a pseudepigraph written by contemporary Protestants,⁴⁹ and the Iraqi 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Salīm al-Baghdādī, known as Bājah'chī'zādah (d. 1911), author of *al-Fāriq bayna l-makhlūq wa-l-khālīq* ('The Distinction between the Creature and the Creator').⁵⁰

7 The Mirror of the Other

To insist on the contrastive, relational character of religious discourse in connection with the history of Christian-Muslim relations in no way implies that there is no more to Christianity than its relation to Islam and vice versa. And yet, by reason of their historical connection and geographical contiguity, both religions have made important theological choices through which they defined themselves 'politically' in relation to one another. And how could it be otherwise, given that Islam understood itself, since its initial phase, as the restoration of the Abrahamic faith to its pristine purity and thus as a correction of both Judaism and Christianity? Putting aside the ongoing debate in regard to the birthplace of Islam, it is beyond dispute that the "true incubator" of Islam, in which it grew to maturity, was the rich civilization of the Near East, to use Daniel Brown's apt metaphor.⁵¹ The main accomplishments of the Islamic civilization were the product of the creative interaction of Muslims with the Mediterranean religious and cultural environment, the result of a complex process of appropriation and elaboration—continuity and discontinuity—

See also, by the same author, "An Annotated Bibliography of Works about Christianity by Egyptian Muslim Authors (1940–1980)," *Muslim World* 80 (1990): 251–277; and idem, *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity* (London: Grey Sale, 1996), 59–94. For an earlier period, see Arthur Jeffery, "A Collection of Anti-Christian Books and Pamphlets Found in Actual Use among the Mohammedans of Cairo," *Muslim World* 15 (1925): 26–37.

49 Nu'mān Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *al-Jawāb al-fasīḥ li-mā laffaḡahu 'Abd al-Masīḥ*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Bayān al-'Arabī, 1987), 34, 38–39.

50 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Salīm al-Baghdādī, *al-Fāriq bayna l-makhlūq wa-l-khālīq* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Mawsū'at, 1904; reprint: Dubai: Maṭba'at al-Bayān al-Tijāriyya, 1987). On this work, see Dorman, *Toward Understanding Islam*, 57–65.

51 Daniel W. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 33.

through which the Islamic community developed its self-understanding over and against other existing religious communities.

Carl Heinrich Becker was probably one of the first scholars to point out the extent to which key issues relating to the history of Islamic dogma were connected with Christian apologetics and polemics against Islam. In a famous article originally published in German in 1912, he set out to demonstrate how the influence of two early Christian writers, John of Damascus (d. before 754) and Theodore Abū Qurra (d. ca. 823), could account almost single-handedly for the terms in which Muslim theologians discussed the issues of free will, the createdness of the Qurʾān, and the divine attributes.⁵² One problematic aspect of Becker's exposition, however, is that he portrays the relationship between Christian apologetics and polemics against Islam, on the one hand, and early Islamic dogma, on the other, exclusively in terms of lending and borrowing, with Islam always on the receiving end, thus oversimplifying a process that was certainly more complex. Becker was right in saying that "the transfer and concurrence of ideas between religions surely results, more often than not, from polemic and disputation,"⁵³ but failed to notice that no side is left unaffected by the process. For instance, he writes in connection with the question of free will: "Indeed, John of Damascus describes determinism as the epitome of Islamic dogma, contrasting this with the specifically Christian doctrine of free will (*to autexousin*)."⁵⁴ But to what extent can we say that the doctrine of free will is specifically Christian? It is not difficult to find in the history of Christian thought theologians who upheld strongly predestinarian views which they found compatible with their faith.⁵⁵ Unlike John of Damascus, however, those

52 Carl Heinrich Becker, "Christliche Polemik und islamische Dogmenbildung," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete* 26 (1912): 175–195. English trans. "Christian Polemic and the Formation of Islamic Doctrine," in *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, ed. R. Hoyland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 241–257. See also Duncan B. Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence, and Institutional Theory* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 131–132. On the work of these two Christian writers in connection with Islam, see Reinhold F. Glei, "John of Damascus," in *CMRI*, 295–301, and John C. Lamoreaux, "Theodore Abū Qurra," in *CMRI*, 439–491. For a recent endorsement of Becker's view, see Miquel Beltrán, "Los atributos divinos en Juan de Damasco y su influencia en el islam," *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 2 (2005): 25–42.

53 Becker, "Christian Polemic," 241–242.

54 Becker, "Christian Polemic," 248.

55 See, for instance, the comments of R. Scott Clark, who draws a long list of Catholic and Protestant theologians who held predestinarian views, in his "Election and Predestination: The Sovereign Expressions of God," in *Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, ed. D.W. Hall and P.A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 90–95.

theologians were not theologizing in a milieu characterized by the ascendancy of Islam. Thus, it would be worth exploring whether John's concentration on determinism as the defining feature of Islamic dogma is not a case of "double metonymy," in which a group "confuses some part of its neighbor with its neighbor, and a piece of itself with itself, and construes each in terms of the other."⁵⁶

For their part, those Muslims who wanted to emphasize the overwhelming character of God's decree (*qadar*) were willing to accept the identification of Christianity with the doctrine of free will and attack Muslims who supported free will precisely as crypto-Christians. The first group then attributed their own view to the prophet Muḥammad himself by means of *ḥadīths* such as: "Perhaps you will outlive me long enough that you might meet those who deny Allah's *qadar* and blame their sins on His servants. They have borrowed those arguments of theirs from Christianity."⁵⁷ The same dynamic—double metonymy—can be seen at work throughout the history of Christian-Muslim relations and different times and places. For instance, the Spanish author of a late-seventeenth century Jesuit missionary handbook for converting Muslims could associate Islam with Lutheranism in that both affirm the possibility of salvation without "good works," and compare the fatalism of Muslims with the doctrine of predestination held by Calvinists.⁵⁸

A more helpful way of looking at early theological exchanges between Christianity and Islam is to realize that they were not unidirectional. Sidney Griffith and others have explored how Christian writers writing in Arabic developed their own theological discourse and articulation of Christian doctrines "in parallel, almost in tandem, with the evolving patterns of Islamic religious thought in the same period . . . In this context, Christians sought to defend the reasonableness of their distinctive doctrines in terms of the same religious idiom as that employed by their Muslim interlocutors and counterparts."⁵⁹ Griffith contends that it is precisely because "the Arabic-speaking Christian

56 William Scott Green, "Otherness Within: Towards a Theory of Difference in Rabbinic Judaism," in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, 'Others' in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner and E.S. Frerichs (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 50.

57 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Muttaqī, *Kanz al-'ummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-af'āl*, ed. Bakrī Ḥayyānī and Ṣafwat al-Saqqā, vol. 1 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1989), 138 (no. 649), quoted in Becker, 9–10 (slightly modified).

58 See Emanuele Colombo, "Even among Turks": Tirso González de Santalla (1624–1705) and Islam," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 44, no. 3 (2012), 19.

59 Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 75. For the limits of this enterprise, see David Thomas, "Christian Borrowings from Islamic Theology in

writers often built their arguments on ways of thinking that the Muslims had initially elaborated in view of commending their own faith” that “the discourse of the Christian apologists in Arabic presented a conceptual profile that cannot easily be mistaken for Christian theology in any other community of Christian discourse.”⁶⁰

The tandem metaphor is indeed a better image to describe Christian-Muslim theological conversation during the formative centuries of Islam than the categories of lending and borrowing. To give another example, responding to the claim of Islamic prophetology that Muḥammad was the seal of a line of prophets that included Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, these Christian writers constructed a scheme of negative criteria “devised specifically in the effort to exclude Islam for any claim to be the true religion.”⁶¹ Some of these criteria—such as the requirement that prophets be authenticated by miracles—affected in turn Muslims’ own vision of the prophet Muḥammad, eventually transforming him into a worker of miracles comparable or even superior to those of the previous prophets.⁶² But also important for our purpose here is that these

the Classical Period: The Witness of al-Juwaynī and Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī,” *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 2 (2014): 125–142.

- 60 Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 75. See also, by the same author, “Free Will in Christian Kalām: The Doctrine of Theodore Abū Qurrah,” *Parole de l’Orient* 14 (1987): 79–107, especially his remarks on pages 89–90 and 106–107 with regard to the project of early Christian theology in Arabic. For echoes of Christian engagement in Muslim theological discourse, see David Thomas, “Christian Voices in Muslim Theology,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 36 (2009): 357–379.
- 61 Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 98. See also by the same author, “Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians,” *Proceedings of the PMR Conference: Annual Publication of the Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Conference* 4 (1979): 63–87; idem, “Faith and Reason in Christian Kalām: Theodore Abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion,” in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period*, 1–43; and Mark N. Swanson, “Apology or its Evasion? Some Ninth-Century Arabic Christian Texts on Discerning the True Religion,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37 (2010): 389–399. Sarah Stroumsa notes that the abundance of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish literature in Arabic dealing with prophecy compares strikingly with the meager attention given to it in Christian and Jewish theological literature prior to Islam. The arrival of Islam changed the scene drastically, triggering an interreligious debate “in which each side helped to shape and remodel the theological edifice of the other” (S. Stroumsa, “The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature,” *Harvard Theological Review* 78 [1985], 114).
- 62 Uri Rubin, “Muḥammad’s Message in Mecca: Warnings, Signs, and Miracles,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Muḥammad*, ed. J.E. Brockopp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 56–57.

criteria in themselves reflect the fact that Christians were already thinking interreligiously and rectifying previous positions. The vehement rejection of the 'sword' on the part of these Christian apologists as being incompatible with the true religion contrasts with the apparent ease that earlier churchmen like Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339) or Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) showed in welcoming the Christianization of the Roman Empire as a sign of divine favor and as a platform for spreading the Christian message.⁶³ We shall see below that, although Paul of Antioch remains significantly silent on the issue of the spread of Islam through military conquest, al-Qarāfi still felt the need to address the question, aware as he was of the popularity of this argument in Christian polemics against Islam.

The main point of the foregoing analysis is to emphasize that Islam and Christianity have always understood themselves in theological opposition to one another. This has happened both in times of political and military confrontation and in periods of social *convivencia*. And it is no less true in today's globalized world than it was in ninth-century cosmopolitan Baghdad or eleventh-century multi-religious Cordoba. In this regard it is revealing that as strong an advocate of Christian-Muslim dialogue as Pope John Paul II should nevertheless have this to say about Islam:

Whoever knows the Old and New Testaments, and then reads the Koran, clearly sees the process by which it completely reduces Divine Revelation. It is impossible not to note the movement away from what God said about Himself, first in the Old Testament through the Prophets, and then finally in the New Testament through His Son. In Islam all the riches of God's self-revelation, which constitutes the heritage of the Old and New Testaments, has definitively been set aside. Some of the most beautiful names in the human language are given to the God of the Koran, but He is ultimately a God outside the world, a God who is only Majesty, never Emmanuel, God-with-us. Islam is not a religion of redemption. There is no room for the Cross and the Resurrection.⁶⁴

63 Patricia Crone reminds us that arguments such as "For 600 years your temple has lain ruined and burnt," "God has dispersed you over the earth," and "God is angry with you" were the staple of anti-Jewish polemic before the rise of Islam. "Vis-à-vis the Jews, the Christian possession of power thus provided some assurance that Christianity was God's own religion" (P. Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 [1980], 60.).

64 John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 92.

As one can see, the statement is highly 'political' in the sense used throughout these pages, in that the Pope clearly defines Islam as a 'them' which is different from 'us.' He is not simply saying that Islam happens to be substantially different from Christianity, but he manifestly interprets those differences in contrastive terms. Thus, the Qur'an appears in his eyes as a reduction in the process of divine revelation, an interruption of the ever-deepening process of divine self-disclosure contained in the biblical tradition. This type of strongly normative evaluations of Islam was precisely what many Catholics who engaged in Christian-Muslim relations in the wake of Vatican II sought to avoid, preferring instead to focus on commonalities such as our shared spiritual bond in Abraham. Yet, the hope of having found a conflict-free terrain of spiritual encounter is now being shattered as more voices begin to insist that 'our' Abraham is not exactly the same as 'their' Abraham. A Catholic theologian puts it bluntly: "The Bible unites Jews and Christians, whereas Islam rejects it. Are we therefore from a common origin? Is the Abraham of the Bible the same as the Ibrahim of the Qur'an? Is Islam a Bible-based religion?"⁶⁵ On the Muslim side, consider, for instance, the motivation given by two recent editors in publishing a fourteenth-century work dealing with Christianity and Judaism, namely, "to resist Muslims who call for unifying the 'heavenly religions' (i.e., Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and for considering Jews, Christians and Muslims children of Abraham."⁶⁶ Thus, we are confronted again with the question of the possibility of a real theological dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

The literary encounter between Paul of Antioch and al-Qarāfi exemplifies the inherent 'othering' that has characterized most of the shared existence of Christians and Muslims. My study of the *Ajwiba* hopes to show that the

65 "La Bible unit juifs et chrétiens tandis que l'islam la refuse. Alors sommes-nous vraiment sur un tronc commun? L'Abraham biblique est-il bien l'Ibrāhīm coranique? L'islam est-il une religion biblique?" (François Jourdan, *La Bible face au Coran: les vrais fondements de l'islam* [Paris: L'Œuvre, 2011], 9). See also Jacques Ellul, *Islam et judéo-christianisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004).

66 Quoted in Jon Hoover, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya," in *CMR4*, 994. The reference is to Ibn Qayyim's (d. 751/1350) *Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma*, ed. Yūsuf ibn Aḥmad al-Bakrī and Shākīr ibn Tawfīq al-ʿArūrī, vol. 1 (al-Dammām: Ramādī li-l-Nashr; Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1997), 17–18. It may be recalled here that Ibn Qayyim is also the author of *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā*, one of the three Muslim classical works mentioned by Dorman as having considerably influenced Muslim polemic against Christianity in the mid-twentieth century. For a Jewish perspective, see also Jon D. Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 173–214: One Abraham or three?

important theological differences between these two religious traditions should not be presumed to be simply 'there' as givens. To paraphrase Nicholson, they are rather the contingent products of the complex processes of selection, emphasis, and recognition through which these two proximate communities have situated themselves 'politically' in relation to each other. Precisely because they are contingent, an awareness of this historical reality can contribute to blunt the impact of oppositional discourse. Theological issues are not to be avoided, but on the contrary need to be at the forefront of Muslim-Christian conversation.

8 Outline

I have structured this study into six chapters. Chapter one examines al-Qarāfi's life, his intellectual concerns, and the local and regional political context with the aim of understanding the *Ajwiba* as an intellectual project. The chapter also reviews previous scholarship on relevant aspects of his thinking, both as a jurist-theologian and as a polemicist.

Chapter two begins by determining as far as possible the date and circumstances of the composition of the *Ajwiba*, its purpose, and intended audience. It also offers a general overview of its structure and contents before examining the main written sources of this work, beginning with the treatise that prompted its writing, Paul of Antioch's *Letter to a Muslim Friend*.

Chapter three explores the first chapter of the *Ajwiba*, in which al-Qarāfi refutes the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* systematically. The chapter is examined in terms of three main areas of concern in monotheistic discourse: theology of religions, or the believer's understanding of religious history; theology of the word of God, or theological reflection on God's acts of revelation; and theology of divinity, or human discourse about God's nature and attributes.

Chapter four examines the second chapter of the *Ajwiba*, which al-Qarāfi devotes to replying to yet another series of arguments that Christians and Jews are said to raise against Islam and against Muslim claims concerning their religions.

Chapter five deals with the third and longest chapter of the *Ajwiba*, which contains, in al-Qarāfi words, "the counter-objection to their questions with another hundred questions which I have presented to both groups, and to which they found it difficult to respond." The analysis is concentrated on the main thematic blocks in the chapter and on certain other issues selected because of their recurrence in Christian-Muslim polemics and their relevance for the prospects of theological dialogue.

Chapter six studies the fourth and last chapter of the *Ajwiba*, devoted to the annunciation of Muḥammad's advent and the emergence of Islam in the Bible. It first situates al-Qarāfi within the tradition of Muslim biblical scholarship and then offers an extended analysis of the main exegetical themes that al-Qarāfi derives from his reading of these biblical passages.

Chapter six is followed by the conclusion in which I address, in light of the previous analysis, Adams' question of "whether in truth there is any hope of Christian-Muslim dialogue ever progressing beyond the stage of registering the differences with one another,"⁶⁷ and what lessons, if any, may be drawn in this regard from the history of Christian-Muslim polemics.

There follow four appendices: al-Qarāfi's literary production (Appendix A); a translation of the fifteen arguments in which al-Qarāfi (or his source) breaks down the contents of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* (Appendix B); a translation of three accounts of the corruption of early Christianity (Appendix C); and the fifty-one biblical predictions presented in the last chapter of the *Ajwiba* (Appendix D).

67 Adams, "Islam and Christianity," 306.

A Scholarly Life in Defense of Islam

Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Šanhājī al-Qarāfi had just passed the midpoint of his life in 1258, the year which saw the fall of the ‘Abbāsid caliphate in Baghdad to the Mongols. This momentous event marks the transition from the Earlier Middle Period (ca. 945–1258) to the Later Middle Period (ca. 1258–1503) in the history of Islamdom, according to Marshall Hodgson’s periodization. This means that al-Qarāfi was born in a world in which Islam had already been given its classical formulation and the Islamic civilization (what Hodgson termed the Islamicate) had achieved a great territorial expansion. Although the last ‘Abbāsid centuries had witnessed the progressive decentralization of power and culture through the emergence and consolidation of regional powers, the world of Islam maintained a sense of unity “through self-perpetuating social institutions which outgrew the caliphate and encouraged high-cultural sophistication and a synthesis of the lettered traditions that had been developed in the High Caliphal Period.”¹ It is this sense of unity and achievement that al-Qarāfi and other scholars of his time felt was under threat, not only from the military advances of enemies, but also from the efforts of Christian apologists and polemicists who questioned well-established assumptions about the superiority of the Islamic belief and way of life.

This chapter focuses on the life and times of al-Qarāfi with a view to understanding the *Ajwiba* as an intellectual project. It first examines the local and regional political context, before looking at Muslim-Christian interaction in Egypt during the thirteenth century. The chapter then reconstructs the biographical data on al-Qarāfi which can be gathered from the sources and presents the range of his intellectual concerns. Particular attention is given to al-Qarāfi’s *Kitāb al-istibṣār*, a treatise on optics and the faculty of sight, which, despite its scientific subject matter, sheds light on his motivation for writing the *Ajwiba*. Both works were written in response to questions put forward by Christians and, arguably, for the same purpose of protecting the Muslim community from the “stigma of deficiency.” The chapter goes on to ask what al-Qarāfi’s personal knowledge of Christians and Jews might have been. It then reviews previous scholarship on relevant aspects of his thinking, both as a jurist-theologian and as a polemicist. The main point argued throughout

1 Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 1, *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 96.

the chapter is that the *Ajwiba* was an intellectual defense and glorification of Islamic civilization driven by anxieties about the renewed strength of Christianity in Egypt and external threats to Muslim supremacy.

1 The Political Context: A World in Convulsion

As noted above, al-Qarāfi lived during a crucial period in the political history of Egypt and the wider Mediterranean context, in which a number of developments impacted dramatically on relations between Christians and Muslims.² These were times of great expectations for some. About fifteen years prior to al-Qarāfi's birth, Pope Innocent III had predicted the impending collapse of Islam in the bull *Quia major*, promulgated in April 1213. He interpreted the "number of the Beast" in the Book of Revelation as indicating a period of time, of which almost 600 years had already been completed since the appearance of Muḥammad. Thus, the ultimate defeat of Islam was drawing near.³ At the time of al-Qarāfi's birth in 1228, al-Malik al-Kāmil, a nephew of the legendary Saladin, had already reigned as sultan of Egypt and overlord of the Ayyūbid realm for about ten years. In the history of Christian-Muslim relations, al-Kāmil is best remembered as the ruler whom Francis of Assisi attempted to convert during what is known as the Fifth Crusade (1217–1221).⁴ It was also al-Kāmil who offered Jerusalem to the Franks in exchange for the support of Frederick II

2 The bibliography on this period is abundant. See, among others, Jean-Claude Garcin, "Les Zankides et les Ayyūbides," in *États, sociétés et cultures du monde musulman médiéval, x^e–xv^e siècle, I: L'évolution politique et sociale*, ed. J.-C. Garcin et al. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995), 233–255; Michael Chamberlain, "The Crusader Era and the Ayyūbid Dynasty," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, *Islamic Egypt, 640–1517*, ed. C.F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 211–221; Linda S. Northrup, "The Bahri Mamlūk Sultanate, 1250–1390," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, 242–289; Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250–1382* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986); Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk–Īlkhānid War, 1260–1281* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and David O. Morgan, "The Mongols in Syria, 1260–1300," in *Crusade and Settlement*, ed. P.W. Edbury (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1985), 231–235.

3 Innocent III, *Quia major* (*Patrologia Latina* 216, 818). On the apocalyptic fears and expectations inspired by the thirteenth-century crusades in European Christians, see John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 194–213.

4 John V. Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

of Sicily against his brother al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam, sultan in Damascus, a promise that materialized with the Treaty of Jaffa on 11 February 1229.⁵ Al-Qarāfi was about ten years old when al-Kāmil was succeeded by his son al-Malik al-‘Ādil II in 1238. From that time, and until his own death on 2 September 1285, al-Qarāfi would see no less than twelve changes of regime in Egypt, including several *coups* and assassinations, a change of dynasty with the rise to power of the Mamlūks, the fall of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate in Baghdad, the crucial Mamlūk victory over the Mongols at ‘Ayn Jālūt, and the progressive disappearance of the Frankish presence in the Levant.

These were years of shifting political alliances, and battles were not always fought along religious lines, as the Crusaders became part of the power politics of the region. In 1240, the Ayyūbid ruler of Damascus, al-Ṣāliḥ Ismā‘īl, made an alliance with the Franks against the Ayyūbids of Cairo. The Damascene scholar ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī, whom we will meet below as the most prominent of al-Qarāfi’s teachers, publicly opposed the policies of the ruler and, after a short stay in prison, exiled himself to Egypt, where he arrived in 1241 accompanied by Ibn al-Ḥājib, who also became one of al-Qarāfi’s mentors.

After the expiration of Frederick’s treaty with al-Kāmil, Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb of Egypt, in power since 1240, moved to regain Jerusalem. Khwārazmian mercenaries from Central Asia captured the city in August 1244, and Frankish hopes to recover it vanished at the Battle of La Forbie, fought on 17 October 1244 near Gaza, in which al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb defeated the Ayyūbid ruler of Damascus and his Frankish allies. Al-Qarāfi, who was about sixteen years old at the time, might have experienced this victory as a vindication of his teacher Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām.

It would not take long before a new crusade—the seventh—was organized, this time under the leadership of Louis IX of France. After six years in the Levant (1248–1254), the French King returned to France having failed to liberate Jerusalem. Before that, however, he was able to capture Damietta—a strategic port on the Nile Delta which controlled access to the Upper Nile and was thus considered the key to all Egypt—in June 1249 and would hold it for a few months. Louis IX attempted a new campaign—the Eighth Crusade—some years later, but did not reach further than Tunis, where he died, most probably of dysentery, in August 1270.

Crusaders were not, however, the only threat facing the central areas of the Islamic world during the thirteenth century. Another formidable menace, indeed much greater, approached from the East, where the empire of Gengis Khān, inherited by his sons, continued to expand after his death in 1227, the

5 Hiroshi Takayama, “Frederick II’s Crusade: An Example of Christian-Muslim Diplomacy,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 25 (2010): 169–185.

year before al-Qarāfi was born. In 1253, one of Gengis Khān's grandchildren, Möngke, who had become the Great Khān, sent his brother Hülegü on the double mission of crushing the Ismāʿilī power in Alamūt and subjugating the ʿAbbāsid caliphate. This campaign was to transform the Middle Eastern landscape definitively. In February 1258, Hülegü's troops took Baghdad and the Caliph al-Mustaʿsim bi-llāh was executed. With the fall of the capital, it did not take long before Georgians and Armenians sided with the Mongols. Aleppo fell in February 1260 and Damascus surrendered shortly afterwards. The apparently unstoppable Mongols, however, suffered their first setback at the hands of the Egyptian Mamlūks at the Battle of ʿAyn Jālūt, in northern Palestine, on 3 September 1260.⁶

As would become increasingly clear during the following decades, this defeat did not halt Mongol expansionist ambitions. Nevertheless, it established two areas of politico-military influence: the Mamlūks on one side, and the Ilkhānid Mongols—descendants of Hülegü—on the other. A period of hostility began between these two powers that would last over sixty years. The Ilkhāns, based in Persia, controlled, directly or indirectly, the territory that today corresponds to Iran, Iraq, most of Turkey, the Caucasus region, Turkmenistan, and the north of Afghanistan. For the Mamlūks, the victory of ʿAyn Jālūt marked the beginning of their hegemony in Egypt and Syria. Under the leadership of Sultan al-Zāhir Baybars (r. 1260–1277) and his successors, the Mamlūks conquered, one after another, all the Crusader enclaves that were left on the Syrian coast: Caesarea, Haifa, and Arsuf in 1265, Safed in 1266, Jaffa and Antioch in 1268, and Tripoli in 1289. The fall of Acre on 13 May 1291 signaled the end of the Crusader presence in the Holy Land. One of the reasons for this relentless effort to oust the Crusaders from the Syrian littoral was, no doubt, the fear of a joint Mongol-Frankish campaign.⁷

2 Muslim-Christian Interaction in Egypt during the Thirteenth Century

The establishment of the Mamlūk sultanate in 1250 also had important consequences for Coptic Christianity. In his recent study, Kurt Werthmuller speaks of

6 The Mamlūk victory was facilitated by the fact that Mongol leaders were occupied with succession problems back in the East after Möngke's death. See Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, 26–48.

7 Reuven Amitai-Preiss, "Mamluk Perceptions of the Mongol-Frankish Rapprochement," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 7 (1992): 50–65.

a stark contrast between “the peaks and valleys of Coptic fortunes” under both the Fāṭimids and the Ayyūbids and “what may be best described as a series of deeper valleys” under the Baḥrī Mamlūks.⁸ Several scholars have characterized the first century of Mamlūk domination as a decisive phase in the history of the Islamization of Egypt. In his article on the Copts for the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Gaston Wiet famously asserted that “the government of the Mamlūks gave the *coup de grâce* to Christianity in Egypt, which ceased to mean anything but a number of individuals,” and that by the fourteenth century the Copts were reduced to barely a tenth of the total population of Egypt.⁹ Wiet and scholars who tended to support his view assumed that conversion to Islam was the main cause of Coptic numerical decline.¹⁰ Their main evidence came from Arabic sources, which record no less than eight anti-Copt assaults between 1259 and 1354, the first four of which took place during al-Qarāfi’s life in the years 1259, 1264, 1279, and 1283.¹¹ These assaults were typically triggered

8 Kurt J. Werthmuller, *Coptic Identity and Ayyubid Politics in Egypt, 1218–1250* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 52. A useful overview of the vicissitudes of the Coptic community under the three successive regimes is found on pages 29–53. A main thrust of this book is to show, however, that the Copts were not a static community throughout this period, merely reacting to external pressures: “They may not have always been masters of their own sociopolitical destiny, but they made a bold bid for it and left their impact on wider society as a result” (p. 5). See also the very informative account of Coptic Christianity during the late Fāṭimid and Ayyūbid periods of Egyptian history provided in Kenneth S. Parker, “Coptic Language and Identity in Ayyūbid Egypt,” *Al-Masāq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 25 (2013): 222–239.

9 See “Kibt,” in *EI*, s.v. (Gaston Wiet).

10 Moshe Perlmann, “Notes on Anti-Christian Propaganda in the Mamlūk Empire,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 10 (1942): 843–861; Donald P. Little, “Coptic Conversion to Islam under the Baḥrī Mamlūks, 692–755/1293–1354,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39 (1976): 552–569; and idem, “Coptic Converts to Islam during the Baḥrī Mamluk Period,” in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands; Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. M. Gervers and R.J. Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 263–288; Yaacov Lev, “Persecutions and Conversion to Islam in Eleventh-Century Egypt,” *Asian and African Studies* 22 (1988): 73–91.

11 The other four outbreaks occurred in 1293, 1301, 1321, and 1354. It is in reference to the last of these that the fifteenth-century Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī wrote: “In all the provinces of Egypt, both north and south, no church remained that had not been razed; on many of those sites, mosques were constructed. For when the Christians’ affliction grew great and their incomes small, they decided to embrace Islam. Thus Islam spread amongst the Christians of Egypt, and in the town of Qalyūb alone, 450 persons were converted to Islam in a single day... Many people attributed this to Christian cunning, so repugnant did most of the *‘amma* [populace] find them. But this was a momentous event

by Muslim resentment of the wealth and social influence of Coptic officials in the Mamlūk administration, or by suspicions of Coptic sympathy with Crusaders and Mongols or of acting in collusion with them. These episodes included popular riots against Christians and churches as well as government measures restricting their access to public office, confiscating Coptic property, and reenacting traditional laws that emphasized the lower status of non-Muslims within the Islamic state. Government pressure on the Copts seems to have increased after 1290.¹² This does not mean, however, as Donald Little is careful to note, that the Mamlūk sultans were themselves advocates of conversion or that they followed a consistent policy of discrimination. Nevertheless, the restrictive character of the measures they adopted “led cumulatively to widespread conversion to the extent that by the middle of the fourteenth century the Copts had been reduced to a small minority in Egypt.”¹³

More recently, Shaun O’Sullivan has offered an important reassessment of the question. He argues that the Islamization of Egypt may have been practically completed long before the establishment of the Mamlūk sultanate in 1250, and that the Copts may have been no more than 20 percent of Egypt’s population already by the ninth century.¹⁴ O’Sullivan emphasizes the *early start* and *gradual* character of their numerical decline (rather than having occurred in two main waves—the first in the ninth century and the second in the fourteenth—as suggested by previous scholars), and the *plurality* of factors explaining this phenomenon in addition to conversion, such as Arab-Muslim immigration and settlement, intermarriage with Coptic women, and the Copts’ own demographic decline following failed attempts to revolt against Muslim rule in the eighth and ninth centuries. He thinks that further reduction did occur during the first Mamlūk century, but that this was not as significant

in Egyptian history. From that time on, lineages became mixed in Egypt” (al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 2 [Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Nīl, 1907], 927, quoted in Little, “Coptic Conversion,” 568).

12 Linda S. Northrup, “Muslim-Christian Relations during the Reign of the Mamluk Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn, A.D. 1278–1290,” in *Conversion and Continuity*, 253–261. Northrup stresses that socio-economic factors were at least as important in breeding resentment as the Mongol threat and the presence of the Crusaders; and that the target of anti-Christian measures was not the Christian community as a whole, but rather select groups within it.

13 Little, “Coptic Converts,” 263.

14 Shaun O’Sullivan, “Coptic Conversion and the Islamization of Egypt,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (2006): 65–79. Besides Wiet, Perlmann, and Little, O’Sullivan also discusses, among others, the views of Y. Friedmann, Y. Courbage and P. Fargues, and T. el-Leithy.

in the wider picture of the Islamization of Egypt as the remarks of some previous scholars would lead us to imagine.

For our purposes here, it is important to note that even if O'Sullivan questions the characterization of the early Mamlūk period as a turning-point in the history of Egypt's Islamization, which, according to him, was already achieved by the ninth century, he nevertheless sees this period "as a long-delayed conclusion to it, since it gave rise to the last and most important in an intermittent series of Coptic conversion waves."¹⁵ Thus, it is no coincidence that the period beginning in 1250 saw the noticeable rise of polemical literature against Christians and Christianity in Egypt which Moshe Perlmann documented several decades ago.¹⁶ It is, no doubt, the combined effect of the regional climate of religio-political competition among Mamlūks, Frankish Crusaders, and Mongol invaders, on the one hand, and the social and economic factors specific to the Egyptian society, on the other, that explain this phenomenon, of which al-Qarāfī's *Ajwiba* was part.

However, unlike the speeches, pamphlets, and fatwas mentioned by Perlmann, whose main purpose seems to have been to stir up popular antagonism against the perceived arrogance of Copts holding office and political influence, al-Qarāfī, who does not refer to these issues at all, appears to be much more concerned with establishing the supremacy of Islam in doctrinal and civilizational terms. It is significant that nowhere in the *Ajwiba* does he refer to, much less call for, the re-enactment of the conditions of the Pact of 'Umar applying to religious minorities living under Muslim protection (*ahl al-dhimma*). Issues such as the building and repair of churches, the legality of holding Egyptian land in pious endowments for monasteries and Christian institutions, Muslim participation in Coptic festivals, or the acceptability of non-Muslims holding office and exercising authority over Muslims are not mentioned in the *Ajwiba*. Nor does al-Qarāfī suggest any type of collusion between local Christians and their co-religionists abroad. These, it must be kept in mind, are issues that will increasingly appear in Muslim polemical literature produced in Egypt as the thirteenth century advanced to its close, and even more conspicuously during the following century.¹⁷ This does not mean

15 O'Sullivan, "Coptic Conversion," 78.

16 Perlmann, "Anti-Christian Propaganda."

17 See, for instance, Bartolomeo Pirone, "Libro della riprovazione del ricorso ai servigi dei Dhimmi del dottissimo shaykh ed imām Abū Umāma Muḥammad b. 'Alī ibn an-Naqqāsh," *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea* 24 (1991): 226–326; Richard Gottheil, "A Fetwa on the Appointment of Dhimmis to Office," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische*

that the tone of al-Qarāfi is not harsh and at times purposely polemical (particularly against Christian clergy), but an examination of the *Ajwiba* makes it clear that his intention is other than that of addressing concrete issues affecting the relationships with the confessional minorities of his immediate society. As was suggested above, al-Qarāfi's perspective is rather that of establishing the religious supremacy of Islam, and this both as a doctrinal system and as a civilizational project.

In this regard, the *Ajwiba* also needs to be viewed against the backdrop of what has been described as a "renaissance" in Christian Arabic literature among the Copts in Egypt, which reached its highest point in the middle decades of the thirteenth century.¹⁸ In spite of their minority status and dwin-

Archäologie 26 (1912): 203–214; idem, "An Answer to the Dhimmis," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 41 (1921): 383–457; Moshe Perlmann, "Asnawī's Tract Against Christian Officials," in *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, v. 2, ed. S. Löwinger et al. (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1958), 172–208; Seth Ward, "Taḳī al-Dīn al-Subkī on Construction, Continuance, and Repair of Churches and Synagogues in Islamic Law," in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions II*, ed. W.M. Brinner and S.D. Ricks (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 169–188; idem, "Ibn al-Rif'ā on the Churches and Synagogues of Cairo," *Medieval Encounters* 5 (1999): 70–84; Denis Gril, "Une émeute anti-chrétienne à Qūs au début du XIII^e–XIV^e siècle," *Annales islamologiques* 16 (1980): 241–274; Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taimiyya's Struggle against Popular Religion: With an Annotated Translation of his Kitāb iqtidā' aṣ-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jahīm* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976). See also the contents of many of Ibn Taymiyya's shorter writings on Christianity in Jon Hoover, "Ibn Taymiyya," in *CMR*, 856–878, and the recent study by Luke B. Yarbrough, "Islamizing the Islamic State: The Formulation and Assertion of Religious Criteria for State Employment in the First Millennium AH" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2012).

- 18 Adel Y. Sidarus, "The Copto-Arabic Renaissance in the Middle Ages: Characteristics and Socio-Political Context," *Coptica* 1 (2002): 141–160; idem, "La renaissance copte arabe du moyen-âge," in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. H.G.B. Teule et al. (Walpole: Peeters, 2010), 311–340; Mark N. Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt (641–1517)* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 59–82; and Parker, "Coptic Language and Identity," 236–238. Even though the Copts had been relatively late in adopting Arabic for written communication as compared with other Christian communities in the Islamic empire, they eventually surpassed all other communities in the production of texts in Arabic. See a summary of this process in Samuel Rubenson, "Translating the Tradition: Some Remarks on the Arabization of the Patristic Heritage in Egypt," *Medieval Encounters* 2 (1996): 4–14. See also Arietta Papaconstantinou, "They Shall Speak the Arabic Language and Take Pride in It': Reconsidering the Fate of Coptic after the Arab Conquest," *Le Muséon* 120 (2007): 273–299. In addition to the two Ibn al-'Assāl brothers to be mentioned below, other figures of this Coptic literary flowering who were more or less contemporaries of al-Qarāfi are al-As'ad Abū l-Faraj Hibat Allāh ibn al-'Assāl (d. before 1259), the historian

dling numbers, a regained sense of confidence and the patronage of Coptic notables led members of the community not only to engage intellectually with some of the most renowned Muslim scholars of the time (it is striking to realize, for instance, how many of these Coptic authors writing in Arabic frequently engaged Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's [d. 606/1210] theological views, particularly with regard to questions of theodicy¹⁹), but also to compose works in defense of Christianity and to circulate those which had been composed by other Christians in similar circumstances, like Paul of Antioch's *Letter to a Muslim Friend*. Linda Northrup explains that Coptic renewed strength and vigor was the result of the mostly benign attitude of the Fāṭimid regime when Egypt had officially become an Ismā'īlī Shī'ī state, and that the Ayyūbid restoration of Sunnism was not only directed against Fāṭimid Ismā'īlism but also against Christianity:

Perhaps as much to counter the revivification of Christianity and the prominence of Christians in Egypt as to erase the traces of Fāṭimid Ismā'īlism, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, upon abolishing the Fāṭimid caliphate, embarked upon a religious policy aimed at strengthening Sunnī Islam against these competitors. The religious policies of the Ayyūbids, pursued even more energetically by the Baḥrī mamlūks, would result in a "consciousness raising," which ultimately created in the Baḥrī period an even more intensely Islamic and Sunnī religious environment.²⁰

al-Makīn Jirjis ibn al-'Amīd (d. after 1280), the priest and physician al-Rashīd Abū l-Khayr ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. last quarter of the thirteenth century), and the polymath al-Nushū' Abū Shākir ibn al-Rāhib (d. ca. 1290).

- 19 See Gregor Schwarb, "The 13th Century Copto-Arabic Reception of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: Al-Rashīd Abū l-Khayr Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *Risālat al-Bayān al-aẓhar fī l-radd 'alā man yaqūlu bi-l-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 2 (2014): 143–169.
- 20 Northrup, "The Baḥrī Mamlūk sultanate," 266. In Gary Leiser's view ("The Madrasa and the Islamization of the Middle East: The Case of Egypt," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 22 [1985]: 29–47), the strength and influence of the Christian community in late Fāṭimid Egypt was actually of greater concern to the Sunnī population than Shī'ī heterodoxy. On the Ayyūbid restoration of Sunnism in Egypt after the Fāṭimids, see also Yaacov Lev, *Saladin in Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 124–132. For the religious policies of the Mamlūk state, see Jonathan P. Berkey, "Mamluk Religious Policy," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (2009): 7–22.

3 A Scholarly Life

3.1 Primary and Secondary Sources

Individual notices on al-Qarāfi are found in the chronicles and biographical dictionaries of al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348),²¹ al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363),²² Ibn Farḥūn (d. 799/1396),²³ Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470),²⁴ and al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).²⁵ The longest account is given, understandably, by Ibn Farḥūn, whose biographical dictionary is exclusively devoted to Mālikī scholars, the school of law to which both Ibn Farḥūn and al-Qarāfi belonged. Less substantial notices on al-Qarāfi are also given by al-Ḥimyarī (d. 900/1495) in the entry on ‘al-Qarāfa’ of his geographical dictionary,²⁶ and by Ibn al-Qāḍī (d. 1025/1616) in his dictionary of famous men of Morocco.²⁷ Finally, information on al-Qarāfi and on several of his works can also be found in the bibliographical encyclopedia compiled by the seventeenth-century Ottoman scholar Ḥajjī Khalīfa (Kātip Çelebi, d. 1657).²⁸ These constitute our primary sources of information and later writers follow them to a great extent.²⁹ The most recent and extensive discussion of

- 21 Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar al-aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, ed. Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Mannān (Beirut: Bayt al-Afkār al-Duwaliyya, 2004), 731 (no. 239); and idem, *Tārīkh al-islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhūr wa-l-aʿlām: ḥawāḍith wa-wafayāt*, 681–690 H, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 2000), 176–177 (no. 226).
- 22 Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, ed. Aḥmad Arnā’ūt and Turkī Muṣṭafā (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2000), 6:146–147 (no. 355).
- 23 Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Alī ibn Farḥūn, *al-Dībāj al-mudhahhab fī maʿrifat aʿyān ‘ulamāʾ al-madhhab*, ed. Maʾmūn ibn Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Jannān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1996), 128–130 (no. 124).
- 24 Abū l-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf ibn Taghrībirdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfi wa-l-mustawfi ba’d al-wāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo: Al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li-l-Kitāb; Maṭba‘at Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathā’iq al-Qawmiyya, 1984), 1:232–234 (no. 122).
- 25 ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara fī tārīkh Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabīyya, 1967), 1:316 (no. 69).
- 26 Ibn ‘Abd al-Mun‘im al-Ḥimyarī, *Kitāb al-rawḍ al-miṭṭar fī khabar al-aqtār*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Matkaba Lubnān, 1984), 460–461.
- 27 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Qāḍī, *Durrat al-ḥijāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl*, ed. Muḥammad al-Aḥmadī Abū l-Nūr (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth; Tunis: Al-Maktaba al-‘Atīqa, 1970), 1:8–9 (no. 3).
- 28 Ḥajjī Khalīfa, *Kashf al-ẓunūn ‘an asāmī l-kutub wa-l-funūn* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 1:11, 21–22, 77, 186, 499, 825; 2:1153, 1359, 1615.
- 29 See Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khuwānsārī (d. 1895), *Rawḍat al-jannāt fī aḥwāl al-‘ulamāʾ wa-l-sādāt*, ed. Asad Allāh Ismā‘īliyyān (Beirut: Al-Dār al-Islāmiyya, 1991), 1:347 (no. 118); Ismā‘īl Bāshā al-Baghdādī al-Bābānī, *Idāḥ al-maknūn fī l-dhayl ‘alā Kashf al-ẓunūn ‘an asāmī*

al-Qarāfi's life and works is found in the first of the two-volume monographic study published in 1996 by al-Ṣaghīr ibn 'Abd al-Salām al-Wakīlī on behalf of the Moroccan Ministry of Religious Affairs.³⁰ As far as I am aware, the only significant introduction to al-Qarāfi's life and career as a jurist written in any Western language is by Sherman Jackson.³¹

3.2 *Biographical Data, Education, and Teaching Posts*

Shihāb al-Dīn Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn Abī l-'Alā' Idrīs ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Yallīn al-Ṣanhājī al-Ṣa'īdī al-Bahfashīmī al-Būshī al-Bahnasī al-Miṣrī al-Mālikī, who became known as al-Qarāfi, was born in Bahfashīm, a village in the province of Bahnasā, on the west bank of the Nile, in the year 626/1228.³² Bahfashīm belonged to the district of Būsh, a town just a few miles to the north of Beni Suef. He received his primary education in his home area,

l-kutub wa-l-funūn (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.), 1:72, 127, 135, 161; 206; 2:732, and idem, *Hadiyyat al-'arīfin: asmā' al-mu'allifin wa-āthār al-muṣannifin* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.), 1:99; 'Abbās al-Qummī, *al-Kunā wa-l-alqāb* (Tehran: Maktabat al-Ṣadr, 1940), 3:59; Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Makhlūf, *Shajarat al-nūr al-zakiyya fī ṭabaqāt al-mālikiyya* (Cairo: Al-Maṭba'a al-Salafiyya, 1930), 1:188–189 (no. 627); 'Abd Allāh Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī, *al-Fath al-mubīn fī ṭabaqāt al-uṣūliyyin* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1947), 2:86–87; Aḥmad Aḥmad Badawī, *al-Hayāt al-'aqliyya fī 'aṣr al-ḥurūb al-ṣalibiyya bi-Miṣr wa-l-Shām* (Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍat Miṣr, 1951), 174–175; Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *al-A'lām, qāmūs tarājim: li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-l-nisā' min al-'arab wa-l-musta'ribīn wa-l-mustashriqīn*, 5th ed. (Dār al-'Ilm lil-Malāyīn, 1980), 1:94–95; and 'Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *Mu'jam al-mu'allifin: tarājim muṣannifī l-kutub al-'arabiyya* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1993), 1:100 (no. 750).

30 Al-Ṣaghīr ibn 'Abd al-Salām al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām al-Shihāb al-Qarāfi: Ḥalqat waṣl bayna l-Mashriq wa-l-Maghrib fī madhhab Mālik fī l-qarn al-sābi'*, 2 vols. (Rabat: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1996). On al-Qarāfi's life, see also 'Iyāḍ ibn Nāmī al-Sulmī, *Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi: ḥayātuhu wa-ārā'uhu al-uṣūliyya* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1990), 5–73.

31 Sherman A. Jackson, *Islamic Law and the State: The Constitutional Jurisprudence of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), based on his doctoral dissertation: "In Defense of a Two-Tiered Orthodoxy: A Study of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi's *Kitāb al-iḥkām fī tamyiz al-fatāwā 'an al-aḥkām wa taṣarruḥāt al-qāḍi wa al-imām*" (University of Pennsylvania, 1991). See also, by the same author, "Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi," in *ELI*, s.v., and "al-Qarāfi, Shihab al-Din (1228–85)," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. G. Bowering et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 444–445.

32 The place is indicated by al-Ṣafādī (6:146) and by Ibn Taghrībirdī (1:233). As for the year of his birth, we know it from the pen of al-Qarāfi himself in his *al-Iqd al-manẓūm fī l-khuṣūṣ wa-l-'umūm*, ed. Aḥmad al-Khatam 'Abd Allāh (Mecca: Al-Maktaba al-Makkiyya; Cairo: Dār al-Kutubī, 1999), 1:440.

perhaps from his father,³³ before he moved to Cairo during his early teens in search of further learning and more authoritative teachers. The rest of his life was spent in this city, where he rose to fame, becoming a leading scholar and the respected head of the Mālikī school.

As for the sobriquet by which he became known, al-Qarāfi himself explains that he acquired it as a result of living for a short while in the district known as al-Qarāfa, just below the Cairo Citadel southward, and not because he belonged to the Arab tribe of Banū Qarāfa, which had settled in Egypt at the time of the Arab conquest.³⁴ In the same passage, al-Qarāfi refers to his Berber origin by tracing his descent from the Ṣanhāja of the region of Marrakesh.

We know from his biographers that during his formative years al-Qarāfi attended the Ṣahibiyya in Cairo, a Mālikī madrasa which the vizier Ṣāfi l-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Shukr had founded sometime before 1214. Ibn Farḥūn also records the names of four of al-Qarāfi’s teachers: the Shāfi‘ī jurist ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī (d. 660/1262), the Mālikī jurist Muḥammad ibn ‘Umrān ibn Mūsā, known as al-Sharīf al-Karakī (d. 688/1289), the Shāfi‘ī polymath ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn ‘Īsā al-Khusrawshāhī (d. 652/1254), and the Ḥanbalī jurist and *ḥadīth* expert Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Abī l-Surūr al-Maqdisī (d. 676/1277).³⁵ The latter became the first Ḥanbalī *qāḍī l-quḍāt* in 1265, when the Mamlūk Sultan al-Zāhir Baybars appointed a chief *qāḍī* for each of the four Sunnī schools of law in Cairo, thereby ending the Shāfi‘ī monopoly of this office.³⁶

The most important of these four scholars was, no doubt, the Damascene Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, who was considered the leading Shāfi‘ī authority of his time, and whose enormous popularity and his independence in dealing with the political power earned him the nickname ‘Sultan of the scholars.’ The biographers suggest that the young al-Qarāfi attached himself to Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām soon after the latter’s arrival in Cairo in 1241, thus when he was about thirteen

33 In the introduction to his book *Tartīb al-furūq*, al-Baqqūrī (d. 707/1307), who was one of al-Qarāfi’s disciples, refers to his master as “son of the illustrious *shaykh*, the late Abū l-‘Alā’ Idrīs al-Qarāfi.” See Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Baqqūrī, *Tartīb al-furūq wa-ikhtisāruḥā*, ed. ‘Umar ibn ‘Abbād (Rabat: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1994–1996), 1:19.

34 Al-Qarāfi, *al-‘Iqd al-manẓūm*, 1:440.

35 Ibn Farḥūn, *al-Dībāj*, 128, 133, and 416. For a fuller treatment of al-Qarāfi’s teachers, see al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:167–179; and Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 5–13.

36 On this important reform of the judiciary system, see Yossef Rapoport, “Legal Diversity in the Age of *Taqlīd*: The Four Chief *Qāḍīs* under the Mamluks,” *Islamic Law and Society* 10 (2003): 210–228.

years of age. In his works, al-Qarāfi refers to him more than to any other scholar of his time.³⁷

Originally from Fez, the Mālikī al-Sharīf al-Karakī settled in Cairo, where he also became proficient in the Shāfiʿī system of law. Jackson thinks that, being a Mālikī, he must have been al-Qarāfi's actual professor, that is, his law professor, and the one who probably granted him the license to teach and to issue *fatāwā* or legal opinions.³⁸

As for the Shāfiʿī al-Khusrawshāhī, he was, as his name indicates, a native of Khusrawshāh, in the vicinity of Tabriz. He was proficient in the fields of legal theory, theology, philosophy, and medicine, and he is known to have been a disciple of the celebrated theologian and Qurʾān exegete Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. It is probably through al-Khusrawshāhī that we can trace al-Qarāfi's great admiration for al-Rāzī, on whose works he wrote a number of abridgements and commentaries.

In addition to these four, al-Qarāfi also refers in his works to the Mālikī jurist and grammarian ʿUthmān ibn Abī Bakr ibn al-Ḥājib (d. 646/1249) as one of his masters.³⁹ Of Kurdish origin, but born in Upper Egypt, Ibn al-Ḥājib lived and taught in Damascus for some years and came back to Egypt at the same time as did the above-mentioned Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām. As a jurist, he is said to have been “the first to combine in his writings the doctrines of the Egyptian Mālikīs with those of the Mālikīs of the Maghrib.”⁴⁰

With regard to al-Qarāfi's teaching career, three posts are mentioned by his early biographers. Al-Dhahabī (in *Tārīkh al-Islām*), al-Ṣafadī, and Ibn Taghribirdī report that he held a professorship at the famous Ṣāliḥiyya madrasa in Fāṭimid Cairo after the death of Sharaf al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 669/1270). This unique madrasa—the first to have a chair of *fiqh* for each of the four schools of law—had been founded in 1242 by the Ayyūbid Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, and it was this institution that provided the four candidates to fill the newly created positions of chief judgeship in 1265. Apparently, al-Qarāfi lost his professorship at the Ṣāliḥiyya for a time to Nafīs al-Dīn ibn Shukr and then recovered it and retained it until his death. These same three biographers also mention

37 According to Jackson (*Islamic Law*, 12–13), however, al-Qarāfi's relationship with Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām was “double-edged,” since his otherwise admired master represented precisely the monopolistic tendency of the state-backed Shāfiʿism to impose its point of view on other juridical schools.

38 Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 7.

39 Al-Qarāfi, *Kitāb al-furūq* (Cairo: Dār Ihyaʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1925–1927), 1:64.

40 See “Ibn al-Ḥādjib,” in *El2*, s.v. (Henri Fleisch). Both al-Marāghī (*al-Faṭḥ al-mubīn*, 2:86) and Makhhlūf (*Shajarat al-nūr*, 1:88) stress his influence on al-Qarāfi.

al-Qarāfi's teaching at the congregational mosque in Old Cairo (known as the mosque of 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ) and at the Ṭaybarsiyya madrasa. Attached to the Al-Azhar mosque, the latter was a madrasa for both Mālikī and Shāfiʿī students, which the Mamlūk amīr 'Alā' al-Dīn Ṭaybars al-Wazīrī had founded in 1279. The modern editor of *al-Iqd al-manẓūm* further indicates al-Qarāfi's teaching post at the much older Qamḥiyya madrasa, which Ṣalāh al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī had established in 1177 for the Mālikīs near the mosque of 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ.⁴¹

Jackson thinks that it was probably after assuming the Mālikī professorship at the Ṣālihiyya that al-Qarāfi became head of the Mālikīs in Cairo.⁴² For, as Ibn Farḥūn first records, "the leadership of the Mālikī school devolved upon him" (*intahat ilayhi riʾasatu l-fiqhi ʿalā madhhab Mālik*), a formulaic phrase that many biographers repeat after him.⁴³ Indeed, already during his lifetime, al-Qarāfi appears to have been counted among the most prominent scholars of the time, if we are to believe the following witness, also recorded by Ibn Farḥūn: "The Mālikīs and the Shāfiʿīs all agreed that the greatest contemporary scholars in Egypt were three: al-Qarāfi in Old Cairo, Nāṣir al-Dīn ibn al-Munayyir in Alexandria, and Taqī l-Dīn ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd in Fāṭimid Cairo."⁴⁴ In fact, this apparent recognition of his intellectual stature across partisan lines is supported by the fact that al-Suyūṭī places al-Qarāfi among the leading jurists-prudents (*al-aʿimmat al-mujtahidīn*) of Egypt, and not in the section that he devotes exclusively to the Mālikī jurists.⁴⁵

Al-Qarāfi died at Dayr al-Ṭīn, a village on the Nile bank in the district of Birkat al-Ḥabash, just south of Cairo, on Sunday 30 Jumāda 11 684/2 September 1285, and was buried the next day in the Qarāfa cemetery.⁴⁶

41 Al-Qarāfi, *al-Iqd al-manẓūm*, 1:35. See also Badawī, *al-Ḥayāt al-ʿaqliyya*, 174.

42 Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 14.

43 Ibn Farḥūn, *al-Dibāj*, 128. On the meaning of this phrase, see Roy P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, rev. ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 145–150.

44 Ibn Farḥūn, *al-Dibāj*, 128. The translation is taken from Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 2. Ibn Farḥūn ascribes this laudatory statement to the *qāḍī l-quḍāt* Taqī l-Dīn ibn Shukr. As Jackson remarks, however, there seems to be some confusion about this name (*ibid.*, n. 13).

45 Al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara*, 1:316.

46 Only al-Dhahabī (*Tārīkh al-Islām*, 177) gives the precise date of his death. Ibn Farḥūn and al-Suyūṭī limit themselves to the month and year (Jumāda 11, 684 H). Al-Ṣafadī and Ibn Taghrībirdī give instead 682 H as the year of al-Qarāfi's death. However, al-Dhahabī's information is confirmed by the testimony of Ibn Rushayd al-Fihri al-Sabtī (d. 721/1321), a Mālikī jurist and man of letters who recorded his regret at having arrived in Cairo eight days after al-Qarāfi's death, too late to study under him. The citation is quoted by

3.3 *In Defense of Islam*

Although al-Qarāfi is known primarily for his mastery of the legal field, in both legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and positive law (*furūʿ al-fiqh*), his biographers inform us that he taught and excelled in several other areas as well. Al-Dhahabī, for instance, describes him as a leading scholar (*imām*) in legal theory, but also in theology (*uṣūl al-dīn*), and mentions his expertise in Mālikī jurisprudence, qurʾānic exegesis, and other sciences.⁴⁷ We also have the witness of scholars who recorded having studied logic and the arts of dialectic and disputation under al-Qarāfi.⁴⁸ Indeed, his works—both extant and those referred to in the sources—give us a measure of the broad interests of his mind: lexicography, grammar, mathematics, algebra, optics, and astronomy, thus reflecting “an almost irreverent passion for knowledge,” as Jackson puts it.⁴⁹ There is no reason to believe, however, that al-Qarāfi was “a learned Hebraist,” as was once believed.⁵⁰ Al-Qarāfi was also able to build clocks and mechanical automata, according to his own testimony.⁵¹

Nevertheless, al-Qarāfi did not consider his scientific pursuits as altogether extraneous to his religious concerns, as can be seen from what he writes in the introduction to his *Kitāb al-istibṣār fī mā tudrikuhu al-abṣār* (‘Examination of What the Eyes May Perceive’), a scientific work on optics and the faculty of sight.⁵² There, al-Qarāfi explains that he was prompted to write this work by

Muḥammad Ḥajjī and Muḥammad al-Amīn Bū-Khubza in their edition of al-Qarāfi’s *al-Dhakhira* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1994), 1:14.

47 Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 176.

48 See references in al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:236. For al-Qarāfi’s views on Aristotelian logic, whose mastery he made one of the preconditions for exercising independent legal reasoning (*ijtihād*), see the testimony of Ibn Ḥajar al-Ḥaythamī (d. 973/1566) quoted in Khaled El-Rouayheb, “Sunni Muslim Scholars on the Status of Logic, 1500–1800,” *Islamic Law and Society* 11 (2004), 218–219.

49 Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 3. On al-Qarāfi’s literary production see Appendix A.

50 Moritz Steinschneider, *Jewish Literature from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century; With an Introduction on Talmud and Midrash* (London: Longman, 1857), 130. Steinschneider was probably referring to Hottinger’s description of al-Qarāfi as “Scriptor multæ lectionis est, cæterarum etiam Linguarum, Hebraicæ cum primis, peritus” (Johann Heinrich Hottinger, *Promptuarium, sive Bibliotheca orientali* [Heidelberg: Adrian Wyngaerden, 1658], 204). See also Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 3. The quotations from the Hebrew Bible (in Arabic script) that appear in the *Ajwiba* are cribbed from *Iḥām al-Yahūd*, a work written by the mathematician and physician al-Samaw’al al-Maghribī (d. 570/1175). (I will return to this later.)

51 Al-Qarāfi, *Nafā’is al-uṣūl fī sharḥ al-Maḥṣūl*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Atā (Beirut: Manshūrāt ‘Alī Bayḍūn; Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2000), 1:192.

52 Al-Qarāfi, “*Kitāb al-istibṣār fī mā tudrikuhu al-abṣār* = La observación de lo que las miradas pueden alcanzar,” edition and Spanish trans. by Aman Salama (PhD diss., Universidad

the actions of “the Emperor, King of the Franks in Sicily,” who at the time of the Ayyūbid Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil, used to challenge the Muslims with difficult questions.⁵³ The Frankish king in question is, no doubt, the above-mentioned Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily, who during his stay in the Holy Land at the time of the Sixth Crusade (1228–1229) is known to have conveyed complex philosophical and scientific questions to al-Kāmil.⁵⁴ In this work, al-Qarāfi responds to three of the questions put forward by Frederick and himself proposes and responds to others, adding up to a total of fifty questions.⁵⁵ According to a biographer, the Christian ruler was only seeking “to raise the esteem of his Mediterranean neighbours for him by appearing in their eyes as a man of learning of whom it might be said (as it had been of [his grandfather] Roger II) that but for his religion he was the intellectual equal of any Muslim prince.”⁵⁶ This was not, however, how al-Qarāfi (and other Muslim scholars, as we shall see later) thought of it. He intimates in the introduction to the *Kitāb al-istibṣār* that the real purpose of the Norman king was to expose the deficiency of the Muslim religion, for if Muslims could not answer these questions, still less could they pretend to be knowledgeable about things divine. For al-Qarāfi, however, it is indisputable

Autónoma de Madrid, 2004); German trans. by Eilhard Wiedemann and Max Meyerhof, “Über ein optisches Werk des Ḥmad al-Qarāfi,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 17 (2006–07), 7–66.

- 53 Al-Qarāfi, *Istibṣār*, ed. A. Salama, 33 (Arabic), 91 (Spanish); *Über ein optisches Werk*, 8 (German).
- 54 Takayama, “Frederick II’s Crusade,” 175. On the intellectual life at Frederick’s court and the philosophical and scientific exchanges that the emperor maintained with the Muslim world, see David Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 251–289, especially 256–258, and Wolfgang Stürner, *Friedrich II* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992–2000), 2:342–457.
- 55 The fifty questions are listed in Eilhard Wiedemann, “Optische Studien in Laienkreisen im 13. Jahrhundert in Ägypten,” *Jahrbuch für Photographie und Reproduktionstechnik* 27 (1913): 65–72. See also, by the same author, “Fragen aus dem Gebiet der Naturwissenschaften, gestellt von Friedrich II., dem Hohenstaufen,” *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 11 (1914): 483–485; idem, “Arabische Studien über den Regenbogen,” *Archiv für die Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften und der Technik* 4 (1913), 457–460; idem, “Über die fata morgana nach arabischen quellen,” *Meteorologische Zeitschrift* 30 (1913): 246–248; and idem, “Anschauungen von muslimischen Gelehrten über die blaue Farbe des Himmels,” in *Arbeiten aus den Gebieten der Physik, Mathematik, Chemie: Festschrift Julius Elster und Hans Geitel zum sechzigsten Geburtstag gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern* (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1915), 124–126. See also Aydin M. Sayili, “Al Qarāfi and His Explanation of the Rainbow,” *Isis* 32 (1940): 16–26.
- 56 Abulafia, *Frederick II*, 255.

that Muḥammad's community is "the best nation ever brought forth to men" (Q 3:15). God had uncovered for the Muslims that which was confused for other nations and granted them what he withheld from the others. As a result, the sciences inherited from pre-Islamic civilizations, particularly from the Greeks, have been perfected and verified. According to al-Qarāfī, it is incumbent on those who have been given great knowledge to apply themselves to study the secrets that God has placed in the created world, so that those who are obstinate will not find a way to reduce them to silence by means of questions. In this way, the Muslim community will be safe from the "stigma of deficiency" (*waṣmat al-tanqīṣ*) and the enemies of Islam will not imagine that they surpass them in perfection and favor.⁵⁷ Al-Qarāfī ends the introduction by pointing out that the pursuit of science and the defense of religion, which is a collective obligation (*wājib kifāya*) for the Muslim community, becomes an individual duty (*wājib 'ayn*) for those who have acquired knowledge, especially at a time when the learned are scarce.⁵⁸

The above remarks from the introduction to the *Kitāb al-istibṣār* shed light on al-Qarāfī's motivation for writing the *Ajwiba*. If the philosophical and scientific questions sent by the Norman king *had* to be answered, lest the Christians thought themselves superior to the Muslims, still more the explicitly religious challenge put forward by Paul of Antioch. In a section of the *Ajwiba* devoted to supporting the qur'ānic claim that the Muslim community is the best nation ever brought forth to men, al-Qarāfī underlines again the enormous literary production of Muslim scholars and the number of sciences practiced in Muslim lands.⁵⁹ Muslims have not only verified the sciences of the ancients and purified them of the errors they contained, but they have also developed new sciences which were not known to other nations. According to al-Qarāfī, these intellectual achievements of the Muslims are due to the excellence of their religious law and to their following the prophet Muḥammad, for, as he puts it, the quality of the fruits points to the quality of the plants.⁶⁰

57 Al-Qarāfī, *Istibṣār*, ed. Salama, 33 (Arabic), 91 (Spanish); *Über ein optisches Werk*, 8 (German).

58 Al-Qarāfī, *Istibṣār*, ed. Salama, 33–34 (Arabic), 92 (Spanish); *Über ein optisches Werk*, 8–9 (German).

59 *Ajwiba*, 281–283 (167–169). See also *Ajwiba*, 766–767 (458–459).

60 According to al-Jāhīz (d. 255/869), the same argument was used by the Christians of his time to boast of the superiority of their religion over that of the Jews, Arabs, and Hindus. They managed to deceive the Muslim masses, who believed them to be philosophers and scientists, while in reality they had obtained their learning from the Greeks, who were the true savants and were not Christians. See the relevant passage in *al-Mukhtār fi l-radd 'alā l-Naṣārā: ma'a dirāsa taḥlīliyya taqwīmiyya*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh al-Sharqāwī

Before concluding this section, a few words seem warranted concerning a work entitled *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya fī l-radd ‘alā l-Naṣrāniyya* ('Proofs of Divine Oneness in Refutation of Christianity'), which is regularly listed among al-Qarāfi's writings.⁶¹ For, if indeed this work belongs to his canon, it constitutes, in addition to the *Ajwiba*, his second book of anti-Christian polemics and would therefore be of capital importance for the present investigation. To my knowledge, the first explicit attribution of this work to al-Qarāfi is found in the *Hadiyyat al-‘arīfīn* of Ismā‘īl Bāshā (d. 1920), and is therefore a relatively late one.⁶² However, the main difficulty for accepting al-Qarāfi's authorship of *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya* is that the prologue of the book clearly explains that it was composed for the Ayyūbid Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil.⁶³ Since al-Qarāfi was born in the year 626/1228, he would still have been a child at the time of al-Kāmil's death on 21 Rajab 635/6 March 1238.⁶⁴ Hence it is extremely unlikely that he authored this book. The difficulty is acknowledged by Maha El Kaisy-Friemuth, who further points out that al-Qarāfi nowhere refers to it in his other works, and raises the possibility that *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya* is the work of an earlier author, perhaps of a certain al-Khaṭīb al-Iskandarī, who is thought to have written a refutation of Christianity for al-Kāmil which bears an almost identical title: *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya fī l-radd ‘alā l-milla al-Naṣrāniyya* ('Proofs of Divine Oneness in Refutation of the Christian Community').⁶⁵ As a matter of fact, not only are the circumstances of the composition and the titles noticeably similar, but also the structure and content of the two books.⁶⁶ 'Abd

(Beirut: Dār al-Jil; [Cairo]: Maktabat al-Zahrā', 1991), 61–63; trans. Charles D. Fletcher, "Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: A Translation and Analysis of Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ's risāla: *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā* (A Reply to the Christians)" (MA thesis, McGill University, 2002), 68–69.

- 61 The two published editions of *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya* are explicitly ascribed to al-Qarāfi by their editors: 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad Sa'īd Dimashqiyya (Riyadh: [s.n.] 1988), and Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyiḥ and Tawfīq 'Alī Wahba (Giza, Egypt: Maktabat al-Nāfidha, 2006).
- 62 Ismā'īl Bāshā, *Hadiyyat al-‘arīfīn*, 1:99.
- 63 *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya*, 19–20 (ed. Dimashqiyya 1988), 47–49 (ed. al-Sāyiḥ and Wahba 2006). See also Erdmann Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter: Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache* (Breslau: Müller & Seifert, 1930), 18.
- 64 A circumstance which al-Wakīlī does not consider in his discussion of *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya* (*al-Imām*, 1:264–266).
- 65 See Maha El Kaisy-Friemuth, "Al-Qarāfi," in *CMR4*, 584.
- 66 Compare David Thomas's description of al-Khaṭīb al-Iskandarī's work (D. Thomas, "Al-Khaṭīb al-Iskandarī," in *CMR4*, 265) with the contents of the published editions of *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya fī l-radd ‘alā l-Naṣrāniyya*.

al-Ḥakīm al-Anīs, for his part, is more categorical in rejecting al-Qarāfi's authorship of this work, not only because of the difficulty already mentioned, but also because of the difference of style when compared with al-Qarāfi's undisputed works.⁶⁷ We must therefore conclude that Ismā'īl Bāshā was mistaken when he ascribed *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya fī l-radd 'alā l-Naṣrāniyya* to al-Qarāfi, even if the precise identity of al-Khaṭīb al-Iskandarī remains to be determined.

4 Al-Qarāfi's Contacts with the People of the Book

In his writings, al-Qarāfi here and there alludes to discussions and debates that he supposedly held with Christians and Jews. There is nothing as such that prevents us from taking them as indications of real encounters, although we should keep in mind that these accounts also play a literary role, and therefore we must allow for the possibility of adaptation and embellishment. In one such episode, reported in his *Nafā'is al-uṣūl*, al-Qarāfi records the objection of a certain Jew to the Muslim claim that the extant Torah could no longer be said to enjoy the guarantee of continuous multiple attestation, and this because of the events that took place at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed Solomon's temple and led the Israelites into exile. His Jewish interlocutor, al-Qarāfi tells us, objected, quoting the well-known fact among Jews that a group of about forty Israelites were able to escape from Nebuchadnezzar and go to different regions, thus assuring the preservation of the Torah through multiple chains of transmission, an argument to which al-Qarāfi replies in turn.⁶⁸

In the *Ajwiba*, al-Qarāfi records a particular episode at a race course where he met with a prominent Christian to discuss the Christian religion in the presence of a group of people of recognized probity and religious integrity.⁶⁹ Al-Qarāfi reports that he did not ask his interlocutor to prove the truth of his religion, but only to conceive a mental representation of it that would be acceptable to the intellect. (A later passage clarifies that the issue here is the impossibility of forming a mental concept of a God who is, as the Christians would have it, one substance and three hypostases.) Aware of the impossibility of complying with this request, his interlocutor replied that the Messiah had

67 'Abd al-Ḥakīm al-Anīs, *al-Imām al-Qarāfi wa-tajribatuhu fī l-ḥiwār ma'a l-ākhar* (Dubai: Islamic Affairs and Charitable Activities Department, 2008), 7.

68 Al-Qarāfi, *Nafā'is al-uṣūl*, 3:241–242. On al-Qarāfi's views on the corruption of the Torah, see below, chapter 4, section 3.2.

69 *Ajwiba*, 145–147 (66–68). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 21.

not asked his followers to form mental representations, but only to believe. Al-Qarāfi, who sees in this a confirmation of the Christians' indolence and lack of reflection on the truth of what they follow, rejoined that belief necessarily requires giving one's assent to something that has been previously conceived in one's intellect.⁷⁰ At that point, his interlocutor, at a loss to answer, requested three days to meet with a certain Ibn al-'Assāl, "a man known among them by his excellence, according to their claim." The account concludes with al-Qarāfi's sarcastic remark: "I did not see him again after that."

Did such an encounter take place? Even allowing for the possibility of adaptation, the mention of Ibn al-'Assāl by the unnamed Christian interlocutor of al-Qarāfi adds to the verisimilitude of the account; for, in effect, we know of the prestige that the Awlād al-'Assāl, a distinguished Coptic family from Old Cairo with connections to the Sultan's court, enjoyed in the Coptic community of the time. Several members of this family played an important role in the Arabic literary renaissance of the Copts during the thirteenth century. Two of them—al-Mu'taman Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn al-'Assāl (d. between 1270 and 1286), and his half-brother, al-Ṣafī Abū l-Faḍā'il ibn al-'Assāl (d. between 1253 and 1275)—composed works in defense of the Christian religion,⁷¹ and either one could well be the Ibn al-'Assāl mentioned in the *Ajwiba*.⁷²

70 Here, al-Qarāfi follows the classical distinction in Arabic philosophy between *taṣawwur* (concept, representation) and *taṣdiq* (assent). See Harry A. Wolfson, "The terms *taṣawwur* and *taṣdiq* in Arabic philosophy and their Greek, Latin and Hebrew equivalents," *Muslim World* 33 (1943): 114–128; and Deborah L. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 71–78.

71 The literature on the Awlād al-'Assāl is vast. The best entry point to the two authors mentioned is Wadi Awad's articles, "al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl," in *CMR4*, 530–537, and "al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl," in *CMR4*, 538–551. See also Wadi Awad, "Towards a New Edition of al-Ṣafī Ibn al-'Assāl's Apologetic Works," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 2 (2014): 227–240.

72 Curiously, al-Qarāfi's account of his interview with the Christian notable at the race course was copied word for word by Muḥammad 'Alī l-Malījī at the end of the nineteenth-century in order to create a fictitious historical setting for his publication of *al-Fāṣil bayna l-ḥaqq wa-l-bāṭil* ('The Distinguisher between Truth and Falsehood,' Cairo 1898). Exactly the same dialogue reported by al-Qarāfi becomes in al-Malījī's recount a dialogue between an Egyptian Christian named Ḥannā Maqār al-'Isawī and a Muslim visitor called 'Izz al-Dīn al-Muḥammadī. After the Muslim's insistence that the Christian should be able to form a mental representation of his belief, the latter asks for three days to confer with Ibn al-'Assāl, now described as "one of the leading theologians" (*aḥad a'immat al-lāhūt*). The Christian did not return as promised. However, about a month later, he sent a written apology of Christianity, to which his Muslim interlocutor also replied in writing. The text published by al-Malījī was in reality the *Maqāmi' al-sulbān*, a work composed by the Andalusī Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Khazrajī (d. 582/1186) in reply to a refutation of Islam

The argument that Christians were incapable of conceiving a mental representation of the object of their Trinitarian belief, still less of offering a logical proof of its truth, seems to have been al-Qarāfi's preferred and, to his eyes, most effective way of confronting Christians on this matter. In a later section of the *Ajwiba* devoted to exposing the logical incoherencies that result from holding to the doctrine of the Trinity, he recalls having repeatedly challenged Christians, while discussing with them, to form a mental representation of their belief, something which they systematically failed to achieve.⁷³

To sum up, there are reasons to believe that al-Qarāfi might have engaged in actual debates with intellectual representatives of the Jewish and Coptic community. Some nuance is required, however, with regard to his supposed familiarity with the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and other Christian writings, which modern commentators have often assumed and to which the *Ajwiba* can easily, understandably and erroneously lead one to assume.⁷⁴ A closer examination reveals that al-Qarāfi drew generously from previous works by Muslim scholars for his knowledge of Christian doctrine and practice. I will also suggest later that most likely he did not have direct access to the Jewish and Christian scriptures (or at least did not think it necessary to consult them), but simply reproduced the biblical material quoted in his sources, at times without realizing the contradictions incurred in the process.⁷⁵

5 Al-Qarāfi in Previous Scholarship

5.1 *The Jurist and the Theologian*

Jackson was right in pointing out that Western scholarship had taken only slight notice of al-Qarāfi before the publication of his research. This observation

by a priest from Toledo. See an account of this literary ruse in Dorman (*Understanding Islam*, 88) who ignores, however, the real identity of the text published by al-Malījī. See also the remarks of Muḥammad Shāma in the introduction to *Bayna l-Islām wa-l-Masīhiyya: Kitāb Abi 'Ubayda al-Khazrajī* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1979), 42–44, who, on the contrary, ignores the publisher of *al-Fāṣil bayna l-ḥaqq wa-l-bāṭil* and the origin of the 'historical setting' borrowed by al-Malījī.

73 *Ajwiba*, 507–511 (356–358).

74 See, for instance, Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 22; al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:586; and El Kaisy-Friemuth, "Al-Qarāfi," in *CMR4*, 586.

75 For instance, al-Qarāfi refers twice to the same passage from Genesis (49:10) in two different Arabic translations and for two different purposes: first as a prediction of the Messiah, against the Jewish denial of the prophethood of Jesus (*Ajwiba*, 364–365 [225–226]), and the second time as a biblical prediction of Muḥammad (*Ajwiba*, 693–694 [418–419]).

applies particularly to al-Qarāfi's work in the legal field, which was after all his main intellectual occupation, and it is to Jackson's credit to have brought this undeservedly neglected jurist to the attention of the scholarly community.⁷⁶ As one of his reviewers wrote, "No longer can any serious student of Islamic legal history afford to ignore the place Qarāfi carved out for himself in that history."⁷⁷

Perhaps following this advice, Felicitas Opwis has recently given considerable attention to the model of *maṣlaḥa* (welfare, benefit) developed by al-Qarāfi.⁷⁸ This important legal concept is closely connected to a major concern in the history of Islamic moral thinking, namely, the epistemological question of whether or not the human intellect is capable of knowing the moral value of actions independently of revelation. The Ash'arī school of the-

76 See Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 2, where he lists the sparse references to al-Qarāfi that he was able to find in the works of J. Schacht, N.J. Coulson, F. Rosenthal, W. Hallaq, and M.H. Kerr. Besides his published book on al-Qarāfi, mention must also be made of Jackson's articles: "The Second Education of the *Muftī*: Notes on Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi's Tips to the Jurisconsult," *Muslim World* 82 (1992): 201–217; "From Prophetic Actions to Constitutional Theory: A Novel Chapter in Medieval Muslim Jurisprudence," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25 (1993): 71–90; and "Taqlīd, Legal Scaffolding and the Scope of Legal Injunctions in Post-Formative Theory *Muṭlaq* and *ʿAmm* in the Jurisprudence of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi," *Islamic Law and Society* 3 (1996): 165–192.

77 Wael B. Hallaq, Review of Sherman A. Jackson, *Islamic Law and the State: The Constitutional Jurisprudence of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi*, *Islamic Law and Society* 5 (1998), 128. Hallaq, however, strongly disagrees with Jackson's views on the general development of Islamic legal history, which he considers unwarranted extrapolations from al-Qarāfi's highly particularized situation. See also Hallaq's remarks in the introduction to this same issue of *Islamic Law and Society*, 127–136.

78 Felicitas Opwis presents four classical models of *maṣlaḥa*, including the one of al-Qarāfi, and investigates their influence on contemporary Islamic legal reflection since the late nineteenth-century in her article: "Maṣlaḥa in Contemporary Islamic Legal Theory," *Islamic Law and Society* 12 (2005): 182–223. A much fuller and technical treatment of al-Qarāfi's model of *maṣlaḥa* can be found in her book, *Maṣlaḥa and the Purpose of the Law: Islamic Discourse on Legal Change from the 4th/10th to 8th/14th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 133–173. Al-Qarāfi's views on *maṣlaḥa* are also studied by the Zaytūna scholar, Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir ibn ʿAshūr (d. 1973) in his treatise *Maqāṣid al-sharīʿa al-Islāmiyya* first published in Tunis in 1946 and recently translated into English by Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi: *Ibn Ashur: Treatise on Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006). See also Malcolm H. Kerr, "Moral and Legal Judgment Independent of Revelation," *Philosophy East and West* 18 (1968): 277–283; and idem, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashid Riḍā* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 66–75, 85–86.

ology, to which al-Qarāfī belonged,⁷⁹ generally emphasized the impossibility of obtaining moral knowledge without the help of revelation, rejecting the idea that actions were inherently good or bad, a position generally ascribed to the Muʿtazilī school of theology.⁸⁰ As Opwis explains, the Shāfiʿī jurist and Ashʿarī theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)—one of the towering figures in the history of Sunnism—was seeking to reconcile these two approaches by making *maṣlaḥa* the purpose of the divine law. He understood *maṣlaḥa* as that which preserves the five essential elements of human well-being deemed to be implicit in the divine law: life, religion, intellect, progeny, and property.⁸¹ Different jurists devised different ways of incorporating this ethical principle into the law-finding process. Al-Qarāfī, in particular, favored its integration at the level of what are technically known as *qawāʿid* or legal principles.⁸²

Al-Qarāfī's position in the debate over the relative weight of reason and revelation in grounding moral knowledge had also been the object of Jackson's analysis, who argued that the Mālikī jurist had attempted to modify what he, Jackson, calls the "over-inclusive scripturalism" of certain Ashʿarīs, that is, the position that every question human beings might pose in moral terms can be resolved by direct reference to scriptural sources (Qurʾān and Ḥadīth). Al-Qarāfī did this by replacing the Ashʿarī conventional definition of *ḥasan* (i.e., laudable or good) as "that which God commanded" with "that which God has *not* forbidden," and by explicitly denying that all acts that are *ḥasan* are rewarded in the next life.⁸³

In recent years, al-Qarāfī's views on the relation between divine will, human reason, and moral obligation have also been examined by Anver Emon, who

79 For indications of al-Qarāfī's Ashʿarism, see Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 19–21, and al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:503–506.

80 George F. Hourani (*Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of ʿAbd al-Jabbār* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971], 3, 8–13) termed these two ethical positions "theistic subjectivism" and "rationalistic objectivism" respectively. On these two contrasting conceptions and their relation to basic theological theses concerning the nature of God and of creation and of humans' relation to God, see Richard M. Frank, "Moral Obligation in Classical Muslim Theology," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11 (1983): 204–223; and A. Kevin Reinhart, *Before Revelation: The Boundaries of Muslim Moral Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). See also Ayman Shihadeh, "Ethical Theories of Kalām: A New Interpretation" (2014). DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199696703.013.007

81 Opwis, "Maṣlaḥa in Contemporary," 188–190; idem, *Maṣlaḥa and the Purpose*, 67–80.

82 Opwis, *Maṣlaḥa and the Purpose*, 138–143.

83 For the legal implications of this subtle redefinition, see Sherman A. Jackson "The Alchemy of Domination? Some Asharite Responses to Mutazilite Ethics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999), 194–197.

counts him among those Muslim scholars who upheld a “soft natural law,” that is, who saw the goodness and consistency of creation not as the necessary result of God’s obligation to do what is best for humanity, but as the contingent effect of God’s gracious favor (*faḍl, tafaḍḍul*). This concession allowed scholars to extend the law on rational grounds in order to address circumstances not contemplated by the revealed texts, while preserving their theological commitment to God’s omnipotence.⁸⁴ According to Emon, al-Qarāfi’s critiques of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī show that he was keen on preserving God’s voluntarist will: “nature’s goodness must be subjected to the possibility of a divine change of mind. Possibility, however, is not the same as probability.”⁸⁵

Although at a less technical level than in al-Qarāfi’s legal writings, the general notion of *maṣlaḥa* or human welfare as the purpose of the divine law does play an important role in the *Ajwiba* at least in two respects (as we will see later in more detail). First, it is connected to the thorny issue of the abrogation of previous religious legislation. Muslims claimed that Muḥammad’s law had abrogated certain legal prescriptions from the Torah. Al-Qarāfi records and answers at length the objection according to which accepting such possibility would not only entail regret and change of mind in God, thus compromising divine perfection, but also an overturning of the ontological order, since God commands actions which in themselves procure benefit (*maṣlaḥa*) and forbids actions which in themselves cause detriment (*mafsada*).⁸⁶ Secondly, al-Qarāfi also uses the notion of *maṣlaḥa* as the purpose of the divine law to argue for the supremacy of the Islamic law (and indirectly of Islamic rule) on the grounds that the benefits attained and the detriments averted through its implementation are more universal than those resulting from previous divinely-sanctioned legislation.⁸⁷

Al-Qarāfi’s treatise *al-Umniyya fī idrāk al-niyya* (‘The Aspiration Concerning the Understanding of Intention’) is one of the main primary sources used by Paul Powers in his study of intentionality in Islamic law.⁸⁸ Although the work surveys four major areas—ritual, contracts, family law, and penal law—

84 See Anver M. Emon, *Islamic Natural Law Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 43–44, 88–89, 123–125, and 148–159. See also, by the same author, “Natural Law and Natural Rights in Islamic Law,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 20 (2004–2005): 351–395.

85 Emon, *Islamic Natural Law Theories*, 186.

86 *Ajwiba*, 323–333 (199–207).

87 *Ajwiba*, 277–291 (163–176).

88 Paul R. Powers, *Intent in Islamic Law: Motive and Meaning in Medieval Sunnī Fiqh* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), and idem, “Interiors, Intentions, and the ‘Spirituality’ of Islamic Ritual Practice,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72 (2004): 425–459. On al-Qarāfi’s understanding of intention and its role in Islamic law, see also Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 200–202; and, more extensively, Muḥammad ibn Yūnus al-Suwayṣī al-Tawzarī al-‘Abbāsī, *Majāl*

al-Qarāfi is cited mainly in connection with ritual law. Relying on al-Qarāfi and his other sources, Powers illustrates how Muslim jurists often treat intent as part of what defines an action and hence helps determine its legal status and consequences. In ritual law, *niyya* is an essentially internal phenomenon, done in the ‘heart,’ or ‘mind,’ with which worshippers mentally define their actions as acts of ritual worship. As al-Qarāfi puts it,

[*Niyya*] distinguishes that which is for God from that which is not, so the action is fit for glorification (*taʿẓīm*). For example, bathing (*ghusl*) may accomplish cooling off and cleaning up, but can also accomplish a commanded act of worship (*ʿibāda*). If one intends specifically that the act is for God, the person accomplishes the glorification of the Lord with this bathing. In the absence of *niyya* . . . fasting (*al-ṣawm*) is [merely] lack of nourishment.⁸⁹

Perhaps in reaction to previous Western scholarship that saw Islam as highly formalist, numerous Western scholars have seen in *niyya* the specifically spiritual element of Islamic worship, a moment of spiritual engagement. Without denying that some Muslims did use the term *niyya* in a spiritual way, Powers shows convincingly that the mainstream juristic tradition does not treat *niyya* in such terms, but rather in quasi-physical terms, as “what one does with one’s mind while performing ritual actions.”⁹⁰ Al-Qarāfi is cited as evidence that classical jurists shared in the belief prevailing in the medieval Islamic world that the heart was the seat of the intellect, thus treating the heart as part of the body, which must be properly disposed when performing an act of worship.⁹¹ According to Powers, “it would be better to recognize that all the *ʿibādāt*, in all their aspects, are properly religious and spiritual, than to designate *niyya* as the element that makes them such.”⁹²

5.2 The Polemicist

As a polemicist, al-Qarāfi (known in Latin as Ahmed Abulabbas ibn Edris Sanhaghius) appeared on the radar screen of Western scholarship much earlier than he did as a jurist. Approximately four hundred years after its

al-niyya fī l-fiqh al-islāmī: mathbūʿan bi-taḥqīq Kitāb al-umniyya fī idrāk al-niyya li-Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfi (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm; Tunis: Dār Saḥnūn, 2010), 287–314.

89 Al-Qarāfi, *al-Umniyya fī idrāk al-niyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1984), 20, quoted in Powers, *Intent in Islamic Law*, 75.

90 Powers, *Intent in Islamic Law*, 19.

91 Powers, *Intent in Islamic Law*, 35–36, 74–76.

92 Powers, *Intent in Islamic Law*, 79.

composition, the *Ajwiba* came to the attention of the Reformed Zurich scholar Johann Heinrich Hottinger (d. 1667), who was the first European to make ample use of it, chiefly, but not only, in his most influential work, the *Historia Orientalis* (1651, 2nd ed. 1660), a pioneering account of the history of Islam based almost entirely on Arabic sources.⁹³ Hottinger based his historical and orientalist scholarship on the manuscripts he copied while he worked in Leiden as tutor to the children of the famous Dutch Arabist Jacobus Golius (d. 1667). As it happened, al-Qarāfi's *Ajwiba* was one of the 211 manuscripts Golius had acquired in Morocco and the Near East for the Leiden library.⁹⁴ Thanks to Hottinger's references to the *Ajwiba* in his works, al-Qarāfi became an ongoing presence in subsequent scholarship. However, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century oriental studies developed under the influence of strong ideological and confessional commitments. As a result, al-Qarāfi came to be quoted as evidence in very varied ideological projects, as recent scholarship has revealed.⁹⁵

As a Church historian, Hottinger was mainly concerned with the information about early Christianity to be found in the Qur'ān and other Arabic sources. He was persuaded that Arabia had been the origin of countless heresies, such as Christian Mariolatry, and that the rise and spread of Islam were mainly due to the decline of the original orthodoxy and the schismatic divisions in the Eastern Churches. Hottinger found confirmation of this in a narrative reported by al-Qarāfi in which a cunning Paul fakes his conversion to

93 On this work, see Jan Loop, "Johann Heinrich Hottinger (1620–1667) and the 'Historia Orientalis,'" *Church History and Religious Culture* 88 (2008): 169–203. See also Alastair Hamilton, "The Study of Islam in Early Modern Europe Journal," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3 (2001), 176–177.

94 See 'Libri MSS Arabici & alii, quos pro Academia ex Oriente advexit Jacobus Golius,' in *Catalogus Bibliothecae Publicae Lugduno-Batavae* (Leiden: Elsevier, 1640), 15, no. 21: Ibn Idris Sanhagii responsa & quæsitæ de religione. For Hottinger's description of al-Qarāfi's work, see *Promptuarium, sive Bibliotheca orientalis*, 66–67, 203–204. Al-Qarāfi is referred to as *Ahmed Ibn Edris*, *Abbulabbasus* on page 66 and as *Ibn Edrisi Sanhagj* on page 203. On al-Qarāfi, see also Hottinger's discussion in *Historia Ecclesiastica Novi Testamenti* (9 vols., Zurich: Michael Schaufelberger, Hartmann Hamberger, 1651–1667), 6:166.

95 Justin Champion, "'I remember a Mahometan Story of Ahmed ben Edris': Freethinking Uses of Islam from Stubbe to Toland," *Al-Qanṭara* 31 (2010): 443–480; Martin Mulso, "Socinianism, Islam and the Radical Uses of Arabic Scholarship," *Al-Qanṭara* 31 (2010): 549–586; Gerard Wiegers, "Islam and Radical Enlightenment," *Journal of the Dutch-Flemish Levinas Society* 16 (2011): 41–50; and Bernard Heyberger, "L'islam dans la controverse entre catholiques et protestants: le *De origine nominis papae* d'Abraham Ecchellensis (1661), réponse à l'*Historia Orientalis* de Johann Heinrich Hottinger (1651 et 1660)," in *Énoncer/Dénoncer l'autre: discours et représentations du différend confessionnel à l'époque moderne*, ed. C. Bernat and H. Bost (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 389–400.

Christianity in order to corrupt it from within and cause dissension through his false teachings about Jesus' divinity and the Trinity.⁹⁶ The narrative was historically unconvincing for Hottinger, who refers to it as a "tasteless and wicked fiction" and describes al-Qarāfi as a "wind-bag."⁹⁷ It nevertheless explained the qur'ānic depiction of Christians as divided into opposing factions (Q 19:37 and *passim*). According to al-Qarāfi's account, moreover, the Christians who rejected the Trinitarian dogma and stayed faithful to Jesus' original monotheistic message were persecuted by Paul's Trinitarian followers and had to live in isolation, until thirty of their descendants eventually recognized Muḥammad. For Hottinger, all this was proof that Christian heretics—Samosatenians and Photinians—had joined Muḥammad. The Reformed scholar further stressed the similitudes between the Arian-influenced Muslims and the anti-Trinitarian Socinians of his day.⁹⁸ Similarly, the French orientalist Mathurin Veyssi  re de La Croze (d. 1739), who also retold al-Qarāfi's anti-Pauline narrative in his *R  flexions historiques et critiques sur le mahom  tisme et sur le socinianisme* (1707), concluded that the Christian heretics who embraced Muḥammad's movement were the remains of the Ebionites.⁹⁹

As Loop suggests, although written from a polemical perspective, Hottinger's comparison between Islam and Socianism must have made Islam very attractive to freethinking figures like the English physician Henry Stubbe (d. 1676) who supported a rational, simple, and Unitarian form of faith.¹⁰⁰ In effect, in his controversial *An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism*, recently described as "the most sympathetic account of Islam and its founder yet

96 Hottinger, *Historia Orientalis*, 2nd ed. (Zurich: Bodmerus, 1660), 350–354. Compare with *Ajwiba* 543–549 (323–326). This narrative of the corruption of early Christianity is discussed in more detail below, chapter 5, section 3.1, and translated into English in Appendix C.

97 "Idem Ahmed [ben Edris] de origine harum trium inter Christianos Sectarum ita fabulos   loquitur, ut mirum unde per febrim simia h  c tam insulsum & impium comminisci potuerit figmentum. Multum tamen est, qu  d, ελφ θυλάκκω, hostis Ecclesi   infensissimus concedit, Paulum, ex persecutore factum esse Christianismi lumen & columen, Trinitatis clarissimum doctorem, fortissim  mque hyperaspisten" (*Historia Orientalis*, 350).

98 Hottinger, *Historia Orientalis*, 2nd ed., 361–396. See also Mulsow, "Socinianism, Islam and the Radical Uses," 559–562.

99 Mathurin Veyssi  re de La Croze, "R  flexions historiques et critiques sur le mahom  tisme et sur le socinianisme," in idem, *Dissertations historiques sur divers sujets* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1707), 87–90; English trans. "Historical and Critical Reflections upon Socinianism and Mahometanism," in *Four Treatises Concerning the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Mahometans* (London: Lintott and Sanger, 1712), 206–207.

100 Loop, "Johann Heinrich Hottinger," 198.

written in English,”¹⁰¹ Stubbe referred to al-Qarāfi’s narrative as evidence that Islam was chiefly founded on the doctrines of Christian groups—Nazarene Christians and Arians—who, in his opinion and contrary to Hottinger’s and La Croze’s views, had preserved the original and true Christian monotheism inherited from the Judaic tradition.¹⁰²

While no single monographic study of the *Ajwiba* has been written in any Western language thus far, this work has been regularly included in general and thematic surveys of polemical literature beginning with Moritz Steinschneider’s *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache*, published in 1877.¹⁰³ One recurrent issue in Muslim polemical literature is the question of *tahrīf* or scriptural falsification by Jews and Christians. Already in 1878, Ignaz Goldziher referred briefly to al-Qarāfi’s views on this matter in an article in which he explored the main themes of Muslim polemics against the *Ahl al-kitāb*.¹⁰⁴ The first major article dealing exclusively with the issue of *tahrīf* was published, however, in the early 1920s by Ignazio Di Matteo, who concluded his treatment of al-Qarāfi as follows: “From all this can be seen that al-Ṣanhājī admits neither the textual authenticity of our Sacred Books nor their divine origin.”¹⁰⁵ He thus summarized al-Qarāfi’s accusation that Christians and Jews had not merely misinterpreted the texts, but had textually corrupted their scriptures. Di Matteo also referred to al-Qarāfi in a separate study which

101 Matthew Birchwood, “Vindicating the Prophet: Universal Monarchy and Henry Stubbe’s biography of Mohammed,” *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 29 (2007), 59. Stubbe’s *An Account*, which opposed the customary denigration of Islam as “imposture,” circulated in manuscript form among heterodox thinkers and was only published for the first time in the early twentieth century: *An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism; with the Life of Mahomet, and a Vindication of him and his Religion from the Calumnies of the Christians*, ed. Hafiz Mahmud Khan Shairani (London: Luzac, 1911). There is now a new edition by Nabil Matar, *Henry Stubbe and the Beginnings of Islam: the Originall & Progress of Mahometanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

102 Stubbe, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism*, 56, 146.

103 Moritz Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache, zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden, nebst Anhängen verwandten Inhalts* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1877). On al-Qarāfi, see 17–19.

104 Ignaz Goldziher, “Über muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-kitāb,” *Zeitschriften der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 32 (1878): 341–378. On al-Qarāfi, see 369–372.

105 “Da tutto ciò si vede come Aṣ-Ṣinhāǧī non ammetta nè l’autenticità del testo dei nostri Sacri Libri, nè la loro provenienza divina” (Ignazio Di Matteo, “Il ‘tahrīf’ od alterazione della Bibbia secondo i musulmani,” *Bessarione* 26 [1922], 238). An English summary of Di Matteo’s long article was published two years later by M.H. Ananikian, “Tahrif or the Alteration of the Bible according to the Moslems, Abbreviated and Translated from the *Bessarione*, xxvi, 1922,” *Muslim World* 14 (1924): 61–84. On al-Qarāfi, see 78–79.

he devoted to Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), whom he considered the ‘caposcuola’ of those Muslim polemicists who alleged the wholesale falsification of the Bible.¹⁰⁶ Al-Qarāfi’s views on *tahrīf* were further explored in 1930 by Erdmann Fritsch, who dedicated a section of his important study of medieval anti-Christian Muslim polemic to “Der Vorwurf der Bibelfälschung.” Like Di Matteo before him, Fritsch traced al-Qarāfi’s views on the textual corruption of the Bible to Ibn Ḥazm.¹⁰⁷ The topic was again discussed in the late 1980s by Ali Bouamama in a book-length survey of Muslim anti-Christian polemical literature prior to the thirteenth century¹⁰⁸ and, some years later, by Hava Lazarus-Yafeh in her study of medieval Muslim authors’ knowledge of, and attitudes toward, the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰⁹ More recently, in an article on the historical development of the accusation of *tahrīf*, Martin Accad detected “a certain element of contradiction in al-Qarāfi’s approach to the Gospels,”¹¹⁰ in that while he sometimes uses the extant texts to prove a point (e.g., the purely human descent of Jesus), he nevertheless upholds the accusation of textual corruption of the scriptures (e.g., by pointing out the contradictions between the two genealogies of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke). Al-Qarāfi, however, was aware of this apparent paradox and addressed it, as shall be discussed.

Besides the charge of *tahrīf*, another aspect that figures prominently in surveys of Muslim polemical literature is the Christian belief in the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. To my knowledge, the first significant study of al-Qarāfi’s views on these two fundamental Christian beliefs appeared in the section that Fritsch devoted to “Gotteslehre, Trinität, Christologie.”¹¹¹ Eight years later, Di Matteo again included the *Ajwiba* among the writings he examined for a study of the Christological and Trinitarian dogmas in Muslim anti-Christian polemic.¹¹² Al-Qarāfi’s views on these issues were also dealt with by Bouamama, who stressed his reliance on previous Muslim literature and

106 Ignazio Di Matteo, “Le pretese contraddizioni della S. Scrittura secondo Ibn Hazm,” *Bessarione* 27 (1923): 77–127. On al-Qarāfi, see notes on pages 78, 80, 90, 93, 101, and 105.

107 Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 54–74.

108 Ali Bouamama, *La littérature polémique musulmane contre le christianisme depuis ses origines jusqu’au XIII^e siècle* (Algiers: Entreprise nationale du livre, 1988), 112–118.

109 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh in *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). See in the Index ‘Al-Qarāfi.’

110 Martin Accad, “Corruption and/or Misinterpretation of the Bible: The Story of the Islamic Usage of *Tahrīf*,” *Theological Review* 24, no. 2 (2003), 93.

111 Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 102–128.

112 Ignazio Di Matteo, *La divinità di Cristo e la dottrina della trinità in Maometto e nei polemisti musulmani* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1938). On al-Qarāfi’s views, see 25–27 and 58–64.

singled out al-Qarāfi's treatment of the crucifixion as his most original contribution.¹¹³ It should be noted that, unlike Di Matteo and Bouamama, Fritsch also paid attention to other doctrinal aspects such as eschatology and prophectology, as well as to Muslim critiques of Christian cultic, legal, and moral practices. From this perspective, his presentation of al-Qarāfi's views is the most comprehensive.

Wadi' Haddad also included the *Ajwiba* in an article in which he explored the image of the Crusaders "that had crystallized in the Muslim mind by the time of the Mamluks."¹¹⁴ At the beginning of his section on al-Qarāfi, Haddad underlines in somewhat dramatic terms the fact that, during al-Qarāfi's lifetime, the Crusaders had reconquered Damietta on the Nile Delta and marched on Cairo, and "thus he had seen too much killing and suffering to forget or forgive the Crusaders."¹¹⁵ He then goes on to provide a very valuable and accurate summary of al-Qarāfi's most polemical passages against Christians and/or Crusaders. Haddad considers the *Ajwiba* to be both a refutation of the Crusaders and of Christianity, pointing out that the context makes it clear when its author is addressing the Crusaders alone and when as a part of Christendom. He thinks that al-Qarāfi's invective against the Crusaders—"their threat being constant during his lifetime"—was more pointed than his general refutation of Christians and their religion, even though "he spared no punches" against the latter.¹¹⁶ In my view, it is difficult to make such a straightforward distinction between al-Qarāfi's critique of the Crusaders and his attacks on Christianity in general, as both appear to be interlocked in his mind. The aberrant behaviors he describes as taking place in Acre, Barcelona or Marseilles are evidence of Christian unsuitability for intellectual reflection, their lack of interest for the truth, and their tendency to follow slavishly their notables and clergy. In al-Qarāfi's eyes, Christianity as it exists is so evidently a religion corrupted to such a high degree that only a senseless people can adhere to it. And conversely, once a religion loses its monotheistic purity and laws are implemented which are no longer based on revelation, that religion loses its capacity to reform its followers. This is not to deny, however, the real threat which the Crusaders represented and which must be taken into consideration in explaining al-Qarāfi's strong views on Christians and their religion.

113 Bouamama, *La littérature polémique*, 178.

114 Wadi' Z. Haddad, "The Crusaders through Muslim Eyes," *Muslim World* 73 (1983), 234. Haddad's study includes a selection of authors representing three areas of writing: history, memoir literature, and apologetic and polemical writings.

115 Haddad, "The Crusaders," 245.

116 Haddad, "The Crusaders," 250.

Finally, with regard to scholarship written in Arabic on al-Qarāfi as apologist and polemicist,¹¹⁷ mention must be made first of the introductory essays written by Nāji Muḥammad Dāwūd for his critical edition of the *Ajwiba*, originally submitted as a doctoral dissertation at Umm al-Qurā University in 1985.¹¹⁸ More recently, Bayān Ṣāliḥ Ḥasan has written a doctoral dissertation comparing the approaches of al-Qarāfi and al-Qurṭubī in their works dealing with Christianity.¹¹⁹ Finally, in 2008, Mus‘ad ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Abd al-Khāliq published a study of al-Qarāfi’s polemics against Jews and Christians, which was originally presented as the author’s master’s thesis at Al-Azhar University.¹²⁰ It bears noting that all these authors consider *Adillat al-waḥdāniyya fī l-radd ‘alā l-Naṣrāniyya* to be a genuine work of al-Qarāfi, and, more importantly, all three are unaware of the origin of the Christian letter to which al-Qarāfi replies in the first chapter of the *Ajwiba*, namely, Paul of Antioch’s *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, a fact that significantly limits their discussion.

6 Concluding Remarks

In an effort to understand the role played by anti-Christian polemics in medieval Islam, Abdelmajid Charfi identified six primary functions of this

117 I have excluded from this review scholarship in Arabic dealing with al-Qarāfi’s legal thought, which is much more abundant, but less directly relevant to our present purposes.

118 Nāji Muḥammad Dāwūd, “al-Ajwiba al-fākhira ‘an al-as’ila al-fājira” (PhD diss., Umm al-Qurā University, 1985), 42–122. Much less interesting is ‘Awaḍ’s introduction to his edition of the *Ajwiba*, which is a summary of Muslim-Christian clashes since the beginning of Islam till the thirteenth century (2nd ed., Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1987, 13–38). Other recent editors of the *Ajwiba*—such as Majdī Muḥammad al-Shahāwī (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 2005), and Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyiḥ and Tawfiq ‘Alī Wahba (Giza, Egypt: Maktabat al-Nāfidha, 2006)—limit themselves to very brief sketches of al-Qarāfi’s life in guise of introduction. (The last two mentioned editors also add a lengthy essay documenting what they see as current polemical and military campaigns against Islam as a reason for their edition of the *Ajwiba*.) There is also an unpublished edition of the first two chapters of the *Ajwiba* which Ṣālim ibn Muḥammad al-Qarnī presented in 1983 as his master’s thesis at Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, but of which I have not been able to obtain a copy.

119 Bayān Ṣāliḥ Ḥasan, “Uslūb al-imāmayn al-Qurṭubī wa-l-Qarāfi fī da‘wat al-Naṣārā ilā l-Islām: dirāsa muqārana” (PhD diss., Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, 2000). The “Imām al-Qurṭubī” in question is the author of *al-I‘lām bi-mā fī dīn al-Naṣārā min al-fasād wa-l-awḥām*, which is one of the main sources of the *Ajwiba*, as will be seen in the next chapter.

120 Mus‘ad ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Abd al-Khāliq, *al-Imām al-Qarāfi wa-juhūduhu fī l-radd ‘alā l-Yahūd wa-l-Naṣārā* (Cairo: Dār al-Muḥaddithīn, 2008).

literature, three of which apply particularly to al-Qarāfi's *Ajwiba*: first, polemics as a defense and glorification of Islamic civilization; second, polemics as part of the construction of a biblical foundation for Islam (i.e., the search for biblical predictions of Muḥammad and the latter's transformation into a miracle worker similar to biblical prophets); and, third, to a lesser degree, polemics as a response to social antagonism.¹²¹ Although I shall come back to the question later as I begin to explore its contents, it is already possible to describe the *Ajwiba* as al-Qarāfi's personal contribution to an ideological struggle for religious and civilizational hegemony, which may best be understood within the framework of the restoration of Sunnī orthodoxy in Egypt, a renewed sense of self-empowerment among the Coptic community, and the threat represented by Crusaders and Mongols.¹²² It was noted earlier that al-Qarāfi saw a test of the truth of Islam in the philosophical and scientific questions that Frederick II addressed to al-Malik al-Kāmil. These questions challenged the qur'ānic claim that the Muslim community is the best nation ever brought forth to men and therefore had to be answered. If that was the case, *a fortiori* Paul of Antioch's explicitly religious challenge could not be left unanswered, and that was his responsibility as a leading scholar.

121 Abdelmajid Charfi, "La fonction historique de la polémique islamochrétienne à l'époque abbasside," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period*, 44–56. The other three functions of Muslim anti-Christian polemics are: to redress the demographic imbalance in favor of the Christians by seeking to convert them to Islam; the integration of neophytes, thus avoiding the risk of syncretism; and polemics as an exercise of theological elaboration.

122 I have not delved into Jewish-Muslim interaction in Egypt during the thirteenth century in this chapter because it seems clear to me that the *Ajwiba*'s primary purpose is to polemicize against Christians, the Jews being only secondary targets. In fact, it is not uncommon to find arguments against Judaism incorporated into Muslim polemical works primarily directed against Christianity. This reflects the situation in the Qur'ān, "in which numerous verses with polemical content are directed at the two Peoples of the Book" (Camilla Adang and Sabine Schmidtke, "Polemics (Muslim–Jewish)," in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, s.v.). We shall see later, however, that al-Qarāfi made use of a tract specifically aimed at the author's former co-religionists by a twelfth-century Jewish convert to Islam. On medieval Muslim-Jewish polemics, see also Moshe Perlmann, "The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S.D. Goitein (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), 103–138. On the numerical and economic decline of Egyptian Jewry during the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods, see Norman A. Stillman, "The Non-Muslim Communities: The Jewish Community," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, 208–210; and "Mamluks," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., s.v. (Eliyahu Ashtor and Reuven Amitai).

Al-Qarāfi did not live long enough to see the fall of Acre in 1291, but he probably would have agreed with the panegyrics that Muslim poets composed to celebrate the victory of Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf:

Because of you no town is left to which unbelief can repair, no hope for
the Christian religion!
Through al-Ashraf the Lord Sultan, we are delivered from the Trinity, and
Unity rejoices in the struggle!
Praise be to God, the nation of the Cross has fallen; through the Turks¹²³
the religion of the chosen Arab has triumphed!¹²⁴

As Little remarks, the fall of Acre was not seen by contemporary Muslims of Egypt and Syria as an isolated event but as the culmination of a long struggle which lasted over two hundred years. It signified the end of humiliation for Islam. To suggest that al-Qarāfi probably saw himself as a participant in a larger battle that was being fought on different planes by sultans and religious scholars is not to single him out as especially deserving of the epithet 'extremist' or 'radical,' an accusation of which al-Wakīlī is at pains to exonerate him.¹²⁵ On the contrary, al-Qarāfi was, in fact, like countless other religious scholars situated on both sides of the divide in the history of Christian—Muslim relations, who could not or would not dissociate religious issues from other points of friction between two worlds competing for political, cultural, and economic hegemony.¹²⁶

123 Reference to the Turkish origin of the Mamlūks.

124 These poems were collected by the Egyptian Ibn al-Furāt (d. 807/1405) in his universal history *Tārīkh duwal al-mulūk*. The translation is taken (with a slight modification) from Donald Little's study: "The Fall of 'Akkā in 690/1291: The Muslim Version," in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of Professor David Ayalon*, ed. M. Sharon (Jerusalem: Cana; Leiden: Brill, 1986), 181.

125 Al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:578–585.

126 To give but one Christian example, Tirso González de Santalla, the Jesuit author of a handbook for converting Muslims published in 1687, four years after the failed Ottoman siege of Vienna, considers the triumph of Christianity over Islam both a military and religious victory, describing his own efforts to convert Muslims as a spiritual war. This sense of being part of a larger battle appears clearly in the dedication of the second edition of the *Handbook* to the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I, in which we read the following: "May His Majesty permit even us of the Society of Jesus, as soldiers defending the Church, to be able to make our contribution to this holy battle. And, while in Hungary, many a Heracles, adorned in laurel wreaths, combat[s] with swords the Mohammedan Hydra, whose monstrous heads are as many as their terrible errors, we wish to fight this same battle with pen and ink" (Colombo, "Even among Turks," 15–16).

A Handbook for Polemics

This chapter first seeks to determine as far as possible the date and circumstances of the composition of the *Ajwiba*. It then gives a general overview of its structure and contents. Attention is also paid to al-Qarāfi's explicitly stated purpose in writing this work and who his intended audience might have been. The rest of the chapter presents the five main written sources of the *Ajwiba*, beginning with the Christian treatise that prompted al-Qarāfi to respond, namely, Paul of Antioch's *Letter to a Muslim Friend*. The other four are polemical writings composed by earlier Muslim scholars from whom al-Qarāfi derived most of his arguments against Christianity (and against Judaism). Special consideration is given to the circumstances of the composition of these works, some of which are said to be written in response to Christian challenges. It will become apparent that the *Ajwiba* represents much more than an isolated attempt by a Muslim scholar in Mamlūk Cairo to respond to an apology for Christianity written some decades earlier by an Arabic-speaking bishop in Sidon. Rather, it will be seen that both Paul's *Letter* and al-Qarāfi's response are part of a larger conversation between two religious worlds in confrontation. One of the important points made in this chapter is the verification that Christian-Muslim polemics was indeed a collegial activity, and that a very extensive scholarly network connecting a number of otherwise unrelated Muslim thinkers coalesced around the need to respond to the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*.

1 Date of Composition

Taken in isolation, the *Ajwiba* contains no explicit indication of its date of composition. Nor does al-Qarāfi refer to any particular historical event or situation that could help us to determine with precision the period in which he wrote this work. He refers to Acre as the capital of the kingdom of the Christians (i.e., the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem), but that is not helpful for our purposes since Acre fell to the Mamlūks on 13 May 1291, almost six years after al-Qarāfi's death.¹ At a certain place, he refers his readers to one of his previous works, the *Sharḥ al-arbaʿīn li-Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī uṣūl al-dīn*, for an explanation of the scene in which Moses hears God's words emanating from the blazing bush

¹ *Ajwiba*, 134 (57).

(Exodus 3; Q 20:10–48), but this is not helpful either since we are ignorant of the date of composition of this now lost book.² Early in the first chapter, however, al-Qarāfi mentions al-Malik al-Mu‘azzam Tūrān Shāh, the last Ayyūbid Sultan of Egypt, who, having discovered the trickery of the ‘Holy Fire’ in the Church of the Anastasis (Holy Sepulcher) in Jerusalem, still allowed the monks to continue their scam in exchange for money.³ It does not seem very likely that al-Qarāfi would have written in these terms while the Ayyūbids were still in power in Cairo. Thus, we can take the establishment of the Mamlūk sultanate in 1250 as a *terminus a quo* for the composition of the *Ajwiba*.

As for the *terminus ad quem*, we can draw on information contained in another of his works, the *Sharḥ tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl fī ikhtisār al-Maḥṣūl fī l-uṣūl*, which is al-Qarāfi’s own commentary on his work on legal theory entitled *Tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl fī ikhtisār al-Maḥṣūl fī l-uṣūl*.⁴ Chapter fourteen of the *Sharḥ tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl* is devoted to the question of abrogation of divine laws. At one point, responding to the Jewish claim that such abrogation is impossible, al-Qarāfi seeks to establish its possibility on the basis of biblical history, advancing, among other arguments, five examples of abrogation supposedly sanctioned by the Torah. He then refers his readers to two other books in which he has discussed the issue, one of which is the *Ajwiba*.⁵ As it happens, *Sharḥ tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl* is one of the few extant works of al-Qarāfi that can be dated with precision, since, exceptionally, he recorded the date when he completed its composition: 9 Sha‘bān 677/26 December 1278.⁶

We are therefore left with the interval between 1250 and 1278 for the period in which the *Ajwiba* was written. That being said, one must always keep in mind that establishing the chronology of medieval Muslim writings on the basis that a work mentioned in another work by the same author must logically have been written earlier than the book in which it is mentioned is not always an unassailable argument. Authors of the time often revised their works and in so doing referred to other writings which they had composed in the meantime.⁷

2 *Ajwiba*, 260 (146). On this work, see Appendix A, no. 14.

3 *Ajwiba*, 142 (64).

4 On these two works, see Appendix A, nos. 7–8.

5 Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfi, *Sharḥ tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl fī ikhtisār al-Maḥṣūl fī l-uṣūl*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2007), 293. All five examples of abrogation listed in *Sharḥ tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl* are mentioned in *Ajwiba*, 326–330 (201–206). See discussion below, chapter 4, section 3.1.

6 *Sharḥ tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl*, 448.

7 A point made by Muhammad Al-Faruque in his review of Jackson’s *Islamic Law and the State*, *The Muslim World Book Review* 21, no. 1 (2000), 17.

2 A Christian Argumentation from the Qur'an

The *Ajwiba* contains a brief preamble and four chapters. The preamble begins, following the customary Islamic pattern, with praise of God and a blessing on the prophet Muḥammad and his family. Already at the very outset, al-Qarāfi announces to his readers that the issue at hand is doctrinal, namely our understanding of God, and that the stakes are high indeed:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praise belongs to God, the Almighty, Indivisible, Abiding, Eternal, the All-great, Incorporeal, who has neither consort nor son, exalted in His essence and attributes above what those who oppose and reject [the truth] say, One God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has neither begotten nor been begotten, and who has no equal. I testify that there is no god but God alone, and that He has no associate—a testimony that obtains eternal happiness for those who pronounce it. I testify that Muḥammad is His servant and His messenger, singled out over all angels and human beings. God bless him, his family and his companions, those in whom God has strengthened and exalted monotheism, and whom He has set apart for the treasures of the divine sciences, and has sustained—a testimony through which I am saved in the two abodes [i.e., in this world and in the next] and made happy.⁸

It would be tempting to see in al-Qarāfi's reference to the special predisposition of Muḥammad's companions for the divine sciences a direct rejoinder to Paul of Antioch's intimation, at the beginning of his *Letter*, that salvation depends upon the proper use of one's understanding. There Paul greets his Muslim friend with the words, "May God grant us and you the benefit of reflection and may He make it conducive for you and for us to gain insight into the works that lead to Paradise and deliver one from Hell-fire" (§ 2).⁹ Time and again, al-Qarāfi will point out that Christians, who are obviously not an intellectually gifted people, are happy to follow what their leaders tell them, with no interest in finding out the truth. We cannot be sure, however, that al-Qarāfi had access to the full text of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, including the lines

⁸ *Ajwiba*, 128–129 (46–47).

⁹ All quotations from the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* are based on Sidney Griffith's translation in *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World, 700–1700: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. S. Noble and A. Treiger (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014), 219–234. The paragraph numbers refer to Paul Khoury's edition in *Paul d'Antioche, évêque melkite de Sidon (XII^e s)* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1964), 59–83 (Arabic).

just quoted, as he might have read only an abridgment of it (more on which later).

After the ritual praise of God and prayers for Muḥammad, al-Qarāfi briefly elaborates on the circumstances that led him to write the *Ajwiba* and advances how he intends to structure his reply and the aim he hopes to accomplish:

To proceed, a certain Christian wrote a letter on behalf of his co-religionists, claiming that someone else was the speaker and he the questioner. It contains an argumentation for the truth of the Christian doctrine from the Noble Qurʾān. I found that the transmitted text [i.e., the Qurʾān] was confusing to him and that the logical premises of the intellect had grown dark in him, since both our Sublime Book and their scriptures indicate the truth of our doctrine and the invalidation of theirs. I will explain this, God willing, in four chapters.

The first contains the explanation—following his letter point-by-point to the end—of what is obscure to him in the Noble Qurʾān. The second chapter contains questions that the People of the Book, Christians and Jews, are usually fond of bringing up—not the issues of the above-mentioned letter—and their replies, so that whoever comes across this book will be thoroughly acquainted with all that the People of the Book ask about and the true and indisputable replies to it. The third chapter contains the counter-objection to their questions with another hundred questions that I have presented to both groups, and to which they find it difficult to respond. The fourth chapter contains an exposition of what in their scriptures points to the truth of our religion and confirms the prophethood of our Prophet (God bless him and grant him salvation), so that their false inference [of the truth of their religion from the Qurʾān] be countered with our correct inference from what you will find,¹⁰ God willing.

Thus, the replies [to their questions in the first two chapters] are completed with the counter-objection [in the third chapter] and with the texts drawn from their books [in the fourth chapter]. I have entitled the book “Splendid Replies to Insolent Questions.” I ask almighty God for help in the matter. God is sufficient for me; an excellent Guardian is He.¹¹

10 That is, in the texts from the Christian and Jewish scriptures that the reader will find quoted in chapter 4 of the *Ajwiba*.

11 *Ajwiba*, 129–130 (47–50).

Al-Qarāfi thus explicitly acknowledges that the *Ajwiba* was written in response to a letter composed by a certain Christian, whose precise identity is left unmentioned. This is perhaps a first indication that al-Qarāfi had access only to an abridged version of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, which includes in all extant manuscripts an explicit reference to the identity of its author: “A letter from the wretched monk, Paul of Antioch, the Bishop of Sidon, to one of his Muslim friends in Sidon” (§ 1). Of course, it could also be that al-Qarāfi simply thought it unnecessary to mention the identity of the Christian author.

That the letter in question is Paul of Antioch’s *Letter*, and not a different Christian apology, becomes evident as our author begins to quote from it and to respond to its claims in the first chapter of the *Ajwiba*. However, the short description that al-Qarāfi provides in the preamble already contains two clues that point unmistakably to the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*. The first indication is found in his words: “A certain Christian wrote a letter on behalf of his co-religionists, claiming that someone else was the speaker and he the questioner.” In effect, Paul’s *Letter* presents itself as a written report of the conversations that its author supposedly held with learned men during a journey that took him, in his own words, “into the homelands of the Romans [i.e., the Byzantines], to Constantinople, the country of Amalfi,¹² some Frankish provinces, and Rome” (§ 3). Those eminent people that Paul was able to meet, thanks to his status as bishop, told him, “When we heard that a man whose name was Muḥammad had appeared among the Arabs saying that he was God’s messenger and that he brought a book, mentioning that it was sent down to him from God, may He be exalted, we set about procuring [a copy of] the book for ourselves” (§ 4). The *Letter* then proceeds to recount the questions that Paul asked his learned interlocutors and the replies he obtained from them. Furthermore, the Bishop of Sidon is careful to note that he has put these conversations in writing only at the request of his unnamed Muslim friend, who, after having heard of his journey, was eager to know what those people thought of Muḥammad and his religion.¹³

12 That is, the once independent Duchy of Amalfi, on the Gulf of Salerno, which was incorporated into the Kingdom of Sicily in 1131.

13 There has been some debate on the historical verisimilitude of this journey. Paul Khoury (*Paul d'Antioche*, 13–18), who suggested the period 1140–1180 as the *floruit* of Paul of Antioch, thought that the itinerary was plausible for the period and even proposed several possible occasions, including the Third Lateran Council, which met in March 1179. Of the same opinion was Joseph Nasrallah (*Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'Église melchite du Ve au XX^e siècle*, vol. 3-1 [Louvain: Peeters, 1983], 257–258), for whom the journey should definitively not be considered a historical fiction. Without denying the possibility of such a journey, David Thomas is skeptical about accepting as real people the

The second element present in al-Qarāfi's words that points to Paul's *Letter* is his description of it as containing "an argumentation for the truth of the Christian doctrine from the Noble Qur'ān." As was noted above, even if the *Letter* also contains biblical proofs of the Trinity and some rational arguments for the truth of Christianity, its most striking characteristic is undoubtedly the use of quotations from the Qur'ān to argue in favor of Christianity.¹⁴ It is precisely this aspect that appears to have caught al-Qarāfi's attention and to which he directs his first critical remark: "I found that the transmitted text was confusing to him and that the logical premises of the intellect had grown dark in him, since both our Sublime Book and their scriptures indicate the truth of our doctrine and the invalidation of theirs."

3 Structure and Contents: A General Overview

Describing the content of the first chapter of the *Ajwiba* in the preamble of his work, al-Qarāfi points out again that the main issue of contention between him and the author of the Christian letter concerns the interpretation of the Qur'ān, promising to provide a point-by-point explanation of "what is obscure to him in the Noble Qur'ān." Al-Qarāfi's response to the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* will be analyzed in some detail in chapter three of this book. For now, it suffices to note that only two of the fifteen points into which al-Qarāfi (or his source) breaks down the contents of the Christian missive are not

experts whom Paul claims to have encountered: "The existence of European Christian scholars who knew the text of the Qur'ān in its original Arabic so well that they could not only quote it but also introduce subtle changes seems far-fetched" ("Paul of Antioch's *Letter*," 205). This difficulty decreases if we suppose, with Griffith, that the people Paul would have met during his journey were not primarily Latins, but Orthodox churchmen and theologians in contact with the Melkites in Islamic lands (*The Orthodox Church in the Arab World*, 218). In any case, whether real or fictitious, it is clear that the journey motif plays a literary role in Paul's work. It creates a protective barrier by ascribing what in all likelihood are his interpretations of the Qur'ān to these learned persons living in distant lands.

- 14 In this, Paul of Antioch stands fully in continuity with the Melkite apologetic tradition. In effect, more than their counterparts in the other ecclesial communities who lived in the world of Islam, the Melkites had been willing to engage with the Qur'ān for apologetics purposes, using quotations thereof as proof texts for the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation and other Christian beliefs and practices. See Sidney H. Griffith, "The Melkites and the Muslims: The Qur'ān, Christology, and Arab Orthodoxy," *Al-Qanṭara* 33 (2012), 426–437.

directly related to or do not involve interpretation of qur'ānic passages.¹⁵ It also bears noting that al-Qarāfi's reaction to Paul's use of the Qur'ān is always a matter of interpretation of the revealed text, and never about lack of precision in quoting the Muslim scripture. Al-Qarāfi is not bothered by certain adaptations or even subtle manipulations that Paul had made in order to press home some of his arguments.¹⁶ In addition to offering Islam-acceptable alternative readings of the qur'ānic passages quoted by Paul, al-Qarāfi devotes a long section in the first chapter to delegitimizing Christian recourse to the Bible to defend Christian doctrine by upholding a strong view of the textual corruption of both the Torah and the Gospel, on which more will be said later. Finally, the first chapter of the *Ajwiba* also deals with the rational arguments contained in Paul's *Letter* in favor of the philosophical and theological reasonableness of the main Christian dogmas.

Christian attacks on the integrity of the Qur'ān also appear among the objections that al-Qarāfi addresses in chapter two. We have seen above that he is careful to note that these are not the questions of the Christian letter to which he responds in the previous chapter. As a matter of fact, generally speaking, this second set of questions is much more pointed and aggressive than Paul of Antioch's polite, even though potentially disturbing, interpretations of the Qur'ān. They include, for instance, the charge that the Muslim scripture contains factual errors, that Muslims themselves are not sure about the Qur'ān which they have now, for their own traditions acknowledge that Muḥammad's companions disagreed concerning the revealed text, a text which has been transmitted moreover in several different readings. This second group of questions does not seem to come from any single source, but has been collected by al-Qarāfi from several sources available to him, to be discussed below.

Whereas the first two chapters of the *Ajwiba* are essentially devoted to answering the arguments of Christian (and, to a lesser extent, Jewish) opponents, in the third chapter al-Qarāfi switches from defensive to offensive mode, offering now his own counter-objection in the form of a long battery of questions which he claims to have presented to both groups and to which they found it difficult to respond. We should observe at this stage that the term *as'ila* (sing. *su'āl*), which literally means 'questions' and which figures so prominently in al-Qarāfi's work (including its title), must be understood in the

15 See the translation of the fifteen points and the references to the corresponding paragraphs in the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* in Appendix B.

16 It has been proposed that the anonymous Cypriot editor of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, aware of Muslim 'sensibilities,' might have been responsible for giving a more accurate rendition of the qur'ānic texts quoted in the *Letter*. See Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic*, 8–10.

broad sense of a claim or argument which is put forward as a challenge to the opponent to answer. Although these arguments are at times presented in the form of a direct question, this is not necessarily always the case. The one hundred and seven questions that al-Qarāfi presents in chapter three are wide-ranging in content, dealing with many different areas of Christian belief and practice, such as Jesus' ontological status, the doctrine of sin and redemption, the anthropomorphic language of God, the attribution of morally unacceptable behavior to prophets in the Bible, Christian cultic practices not based on divine mandates, etc. One of the most striking characteristics of this chapter is the wealth of references to Christian texts and practices contained therein, material which al-Qarāfi has harvested from the polemical works of other Muslim authors, as will be shown.

Finally, al-Qarāfi announces in the preamble that in chapter four he will present the reader with a selection of texts drawn from "their scriptures," that is, the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, that confirm the truth of Islam and the prophetic office of Muḥammad. Al-Qarāfi describes this exercise of biblical exegesis as a "correct inference" (*istidlāl ṣaḥīḥ*), which opposes the Christians' "false inference" (*istidlāl bāṭil*), that is, their inferring the truth of Christianity from the Qur'ān. In this last chapter, which collects a total of fifty-one biblical predictions of Muḥammad and of the rise of Islam, al-Qarāfi shows himself once again dependent on the work of previous Muslim writers who had begun to compile biblical *testimonia* of Muḥammad from an early age. Before exploring the question of the written sources, a word needs to be said concerning al-Qarāfi's purpose in writing the *Ajwiba* and his target audience.

4 A Handbook for Polemics

In the preamble to the *Ajwiba*, translated above, al-Qarāfi clearly indicates that he intends to write a sort of handbook or manual of anti-Christian and anti-Jewish polemics, "so that whoever comes across this book will be thoroughly acquainted with all that the People of the Book ask about and the true and indisputable replies to it." The *Ajwiba* is manifestly written for a Muslim readership, and Christians and Jews are referred to, for the most part, in the third person. There is a long Muslim tradition in which polemical writing against other faiths has often served as a means to defend the soundness of Islamic belief in general or even to promote a particular view of Islamic orthodoxy.¹⁷

17 This internal, educational, and apologetic aim of the Muslim anti-Christian polemical tradition has been emphasized by David Thomas, who gives several examples of what he describes as "polemical argument in the service of theological exposition rather than

A most obvious example of the latter is precisely Ibn Taymiyya's response to the Cypriot reworking of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, which was written first and foremost as a warning against tendencies within the Islamic community of his time which, in the eyes of this Ḥanbalī scholar, were leading his co-religionists to the same type of religious decadence in which Christians had fallen, or even worse. As has been remarked, much space is given in Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ* to denouncing the pantheistic teachings of speculative Sufis, incarnational and esoteric aspects of Shī'ī Imamism, as well as popular practices of tomb veneration and saint intercession and other Islamic phenomena which, according to him, paralleled the errors of corrupted Christianity.¹⁸ Thus, his attack on Christianity is aimed in reality at fellow Muslims and is meant as a demonstration of the errors that result from deserting the plain meanings of scripture and replacing them with human speculation. This is clearly not the case with al-Qarāfī who, not even once, expresses criticism of his co-religionists. His principal motive for writing the *Ajwiba* was to buttress the self-assurance of Muslims in the face of both military threat and cultural-theological challenge by supplying them with an impressive array of information concerning the issues that Christians and Jews were bringing up against Islam, as well as the appropriate responses to them. This, al-Qarāfī appears to have thought, was neither the time nor the place to criticize the errors or deviant behavior of fellow Muslims, but rather to strengthen their confidence of being, as the Qur'ān proclaims, the best community singled out for people,¹⁹ firmly established on the right path and, hence, not likely to be abandoned by God into the hands of a godless enemy.

(though not necessarily in contradiction to) devaluation of rival religions" (D. Thomas, "Dialogue with Other Faiths as an Aspect of Islamic Theology," in *Religious Polemic in Context*, ed. T.L. Hettema and A. van der Kooij (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), 98. See also, by the same author, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 5–14; and idem, "Christianity in Islamic Theology: The Case of al-Juwaynī," in *Mission in Dialogue: Essays in Honour of Michael L. Fitzgerald*, ed. C. Belo and J.-J. Pérennès (Louvain: Peeters, 2012), 211–221.

18 See Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 99–103; Thomas, "Christian-Muslim Misunderstanding," 21–23. Paul Heck offers an insightful discussion of Ibn Taymiyya's critique of Christianity in chapter 4 of his work, *Skepticism in Classical Islam: Moments of Confusion* (London: Routledge, 2014), 152–192.

19 Q 3:110, quoted in *Ajwiba*, 281 (167) and 382 (235).

5 Written Sources

5.1 *Paul of Antioch's* Risāla ilā baʿḍ aṣḍiqāʾihi alladhīna bi-ṣaydā min al-muslimīn

Much has already been said in the preceding pages about this work which prompted al-Qarāfi to write the *Ajwiba*. It is nonetheless convenient to recapitulate here what we know about it and about its author, whom the later Melkite tradition will remember as “Saint Paul, Bishop of Sidon.”²⁰ We have little firm historical information about him and scholars are not even unanimously agreed on when he might have lived. From his writings, we know that he was a Melkite, native to Antioch, who embraced the monastic life and later became Bishop of Sidon (in today’s Lebanon). But when did this happen? And when did he write his famous *Letter to a Muslim Friend*?²¹

The only thing we can say with certainty is that this work was written sometime between 1027 and 1232. The first date is that of the death of al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī l-Maghribī, the vizier with whom the metropolitan of the Church of the East, Elias of Nisibis (Iliyyā ibn Shīnā, d. 1046), held several debates, of whose written account Paul has borrowed some arguments.²² As for 1232, it

20 See the reference to the work *Akhbār al-qiddīsīn allādhīna kharajū min bilādīnā* by the Patriarch of Antioch, Makarios III Za’īm (d. 1672), in Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 257, n. 102.

21 For a detailed study of the manuscript tradition of the writings attributed to the Bishop of Sidon, see Khoury, *Paul d’Antioche*, 19–44, who concludes that only five of the twenty-four treatises attributed to him can be considered authentic beyond any doubt. They are explicitly attributed to Paul by the most ancient witnesses so that they already constitute a corpus by the thirteenth century. Other scholars, however, have raised questions regarding Khoury’s doubts about the authenticity of some treatises. In this regard, see Khalil Samir’s remarks in Robert Caspar et al., “Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien: les auteurs et les œuvres des XI^{ème} et XII^{ème} siècles,” *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976), 232; and Herman G.B. Teule, “Paul of Antioch’s Attitude towards the Jews and the Muslims: His Letter to the Nations and the Jews,” in *The Three Rings: Textual Studies in the Historical Dialogue of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. B. Roggema et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 96–97.

22 Compare §§ 49–63 of Paul’s *Letter* with Khalil Samir, “Entretien d’Élie de Nisibe avec le Vizir Ibn ‘Alī al-Maghribī, sur l’Unité et la Trinité,” *Islamochristiana* 5 (1979), 100–107 (Arabic and French trans.). See also Jean-Marie Gaudeul, *Encounters and Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistica, 2000), 2:133–134 (English trans. of Elias’ text). The paragraphs in question are a defense of the anthropomorphic language that Christians use about God, terms such as ‘Father’ and ‘Son.’ This borrowing from Elias of Nisibis by Paul explains why the Qur’ān, which is never referred to other than as “the Book” in the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, is suddenly mentioned by name in § 51.

corresponds to the earliest known copy of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, which was completed in Damascus on March 23 of that year, a manuscript which eventually made its way to Egypt.²³ It was mentioned earlier that Khoury proposed 1140–1180 as the period of Paul's *floruit*.²⁴ Some years later, Nasrallah argued convincingly against considering 1180 the *terminus ad quem* for Paul's literary activity and placed the composition of the *Letter* at the turn of the thirteenth century.²⁵ On the basis of the previous discussions, and noting that al-Qarāfi had responded to Paul's *Letter*, Thomas thought it reasonable to assume a date of composition around the year 1200, remarking that "it is likely that the *Letter* with all its provocative claims would not have lain unnoticed by Muslims for very long after it was written."²⁶ More recently, Herman Teule has reopened the debate, calling attention to the fact that Paul mentions both Rome and Constantinople in the itinerary of his journey, "which might be an indication that he lived in the second half of the eleventh century or the beginning of the twelfth, when the clergy and theologians in the Patriarchate of Antioch had not yet clearly defined their position in the conflict which opposed Rome and Constantinople."²⁷ Teule's arguments are not convincing for Griffith who, on similar grounds as those of Thomas, argues that it is reasonable to think that

23 Khalil Samir, "Notes sur la 'Lettre à un musulman de Sidon' de Paul d'Antioche," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 24 (1993), 180–190.

24 Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, 13–18. Most scholars writing before Khoury tended to situate Paul's activity towards the turn of the fourteenth century because, not aware of the Cypriot reworking of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, they thought that Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) had responded directly to Paul of Antioch. One notable exception was Louis Massignon, who located him in the twelfth century, suggesting that the *Letter* might have been dedicated to the Kurdish Emir of Bidlis, Fakhr al-Dīn ibn Tughān, on the occasion of his marriage with an Artuqid princess ("Le signe marial," *Rythmes du monde* 3 [1948], 12; see also, by the same author, "L'hôte est l'hôte de Dieu, surtout dans la fraction du pain," in *Opera minora*, ed. Y. Moubarac [Beirut: Dar al-Maaref, 1963], 3:834, where Massignon gives the date of 1130, but without explanation). Another exception was Claude Cahen, who was inclined to situate Paul of Antioch in the eleventh century, when a visit of a Melkite bishop to Amalfi seemed more plausible to him (Cl. Cahen, *Orient et Occident au temps des Croisades* [Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1983], 272, n. 24).

25 Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 259.

26 Thomas, "Paul of Antioch's *Letter*," 204.

27 Teule, "Paul of Antioch," 95. Another reason to push Paul's presence in Sidon back to the period before the first Crusader occupation of this city (1110–1187) is the general crusader policy of not maintaining Melkite bishops in office. Teule acknowledges, however, that this argument does not exclude the intermittent presence of Crusaders in Sidon between 1197 and 1291, when the Latin bishops did not seem to have resided in the city. For a brief yet thorough account of the Latin presence in Sidon, see Denys Pringle, *The Churches of*

Paul flourished in the first half of the thirteenth century.²⁸ I am also inclined to situate the composition of Paul's *Letter* toward the beginning of the thirteenth century, especially if we bear in mind that the *Letter* also came to the attention of the Coptic scholar, al-Ṣaḡī ibn al-ʿAssāl, who used it sometime between 1238 and 1243 in composing his *al-Ṣaḡāʾih fī jawāb al-naṣāʾih* ('Truths in Response to Advices'), a reply to an earlier Muslim refutation of Christianity by ʿAlī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. c. 860), in the ninth century.²⁹ Although al-Ṣaḡī does not mention Paul by name, he indirectly acknowledges the borrowed character of the qurʾānic arguments in favor of Christianity, which he lists in the fourth chapter of the *Ṣaḡāʾih*, when he writes, replying to one of ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī's points:

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 Ḥijāz. For instance, his saying. . .'³⁰

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that these Christian kings are the same individuals that the Melkite Bishop of Sidon supposedly encountered during his journey: "the most important people of those regions, their leaders, and . . . their most eminent and learned men" (§ 3), who, upon hearing of the appearance of the Arab prophet and securing a copy of his book, found in it

the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus, vol. 2, L-Z (excluding Tyre) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 317–329.

- 28 Griffith, "Paul of Antioch," in *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World*, 217–218. For the possibility of dating Paul of Antioch's activity in Sidon to around 1200, see also Johannes Pahlitzsch and Dorothea Weltecke, "Konflikte zwischen den nicht-lateinischen Kirchen im Königreich Jerusalem," in *Jerusalem im Hoch- und Spätmittelalter: Konflikte und Konfliktbewältigung—Vorstellungen und Vergegenwärtigungen*, ed. D. Bauer et al. (Frankfurt: Campus, 2001), 132–135.
- 29 On al-Ṣaḡī's work and its date of composition, see Awad, "Al-Ṣaḡī ibn al-ʿAssāl," in *CMR* 4, 542–544; and Khalil Samir, "La réponse d'Al-Ṣaḡī ibn al-ʿAssāl à la réfutation des chrétiens de ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī," *Parole de l'Orient* 11 (1983): 281–328. Al-Ṣaḡī's use of Paul's *Letter* was noticed by Gaudeul in *Encounters and Clashes*, 1:130. That al-Ṣaḡī felt the need to reply to a refutation of Christianity written by a Nestorian convert to Islam about three hundred years earlier is telling evidence of the long popularity of this type of literature and of the tense relationships between the two communities in Cairo during the thirteenth century.
- 30 Arabic text in Samir, "La réponse d'Al-Ṣaḡī," 313.

several reasons for not accepting Islam, exactly the same passages that al-Ṣaḥī lists.³¹

To sum up: although it is not impossible that Paul of Antioch could have lived in an earlier period and that his *Letter* remained unnoticed for a long time, the fact that it was copied in Damascus in 1232, that al-Ṣaḥī ibn al-ʿAssāl made use of it shortly after 1238, that al-Qarāfi replied to it in the third quarter of the thirteenth century, and that an extended version of it was produced in Cyprus some decades later and was sent to two Muslim personalities in Damascus, makes it reasonable to surmise that the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* was composed not long before 1232, perhaps within the first two decades of that century. It must be borne in mind, however, that this is not definitive evidence, but only an assumption to explain the otherwise sudden outburst of attention to the *Letter* in the thirteenth century.

With regard to Paul's own sources in composing his *Letter*, it has already been said that he made direct use of the *Kitāb al-majālis* ('Book of Sessions') of Elias of Nisibis, one of the most significant Arab Christian writers of all time in terms of literary output and influence.³² This work presents itself as Elias's account of his debates with the Muslim vizier and littérateur, al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī l-Maghribī, the last of a well-known family of court officials who served under different dynasties. The sessions were held in Nisibis (today Nusaybin, in Turkey), when al-Ḥusayn, then at the service of the Marwānid ruler, Naṣr al-Dawla ibn Aḥmad, passed through the city, possibly in the year 1026. A comparison of the issues that were discussed by the metropolitan and the vizier and the contents of Paul's *Letter* and al-Qarāfi's replies illustrates how much the same questions continued to be debated between the two sides in what one is tempted to describe as a dialogue of the deaf. As we explore in the coming chapters the contents of the *Ajwiba*, it will be shown that, however much Christian and Muslim thinkers were playing off one another in formulating

31 It is this dependency of *al-Ṣaḥīh fī jawāb al-naṣāʾih* on the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* that presumably misled Khalil Samir into thinking that al-Qarāfi was responding to this text of al-Ṣaḥī ibn al-ʿAssāl (Samir, "La réponse d'Al-Ṣaḥī," 303–304).

32 The literature on this author, which is vast, is conveniently presented in Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala "Elias of Nisibis," in *CMR2*, 727–741. For Elias's views on Islam, see principally Khalil Samir, *Foi et culture en Irak au XI^e siècle: Elie de Nisibe et l'Islam* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996). Paul of Antioch also borrows from Elias in his *Exposition to the Nations and the Jews*, as remarked by Samir in "Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien," 232–233. On the *Kitāb al-majālis*, see Emmanuel-Karim Delly, *La théologie d'Élie de Nisibe: étude et traduction de ses Entretiens* (Rome: Pontificiam Universitatem urbanianam de propaganda fide, 1957), and S. Khalil Samir, "Iliyyā al-Naṣībīnī (975–1046) wa-l-wazīr Abū l-Qāsim al-Maghribī (981–1028)," *Al-Machriq* 25 (2002): 443–458.

their own religious thinking, they were starting, ultimately, from completely different points of departure, leading them, more often than not, to speak past one another.

The contents of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* have been analyzed by several scholars. It will suffice here to recall briefly the structure of the *Letter* and its principal claims:

- i. Introduction: Paul's journey and his encounter with Christian notables (§§ 1–5)
- ii. Islam: a religion for the Arabs (§§ 6–7)
- iii. The Qur'ān confirms Christianity:
 - The Messiah and his mother (§§ 8–10)
 - Christian cult (§ 11)
 - Partial conclusion: We must hold on to our religion (§ 12)
 - The Apostles (§ 13)
 - The Christian scriptures (§§ 14–18)
 - We are neither like the Jews nor polytheists (§§ 19–23)
 - Eucharistic sacrifice (§ 23)
 - Partial conclusion: God will not blame us for not following a messenger who was not sent to us (§ 24)
- iv. Muslims misunderstand our dogmas:
 - The Trinity (§§ 25–32)
 - The Incarnation and the hypostatic union (§§ 33–40)
 - Only one God (§§ 41–44)
- v. The Qur'ān gives witness in our favor (§§ 45–48)
- vi. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: neither polytheism nor anthropomorphism (§§ 49–54)
- vii. God is a substance (§§ 55–58)
- viii. The final character of Christian revelation (§§ 59–63)
- ix. Conclusion (§ 64)

A full analysis of Paul of Antioch's views on Islam would require not only looking into the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, but also into some of his other writings that were composed as replies to alleged inquiries by Muslims or that were clearly written with Muslim objections to Christianity in mind.³³ Such a study is beyond the scope of the present work, especially given the fact that al-Qarāfi seems only aware of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, and possibly only

33 See Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, 59–61; Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 260; and Teule, "Paul of Antioch," 97–99.

an abridged version of it. We turn now to the four main Muslim sources from which al-Qarāfi derives most of the material collected in chapters two, three, and four of the *Ajwiba*.

5.2 *Al-Ja'farī's Takhjīl man ḥarrafa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Injīl*

Al-Qarāfi's most important single source is undoubtedly the *Takhjīl man ḥarrafa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Injīl* ('The Shaming of Those Who Have Altered the Torah and the Gospel'), written by his younger contemporary, the Egyptian, Ṣāliḥ ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ja'farī (d. 668/1270).³⁴ In all fairness, if Erdmann Fritsch was able to hail the *Ajwiba* as, to his knowledge, the greatest apologetic achievement in Islam, it is to a great extent thanks to the material and arguments that al-Qarāfi takes from the *Takhjīl*, the importance of which Western scholarship is only beginning to acknowledge.³⁵

Not much is known about Abū l-Baqā' Taqī l-Dīn Ṣāliḥ ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Ṭalḥa ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Hāshimī al-Ja'farī al-Zaynabī. The last two names indicate that he traced his descent from the family of the prophet Muḥammad.³⁶ Al-Ja'farī was born in 581/1185, forty five years before al-Qarāfi, when Saladin still reigned as Sultan of Egypt, and died in Cairo on the first of Dhū l-Qa'da 668/22 June 1270, at the advanced age of eighty-seven. His earliest biographer, al-Yūnīnī (d. 726/1326), describes him as an eminent person, knowledgeable in *belles lettres* and other subjects, and a leader remembered for his refinement and nobility.³⁷ We learn from al-Dhahabī that al-Ja'farī studied under the *ḥadīth* expert, 'Alī ibn al-Bannā' (d. 622/1225), and that he himself transmitted *ḥadīth* to 'Abd al-Mu'min ibn Khalaf al-Dimyāṭī (d. 705/1306). He also mentions that al-Ja'farī was the author of sermons, works of poetry and prose, and several books.³⁸ Al-Ja'farī served

34 The *Takhjīl* was first edited by Maḥmūd ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Qadaḥ, 2 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-'Ubaykān, 1998). There is a more recent edition by Khālid Muḥammad 'Abduh (Giza, Egypt: Maktabat al-Nāfidha, 2006). All references hereafter to the *Takhjīl* will be from Qadaḥ's edition.

35 Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 22.

36 Al-Ja'farī goes back to Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib, the cousin of Muḥammad and brother of 'Alī, the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph. As for al-Zaynabī, it refers to the descendants of 'Alī ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib, whose mother was Zaynab al-Kubrā, daughter of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭima, and granddaughter of Muḥammad.

37 Mūsā ibn Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl mir'āt al-zamān* (Haydarābād: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1954–1961), 2:438.

38 Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-a'lām: ḥawādith wa-wafayāt*, 661–670 H, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmuri (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabi, 1999), 262.

as judge in the city of Qūṣ in Upper Egypt, which was then, according to the traveler and scholar, Yāqūt (d. 626/1229), the third city of Egypt, after Cairo and Alexandria.³⁹ Apparently, al-Jaʿfarī also served as governor of the same city at a different period of his life, an appointment of which some of his biographers speak in less favorable terms.⁴⁰ From his writings, it is evident that he was Ashʿarī in his theological persuasion. As for his legal doctrine, we can presume that he was a Shāfiʿī, the school favored by the Ayyūbids upon their coming to power in Egypt and up to the time of Baybars's reforms of the judiciary system in the 1260s. Three books written by al-Jaʿfarī are known, of which the second and the third are later abridgements of the first and most important one, the *Takhjīl*. The other two are entitled *Kitāb al-ʿashr al-masāʾil al-musammā bayān al-wādiḥ al-mashhūd min faḍāʾih al-Naṣārā wa-l-Yahūd* ('The Book of the Ten Questions, or Exposition of the Clear and Attested Ignominies of the Christians and the Jews'), and *al-Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā* ('Refutation of the Christians').⁴¹

The introduction to the *Bayān* provides some information concerning the circumstances of its composition and its relation with al-Jaʿfarī's previous book. In the year 618/1221, the "tyrant of the Romans" (*ṭaghīyat al-Rūm*) sent a series of questions to the Ayyūbid Sultan, al-Malik al-Kāmil, demanding a response.⁴²

39 See "Kūṣ," in *EI2* (Jean-Claude Garcin). In addition to being an important center for sugar production, the prosperity of this city was due to its strategic situation, which made it an important staging-post on the major trade-route with Yemen. The city had a Christian majority until the middle of the twelfth century. The first Sunnī madrasa of Qūṣ was founded in 1210, after which the city became a center for the propagation of Sunnism in Upper Egypt.

40 Al-Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, 16:148–149.

41 The *Bayān* has been edited recently by Amal bint Mabrūk ibn Nāhis al-Luhībī (PhD diss., Umm al-Qurā University, 2011). References hereafter will be to this edition of *Bayān*. See also a partial edition and Latin translation by Francis Triebs in his inaugural dissertation at the University of Bonn: *Liber decem quaestionum contra Christianos* (Bonn: Typis Caroli Drobnig, 1897). The *Radd* was edited by Muḥammad Muḥammad Ḥasanayn (Doha: Maktabat al-Madāris; Cairo: Maktaba Wahba, 1988). In addition to al-Jaʿfarī's own abridgments, there is also an epitome of the *Takhjīl* written in 1536 by Abū l-Faḍl al-Mālikī al-Suʿūdī, entitled *al-Muntakhab al-jalīl min Takhjīl man ḥarrafa al-Injīl* ('A Splendid Selection from the Shaming of Those Who Have Altered the Gospel'), an early edition of which was prepared by Frederik J. van den Ham, *Disputatio pro religione Mohammedanorum adversus Christianos: textum arabicum e codice Leidensi cum varr. lect.* (Leiden: Brill, 1890). There is a more recent edition by Ramaḍān al-Ṣafanāwī al-Badrī and Muṣṭafā al-Zuhbī (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1997). On the author of this epitome, see "Al-Suʿūdī," in *EI2* (Cornelis van Arendonk).

42 Triebs simply assumed that the Christian ruler referred to by al-Jaʿfarī had to be the Byzantine Emperor of the time, Theodore I Laskaris, resident at Nicaea after the Crusaders'

Al-Ja'farī describes these questions as “useless and devoid of benefit, resembling the trifles of women and children more than anything else.”⁴³ The Sultan nevertheless requested him to prepare a response exposing the falsity of the Christian doctrine. He indicated that writing such a work was an act of defense of the religion and a contribution to the struggle to subdue the ungodly, and then recited *sūrat al-ʿankabūt* (29):69, “But We shall be sure to guide to Our ways those who strive hard for Our cause: God is with those who do good.” To comply with al-Kāmil’s request, al-Ja'farī says, he turned to his book *Takhjīl man ḥarrafa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Injīl*, which he had composed in the days of youth and intellectual vigor, structuring the new book around ten questions, each of which summarized a chapter from the *Takhjīl*.

capture of Constantinople in 1204. He further suggested that the word “al-abtar,” a derogatory epithet for a married man with no male heirs, which follows the mention of the “tyrant of the Romans” in the manuscript he was working with (MS Lodon, British Library Add 16661), should perhaps be read as “al-ashkarī,” i.e., Laskaris (see Triebs, *Liber*, iii). This hypothesis has been generally accepted in Western scholarship, even though Theodore’s initiative is not mentioned by any other historical source (see Clément Huart, *Littérature arabe* [Paris: Armand Colin, 1902], 267; Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 17; Tolan, *Saint Francis*, 6; and, most recently, Lejla Demiri, “Al-Ja'farī,” in *CMR4*, 484). However, it is more likely that the “tyrant of the Romans” in question was not the exiled Byzantine Emperor, but the already mentioned Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, who held the title of King of the Romans since 1212 and was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Rome on 22 November 1220. Unlike Theodore, Frederick is known to have corresponded with al-Kāmil, and Muslim writers, including al-Qarāfi in his treatise on optics, set out to answer Frederick’s scientific and philosophical challenges. Furthermore, another manuscript (MS Dublin, Chester Beatty Library 4602) has “al-anbarūr,” the emperor, in place of “al-abtar” (see *Bayān*, 102, n. 4), which supports the likelihood that the ruler who wrote to al-Kāmil was the Latin Roman Emperor and not his Greek counterpart. A final piece of evidence is that the same questions that al-Ja'farī mentions in the introduction to the *Bayān* are ascribed to “the Franks” in the *Takhjīl*’s second abridgment (see *Radd*, 56). On the title “anbarūr” in connection with Frederick II in Arabic historical works, see Hans L. Gottschalk, “Al-anbaratūr/Imperator,” *Der Islam* 33, nos. 1–2 (1957): 30–36.

- 43 According to him, one had to do with the visions that the sleeping person sees while dreaming, and another with whether a child is created from the man’s discharge or from the woman’s discharge (see *Bayān*, 102). These are suspiciously close to some of the questions that, according to Muslim tradition, the Jews of Medina asked Muḥammad to test the authenticity of his prophetic claim. See Ibn Ishāq (recension of Ibn Hishām), *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1990), 2:184–185; trans. Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishāq’s Sīrat rasūl Allāh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 255.

Thus, writing shortly after 618/1221, when al-Ja'farī was about thirty-seven years old, he refers to the *Takhjīl* as a work of youth. This information allows us to push back its composition to at least a decade earlier, that is, sometime around 1210, if not earlier. In the introduction to the *Bayān*, al-Ja'farī also attests to the popularity of his first book among the scholars of Fustāt, in Cairo, who had found much pleasure in the *Takhjīl* and readily referred to it for refuting Christians. Indeed, the *Takhjīl* appears to have become a bestseller among the Muslim population of Cairo where, if we are to believe al-Ja'farī, there were many eager to engage in debate with Christians and Jews: "The book brought something uncommon in its art, the ultimate in its genre. And no sooner had rulers and ruled alike heard of it, than they obtained a copy of it, and, by means of it, realized their long-sought desire to debate with the People of the Book."⁴⁴

We find a confirmation of al-Ja'farī's testimony about the popularity of the *Takhjīl* in the fact that the Coptic Patriarch Cyril III ibn Laqlaq (r. 1235–1243) requested al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl to write a refutation of it, which the latter did, entitling it: *Nahj al-sabīl fī jawāb takhjīl muḥarrifī l-Injīl* ('The Procedure Along the Way in Response to the Shaming of Those Who Alter the Gospel').⁴⁵ In the introduction, al-Ṣafī explains that someone had sent him a copy of the *Takhjīl* and asked him to respond to it. He studied the book and realized that its author had based himself on the *Kitāb al-naṣā'ih*, that is, 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī's refutation of Christianity, to which al-Ṣafī had already replied, as it will be recalled, with his *al-Ṣaḥā'ih fī jawāb al-naṣā'ih*, and thus he thought it unnecessary to write another rebuttal. A few months later, however, the Patriarch's request had reached him. When told about al-Ṣafī's previous book, the Patriarch decided that, nevertheless, he should add a brief response to those arguments in the *Takhjīl* which were not found in 'Alī l-Ṭabarī.⁴⁶ In a later passage, al-Ṣafī writes that it has reached his notice that the author of the *Takhjīl* was chief judge of a province (*qāḍī quḍāt iqlīm*) and that he became a book-dealer (*warrāq*).⁴⁷ Al-Ṣafī also mentions an unnamed table companion of the Sultan, who made an abridgment of the *Takhjīl*, adding that he does not know these people personally and is not sure about the information. At any event, he considers it unlikely that the power of the truth of the Christian

44 Al-Ja'farī, *Bayān*, 110.

45 Arabic text published by Murqus Jirjis, *Kitāb nahj al-sabīl fī takhjīl muḥarrifī l-Injīl*, by al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl, Cairo: Maṭba'at 'Ayn Shams, Year 1643 of the Martyrs [1926/1927]. See also Awad, "Towards a New Edition of al-Ṣafī Ibn al-'Assāl's Apologetic Works," 231.

46 Al-Ṣafī, *Nahj al-sabīl*, 3–4.

47 Al-Ṣafī, *Nahj al-sabīl*, 45.

doctrine will impact on those whose intention is to oppose it stubbornly and who wish its destruction.⁴⁸

If true, al-Ṣaḥī's information to the effect that al-Ja'farī was a book-dealer, in addition to being a legal scholar, would go a long way to explaining his manifest erudition and the extraordinary wealth of sources, Muslim and Christian, that he collected for the purpose of writing his first book. Fortunately for us, al-Ja'farī provides a detailed account of them in the introduction to the *Takhjīl*. The passage is important for our purpose, since these sources are also, albeit indirectly, the sources of the *Ajwiba*:

The author said: *Kitāb takhjīl man ḥarrafa al-Injīl* contains the refutation of the Christians and the Jews from the books which they have, such as the Torah of Moses (the five books), the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), the Psalms of David, the Prophecies of Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Habakkuk, and Daniel; the Letters of Paul the Apostle; the Book of Kings, and the Acts of the Apostles.

The author—may God forgive him—said: I became acquainted with many of their works and compositions in defense of their religion, the proofs they adduce for their captious arguments, the refutations that each of their three sects (Melkites, Nestorians and Jacobites) wrote of one another, and their apologies for their doctrines. I also read a number of refutations of the Christians written by our fellow Muslims, such as the book of al-Ruhāwī,⁴⁹ the book of 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ,⁵⁰ the book of

48 It is very possible that this unnamed person who sits at the royal table and who made an abridgment of the *Takhjīl* is al-Ja'farī himself, who, as mentioned above, composed the *Bayān* at the direct request of al-Kāmil. Moreover, al-Ja'farī also served as governor of Qūṣ, a position which the Sultan would entrust to someone within his circle of confidence. It has been suggested that the author of this summary of the *Takhjīl* could be al-Qarāfi himself (see *CMR4*, 548). But this is unlikely, given the fact that al-Ṣaḥī wrote his reply at the request of Patriarch Cyril II, who died in March 1243, when al-Qarāfi was about fifteen years old.

49 *Radd al-Naṣārā* ('Refutation of the Christians'), by 'Abd al-Qādir ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ruhāwī (d. 612/1215). See David Thomas, "Al-Ruhāwī," in *CMR4*, 157–158.

50 *Al-Radd 'alā l-Naṣārā* ('Refutation of the Christians'), by 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869). See note 60 to chapter 1.

‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Mu‘tazilī,⁵¹ the treatise of Abū Bakr,⁵² the Kalām of al-Juwāynī,⁵³ a book by one of the people from the West,⁵⁴ the book of Ibn al-Ṭayyib,⁵⁵ the book of al-Ṭurṭūshī,⁵⁶ a book by Ibn ‘Awf,⁵⁷ the book of al-Dimyāṭī,⁵⁸ and a book by one of our contemporaries.⁵⁹ Then, from among the ancients, I studied part of a book by Ibn Rabban.⁶⁰ I hope that,

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- 51 Most probably the *Tathbūt dalāl al-nubūwa* ('The Confirmation of the Proofs of Prophethood'), by 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Asadābādī (d. 415/1025), ed. and trans. Gabriel S. Reynolds and S. Khalil Samir, *'Abd al-Jabbār: Critique of Christian Origins: A Parallel English-Arabic Text* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2010). However, al-Ja'farī could also be referring to chapter 5 of 'Abd al-Jabbār's *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-'adl* ('Summa on the Matters of Divine Unity and Divine Justice'), on which see Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 226–377.
- 52 *Kitāb al-tamhīd* ('The Introduction'), by Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013). See David Thomas, "Al-Bāqillānī," in *CMR2*, 446–450.
- 53 Al-Ja'farī is most probably referring to the *Kitāb al-shāmīl fī uṣūl al-dīn* ('The Complete Book on the Principles of Religion') of 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Juwāynī (d. 478/1085), which includes a long refutation of Christianity. On this work, which has not survived in full, see David Thomas, "Al-Juwāynī," in *CMR3*, 124–126.
- 54 The *Maqāmi* 'al-ṣulbān' ('Mallets for Crosses'), by Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Ṣamad al-Khazraǧī (d. 582/1187), on which more will be said below.
- 55 Perhaps the *Radd al-Naṣārā* ('Refutation of the Christians') of Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Sarakhsī (d. 286/899), mentioned by Steinschneider, *Polemische*, 142–144.
- 56 Perhaps the *Radd al-Naṣārā* ('Refutation of the Christians') of Muḥammad ibn al-Walīd al-Ṭurṭūshī (d. 520/1126), mentioned by Steinschneider, *Polemische*, 144–146. See also Maribel Fierro, "Al-Ṭurṭūshī," in *CMR3*, 387–396.
- 57 Most probably the *Radd 'alā l-mutanaṣṣir* ('Refutation of the Convert to Christianity') of Ismā'īl ibn Makki ibn Ismā'īl ibn 'Isā ibn 'Awf, known as Abū l-Ṭāhir ibn 'Awf (d. 581/1185), mentioned by Ibn Farḥūn (*al-Dibāj*, 157). Elsewhere in the *Takhjīl*, criticizing the Christians for passing judgments not resting on a revealed text, al-Ja'farī quotes Abū l-Ṭāhir ibn 'Awf to the effect that the juridical compendium of the Christians contains only five hundred and some questions, which are not taken from the Messiah (*Takhjīl*, 617), information which al-Qarāfi reproduces in *Ajwiba*, 586 (346).
- 58 *Radd al-Naṣārā* ('Refutation of the Christians'), by 'Abd al-Mu'min ibn Khalaf al-Dimyāṭī (d. 705/1306). See David Thomas "Al-Dimyāṭī," in *CMR4*, 695–696.
- 59 This could be the *I'lām* of Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn 'Umar al-Qurṭubī, who died in Alexandria in 1258 and was thus a contemporary of al-Ja'farī. This work, which is a direct source of al-Qarāfi, is discussed in this chapter, below.
- 60 On this author, see David Thomas, "Alī Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī: A Convert's Assessment of His Former Faith," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle*

God willing, this compendium will bring together what is scattered in them and supply what they omitted.⁶¹

As for the structure of the *Takhjīl*, the work is divided into ten chapters, whose topics, briefly presented by al-Jaʿfarī in the introduction,⁶² are as follows: (i) on the servanthship of the Messiah; (ii) on his office of prophet and messenger; (iii) on the interpretation of the literal meaning of expressions in the Gospel such as 'Father,' 'Son,' 'God,' and 'Lord,' and the Messiah's equality with other prophets and friends of God; (iv) on the falsification of the Gospel, as shown by the lies of the four gospels and their contradictions; (v) on the alleged crucifixion and death of the Messiah and God's protection of His prophet; (vi) responses to various questions raised by the Christians;⁶³ (vii) on the falseness of their claim concerning the union of the divinity with humanity; (viii) on the contradictions of the Creed;⁶⁴ (ix) on the ignominies of the Christians and the Jews, such as the tricks and ruses of priests and monks, the absurdities which they recite in their prayers,⁶⁵ and the fabrications of the

Agēs, ed. M. Tamcke (Beirut: Orient-Institut; Würzburg: Ergon, 2007), 137–156. See also note 29 to this chapter.

- 61 Al-Jaʿfarī, *Takhjīl*, MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye—Reisülkuttāb 6 (1239), fol. 2a, transcribed in Qadaḥ, *Takhjīl*, 62–64. In addition to these sources, al-Jaʿfarī quotes elsewhere (*Takhjīl*, 537) from al-Shahrastānī's (d. 548/1153) famous heresiographical work *Kitāb al-mīlāl wa-l-nihāl*. Other sources not acknowledged by al-Jaʿfarī, but which Qadaḥ (*Takhjīl*, 65) has been able to identify, are *al-Shifāʾ bi-taʾrīf ḥuqūq al-muṣṭafāʾ*, by al-Qāḍī ʿIyād (d. 544/1149), *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyāʾ*, by Abū Nuʿaym Aḥmad al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), and *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, by Abū l-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200). From these three works, al-Jaʿfarī derives the material on the miracles performed by Muḥammad and by his followers in the second part of the tenth and last chapter of the *Takhjīl*. See note 66 to this chapter.
- 62 *Takhjīl*, 106–110.
- 63 Incidentally, the title of this chapter—*al-Ajwiba al-mustaʿidda ʿan al-asʿila al-mulḥida* ('Ready Replies to Ungodly Questions')—might have inspired al-Qarāfī's *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira ʿan al-asʿila al-fājira*.
- 64 This is not, however, the creedal formula promulgated in 325 at the Council of Nicaea, as al-Jaʿfarī and his modern editors mistakenly assume (*Takhjīl*, 499; *Bayān*, 310), nor the formula conventionally known as the Nicene (or Niceno-Constantinopolitan) Creed composed in 381 at the First Council of Constantinople, but rather a Syrian creed used by the Church of the East, of which more later.
- 65 Al-Jaʿfarī is referring principally to the seven Offices of the Coptic Horologion: Morning Prayer (First Hour), Terce, Sext, None, Vespers (Eleventh Hour), Compline, and the Office of Midnight Prayer which comprises three sections of Nocturns. He quotes and criticizes several passages in them (*Takhjīl*, 629–642), a section summarized in the *Ajwiba*

Jews with regard to the prophets and friends of God in their Torah; and (x) on the divine tidings of Muḥammad and his prophetic mission contained in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Prophecies.⁶⁶ It is no doubt the encyclopedic character of the *Takhjīl*, both in its contents and in its sources, that made this polemical treatise so popular.

To conclude this section, it remains to determine whether al-Qarāfi made use of the *Takhjīl* or used instead one of al-Ja'fari's two abridgements of his book. We can safely discard the second and shortest summary, the *Radd*, in which some material has been eliminated, among which, the entire chapter dealing with the Creed, material that al-Qarāfi reproduces.⁶⁷ There is a further indication that leads us to discard also the *Bayān*. Al-Ja'fari ends the introduction to the *Takhjīl* with a brief section explaining that the Christians now have not one Gospel but four, and providing his Muslim readers with some basic information, such as the names of the evangelists, whether they were among the Twelve Apostles, the language and place in which each wrote his gospel, and how many years after Jesus' ascension.⁶⁸ He then goes on to observe that,

(more on which below). Although al-Ja'fari refers several times to "their eight prayers" (*Takhjīl*, 102, 109, 582, 643), this appears to be a mistake resulting from his counting as two different prayers what in reality is one single office, namely, "the first prayer, which they call *ṣalāt al-saḥar* or *ṣalāt al-fajr*" (*Takhjīl*, 629) and "the prayer of the first hour" (*Takhjīl*, 631). The seven prayers are described by the Coptic author Abū l-Barakāt ibn Kabar (d. after 1321) in his encyclopedic work *Miṣbāḥ al-ḡulma fī iḏāḥ al-khidma*, Arabic text edited by Wadi Awad, "Abū al-Barakāt Ibn Kabar, *Miṣbāḥ al-ḡulmah* (cap. 16: la preghiera del giorno e della notte)," *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea* 35–36 (2002–2003), 377–379, 397–400; trans. Louis Villecourt, "Les observances liturgiques et la discipline du jeûne dans l'église copte (ch. xvi–xix de la *Lampe des ténèbres*)," *Le Muséon* 37 (1924), 211–214. See also Oswald H.E. Burmester, "The Canonical Hours of the Coptic Church," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 2 (1936): 78–100; and Archbishop Basilios, "Canonical Hours, Book of," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. A.S. Atiya (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 2:446–449.

66 In fact, the biblical prediction of Muḥammad is the topic of only the first part of chapter 10 (*Takhjīl*, 651–722). The second part (pp. 723–896) deals mostly with the miracles performed by Muḥammad and his followers. It also includes a few pages on the attestation of Muḥammad by ancient Arabian heroes, renowned figures of pre-Islamic Arabian monotheism, Jewish and Christian scholars, soothsayers, etc. (pp. 851–865), as well as a defense of his prophecy in face of biblical warnings against false teachers and prophets (pp. 885–896).

67 Compare *Takhjīl*, 499–523 and *Bayān*, 310–336 with *Ajwiba*, 511–532 (308–319).

68 This is the kind of information one usually finds in the subtitles that accompany the Arabic manuscripts of the Gospels describing their authorship. See, for instance, Khalil Samir, "La version arabe des évangiles d'al-As'ad Ibn al-'Assāl," *Parole de l'Orient* 19 (1994),

according to his informants, there exists a fifth gospel known as the Gospel of the Infancy (*Injil al-ṣabwa*), noting, however, that he was unable to examine it. Interestingly, in the earliest extant manuscript of the *Takhjil*, which is dated 1239 and contains a note indicating that it was verified by the author himself, al-Jaʿfarī has added a note saying that he was able afterwards to obtain a copy of the Gospel of the Infancy. He then adds some information which he lacked when he first wrote the *Takhjil*, such as its attribution to Peter, who received and transmitted it from Mary the mother of Jesus, that it mentions the coming of the Holy Family to Upper Egypt and their eventual return to Nazareth, and that it contains extra material, but also deficiencies, since it does not report many of the sayings and well-known miracles of the Messiah.⁶⁹ The fact that all this information on the four gospels and on the Gospel of the Infancy, absent in the *Bayān*, is reproduced in the *Ajwiba*⁷⁰ allows us to conclude that al-Qarāfi used the original *Takhjil* with the annotations added by al-Jaʿfarī himself in 1239.

5.3 *Al-Qurṭubī's al-I'lām bi-mā fi dīn al-Naṣārā min al-fasād wa-l-awhām*

We owe to Samīr Qaddūrī and Muḥammad Binsharīfa the identification of the author of the *al-I'lām bi-mā fi dīn al-Naṣārā min al-fasād wa-l-awhām wa-iḥḥār maḥāsin dīn al-Islām wa-ithbāt nubūwat nabiyyinā Muḥammad* ('Information about the Corruptions and Delusions of the Religion of the Christians and the Presentation of the Merits of the Religion of Islam and the Establishment of the Prophethood of Our Prophet Muḥammad,' henceforth *I'lām*) with the Mālikī jurist and *ḥadīth* expert, Aḥmad ibn 'Umar ibn Ibrāhīm ibn 'Umar al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī, also known as Ibn al-Muzayyin.⁷¹ Born in Cordoba in 578/1182, his

502. The references to Jesus' ascension (*ṣu'ūd*) are interpreted by al-Jaʿfarī and other Muslim readers of these texts as referring to the elevation of the living Jesus to God before the Jews could kill him (see Q 4:157–158, quoted in note 2 to chapter 4).

69. Annotation reproduced by Qadaḥ in *Takhjil*, 114, n. 4. From al-Jaʿfarī's description, the gospel in question appears to be the Arabic Infancy Gospel, which covers the time from Jesus' birth to the return of the Holy Family to Nazareth after their sojourn in Egypt. See James K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 100–107.

70. *Ajwiba*, 188–193 (103–107).

71. Muḥammad Binsharīfa, "Al-Imām al-Qurṭubī al-mufasssīr: siratuhu min ta'ālīfihī" *Majallat Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ḥasanīyya* 16 (1420/1999), 173; Samir Kaddouri (Samīr Qaddūrī), "Identificación de « Al-Qurṭubī », autor de *Al-i'lām bimā fi dīn al-naṣārā min al-fasād wa-l-awhām*," *Al-Qanṭara* 21 (2000): 215–219. The book had been previously attributed to, among others, the famous Qur'ān commentator, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273). Although not listed among his writings in the biographical sources, Aḥmad

biographers mention that he left his native city in his early twenties in search of knowledge, spending some years in Tlemcen, Fez, and Ceuta, in North Africa, before returning to Cordoba. We also hear of a sojourn in Granada some years later. In 1221, when he was about forty years old, al-Qurṭubī went on pilgrimage to Mecca, visiting Tunis and Alexandria on the way.⁷² Apparently, he never returned to al-Andalus, but settled in Alexandria where he became a respected teacher and scholar, eventually dying there on 24 Dhū l-Qa'da/ 22 November 1258.

In the introduction to the *I'lām*, al-Qurṭubī mentions that he came across a book opposing the Muslim religion entitled *Tathlith al-waḥdāniyya* ('Trebling the Divine Oneness') that a Christian from Toledo had sent to Cordoba.⁷³ He follows the mention of his native city with the invocation 'May God guard it,' thus indicating that he was writing before the fall of Cordoba in 1236.⁷⁴ There

ibn 'Umar al-Qurṭubī refers to the *I'lām* several times in another of his works, thus leaving no doubt as to his authorship. See a summary of the debate in Abdelilah Ljamai, *Ibn Ḥazm et la polémique islamo-chrétienne dans l'histoire de l'Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 153–156; and in Aḥmad Āyt Bil'ayd, "La profecía de Mahoma a través de la Biblia Sagrada," *Anaquel de Estudios Árabes* 16 (2005), 68–70. There is a published edition of the *I'lām* by Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1980). A long excerpt from this edition (pp. 181–280) was later published by the same editor under the title, *Ḥiwār al-adyān fī l-Andalus* (Giza, Egypt: Maktaba Madbūlī al-Ṣaghīr, 2003), 53–172. Another complete but unpublished edition of the *I'lām* was prepared by Fāyiz Sa'īd Ṣāliḥ 'Azzām (PhD diss., Umm al-Qurā University, 1985). The first two parts of the *I'lām* were also edited and translated into French by Paul Devillard, *Thèse sur Al-Qurtubi (Thèse de troisième cycle, Université d'Aix-en-Provence, 1969)*. More recently, Aḥmad Āyt Bil'ayd has edited the third part under the title, *Ithbāt nubūwat Muḥammad* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004). Unless noted otherwise, all references hereafter to the *I'lām* are from al-Saqqā's 1980 edition.

72 For al-Qurṭubī's biography and literary production, see Bil'ayd, *Ithbāt nubūwat Muḥammad*, 8–16; and especially Samīr Qaddūrī, "Riḥlāt Aḥmad ibn 'Umar al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī (t. 656 H.) fī l-Maghrib wa-l-Mashriq wa-mu'allafātuhu al-'ilmiyya," *Majallat Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Waṭaniyya* 11 no. 2 (1426/2005–2006): 160–207. A detailed analysis of al-Qurṭubī's method of argumentation in the *I'lām* can be found in Ḥasan, *Uslūb al-imāmayn*, 137–307.

73 The *Tathlith al-waḥdāniyya*, which is only preserved by al-Qurṭubī (*I'lām*, 47, 57, 71, 77, 91, 97, 105–106, 115–117, 163–165, 177, 181–185, 215–217), has been edited and translated into French by Paul Devillard, "L'écrit de Tolède: 'La Trinité de l'Unicité,' à travers la réfutation qu'en fait al-Qurṭubī," *Études Arabes* 24 (1970), 24–36. An abridged English translation by Thomas Burman appears in *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, ed. O.R. Constable, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 194–198.

74 *I'lām*, 42.

is also internal evidence to suggest that the author was still in al-Andalus when he wrote it.⁷⁵ Qaddūrī places the composition of the *I'lām* around 1220, in the period immediately prior to his pilgrimage to Mecca.⁷⁶ The introduction reflects the difficult relations between the two communities that prevailed around the Mediterranean basin in the thirteenth century, and exemplifies what was said earlier about scholars who saw themselves as participants in a larger battle that was being fought on different planes. In al-Qurṭubī's own words, "wounding the enemy by means of proof and words is more effective than wounding them with sword and spearhead, and the King of the Two Worlds expects that we combine the two ways and obtain the recompense for both actions."⁷⁷ He strongly criticizes the Toledo author for his poor mastery of Arabic and the weakness of his intellect, incapable of following the rules of logic and sound discourse. According to al-Qurṭubī, one of the most ingrained errors of the Christians is their denial of the evident proofs of Muḥammad's prophethood from their own scriptures, and although he is hardly confident that they will profit from any guidance offered them, he has nonetheless decided to respond word-for-word, "in eloquent Arabic logic," especially since a group of Muslims has requested him to do so. He will not lower himself to the level of his opponent, but will simply expose the error and contradictions of their doctrines. Finally, al-Qurṭubī announces that after dealing with the book from Toledo, he will add some sections on the doctrines and legal rulings of the Christians as taught by their bishops and recorded by their priests and monks:

To that end, this book comprises a preamble and four chapters. The first chapter concerns the discourse on the hypostases; the second deals with the discourse on the union [of the Creator and the created] (*ittiḥād*) and the [divine] indwelling [in creatures] (*ḥulūl*); the third contains the discourse on the prophecies and the establishment of the prophethood of our Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him; and the fourth deals with a series of propositions taken from their positive legal rulings. In this

75 *I'lām*, 339.

76 Qaddūrī, "Riḥlāt," 170. In relation to the date of composition of the *I'lām*, see also P.S. van Koningsveld, "La Apología de al-Kindī en la España del siglo xii: huellas toledanas de un 'animal disputax'," in *Estudios sobre Alfonso vi y la Reconquista de Toledo: Actas del II Congreso Internacional de Estudios Mozárabes (Toledo, 20–26 mayo 1985)*, vol. 3 (Toledo: Instituto de Estudios Visigótico-Mozárabes de San Eugenio, 1988), 110, n. 4.

77 *I'lām*, 46.

[fourth] chapter, I explain that their legal rulings have no textual basis but are based on pure whim, arbitrariness, and litigation.⁷⁸

Tathlith al-waḥdāniyya was not the only example of local Christian anti-Muslim polemics of which al-Qurṭubī was aware, nor was it the only Christian work he ever read. He criticizes its anonymous author for having copied the opening from a letter that a group of bishops gathered in Toledo had sent to the *qāḍī* Abū Marwān ibn Maysara, and to which the latter replied exposing their ignorance and stupidity.⁷⁹ Al-Qurṭubī also compares him unfavorably with earlier Christians whose doctrines the Toledo author ignores, and who did not claim inconceivable things.⁸⁰ In particular, he faults the author of *Tathlith al-waḥdāniyya* for not following the logical method of argumentation of “the leader of your teachers and greatest bishop, Aghushtīn,” in his book, *Muṣḥaf al-‘ālam al-kā’in* (‘Book of the Existing World’), as Ḥafṣ ibn Albar did.⁸¹ He further notes that his teaching on the Trinity does not correspond with what is written in the *Kitāb al-masā’il al-saba’ wa-l-khamsīn* (‘Book of the Fifty-Seven Questions’).⁸² Finally, his interlocutor is also blamed for contradicting the *Kitāb al-ḥurūf* (‘Book of Letters’), which al-Qurṭubī ascribes to an unnamed priest, well-known among the Christians, who sought to perfect their doctrine.⁸³

Who are all these authors referred to by al-Qurṭubī? The question is important for our study, given the fact that all this material from the *I’lām* is taken up by al-Qarāfi. Scholars working on the history of the Mozarabs (the arabicized

78 *I’lām*, 46.

79 *I’lām*, 49. The *qāḍī* in question is Abū Marwān ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Masarra (Maysara, in some sources) al-Yaḥṣubī al-Shantamarī (d. 552/1157), who lived in Cordoba. In his famous catalogue of the works he had read, Ibn Khayr al-Ishbīlī (d. 575/1179) mentions a *Risālat mizān al-ṣidq al-mufarriq min ahl al-bāṭil wa-ahl al-ḥaqq* (‘The Balance of Truth Which Separates the People of Wrong from the People of Right’) that Ibn Masarra wrote in answer to a letter sent by some Christian bishops and a poem that Ibn Masarra composed about the same topic (see Ibn Khayr, *Fahrasat mā rawāhu ‘an shuyūkhīhi min al-dawāwīn al-muṣannafa fi ḍurūb al-‘ilm wa-anwā’ al-ma‘ārif*, ed. Muḥammad Fu‘ād Maṣṣūr [Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1998], 374). Koningsveld (‘La Apologia,’ 122–123) suggests that the apparently popular *Radd ‘alā l-Naṣārā* (‘Refutation of the Christians’) attributed to Ibn Masarra by the twelfth-century Andalusī author Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣadafi could be the very same response to the letter sent by the bishops. See also Fritz Meier, “Ṭāhir aṣ-Ṣadafi’s vergessene schrift über westliche heilige des 6./12. Jahrhunderts,” *Der Islam* 61 (1984), 37.

80 *I’lām*, 45.

81 *I’lām*, 57–58.

82 *I’lām*, 61; see also page 128.

83 *I’lām*, 75, 80.

Christians of medieval Spain) have sought to identify the Christian sources mentioned by al-Qurṭubī, beginning with the author of *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya*. According to Thomas Burman, following a hypothesis first proposed by P.S. van Koningsveld, he was probably a *converso* from al-Andalus, who was active in Toledo during the latter half of the twelfth century.⁸⁴ He shows familiarity not only with medieval Islamic and Judaic thought, but also with contemporary Latin-Christian theology, particularly with the thought of Peter Abelard (d. 1142), from whom he apparently derives the triad of power, knowledge, and will for his explanation of the Trinity. He quotes verses from the Hebrew Bible in both Hebrew and Aramaic.⁸⁵ This Mozarabic tract further reveals that the intellectual milieu in which it was produced was influenced by anti-Muslim polemical texts written by Christians in the East. Finally, Burman suggests that *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya* might have been written in response to the strict and highly rationalist monotheism of the Almohads as espoused by Ibn Tūmart (d. 524/1130).⁸⁶

As for Aghushtīn, the author of *Muṣḥaf al-‘ālam al-kā’in*, he is not Augustine (d. 430), the famous Bishop of Hippo, as al-Qurṭubī (followed by his modern editor) seems to suggest, for the obvious reason that he could not have authored a work manifestly written in response to Islam.⁸⁷ The most that can be said at the present state of research is that he was a learned Mozarabic churchman, perhaps in Toledo, active in the twelfth century.⁸⁸ In the second of the two substantial fragments from the *Muṣḥaf al-‘ālam al-kā’in* that al-Qurṭubī preserves,

84 Koningsveld, “La Apología,” 107–129; idem, “Christian-Arabic Manuscripts from the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa: A Historical Interpretation,” *Al-Qanṭara* 15 (1994), 426; Thomas E. Burman, *Religious Polemic and the Intellectual History of the Mozarabs, c. 1050–1200* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 70–80; idem, “Christian *Kalām* in Medieval Spain,” in *Iberia and the Mediterranean World of the Middle Ages*, ed. L.J. Simon, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 38–49; idem, “‘Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyah’ and the Twelfth-Century Andalusian-Christian Approach to Islam,” in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays*, ed. J.V. Tolan (New York: Garland, 1996), 109–128. On the *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya*, see also Charles L. Tieszen, *Christian Identity amid Islam in Medieval Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 202–211.

85 See note 50 to chapter 6.

86 Burman, *Religious Polemic*, 78–79. On Ibn Tūmart’s theology of monotheism, see Madeleine Fletcher, “The Almohad *Tawhīd*: Theology Which Relies on Logic,” *Numen* 38 (1991): 110–127.

87 Aghushtīn is mentioned, quoted, and rebutted in *I’lām*, 57–58, 60, 69, 72, 81–86, 110, 126, 128, 143–157.

88 Burman, *Religious Polemic*, 80–84; Devillard, *Thèse sur al-Qurtubī*, introduction, 26–30; J.P. Monferrer Sala, “Aguštīn,” in *Diccionario de autores y obras andalusíes, tomo I (A-Ibn B)*, ed. J. Delgado Lirola and J.M. Puerta Vilchez (Seville: Consejería de Cultura de la Junta de Andalucía; Granada: Fundación El Legado Andalusí, 2002), 50–52.

Aghushtīn argues for the possibility of the Incarnation from the Qurʾān, which recounts God's conversation with Moses through the intermediary of a created being, that is, the voice that spoke to him from the blazing bush.⁸⁹ The same episode was invoked by Muslim partisans of the createdness of the Qurʾān to show that God's eternal and uncreated word could exist in the created form of letters and sounds. We shall see below that al-Qarāfi takes up and responds to this defense of the Incarnation in the second chapter of the *Ajwiba*, ascribing it to a certain Aghushtīn, the leader of the priests in Toledo.⁹⁰

Much more scholarly attention has been paid to the other Christian writer mentioned by al-Qurṭubī, Ḥafṣ ibn Albar, even though in the end very little can be said with certainty about him.⁹¹ This learned Christian author was the *qāḍī*

89 *I'lām*, 143–147.

90 *Ajwiba*, 430–432 (267–268). Al-Qarāfi adds a detail not mentioned by al-Qurṭubī, namely, that a certain Ibn Fakhkhār al-Yahūdī, who converted to Christianity and became vizier of the Christian kings, wrote to the Muslim scholars of Cordoba with the same argument. He is probably referring to Abū Iṣḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn al-Fakhkhār (d. 1240), a member of a distinguished Jewish family originally from Granada, who became chief rabbi of Castile and carried out diplomatic negotiations on behalf of King Alfonso VIII. Ibn al-Fakhkhār is said to have had a profound knowledge of Arabic and of the Qurʾān. He has been described as “a figure who moved easily among the settings of the Jewish community and Christian and Muslim courts, [who] was able to speak several languages and assume various modes of cultural discourse” (Jonathan P. Decter, “Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Fakhkhār al-Yahūdī: An Arabic Poet and Diplomat in Castile and the Maghrib,” in *Beyond Religious Borders: Interaction and Intellectual Exchange in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. D.M. Freidenreich and M. Goldstein [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012], 98). There is no record, however, that he converted to Christianity or that he wrote to Muslim scholars with arguments in favor of Christianity. It is not inconceivable, however, that Ibn al-Fakhkhār could have composed an anti-Muslim tract on behalf of Christian prelates in Toledo, perhaps the bellicose Martín López de Pisuerga, Archbishop of Toledo from 1192 until his death in 1208, and that this writing could have been sent to Cordoba. The question deserves further investigation. See also Koningsveld, “La Apología,” 126–127.

91 See, among others, Adolf Neubauer, “Ḥafṣ al-Qoutī,” *Revue des Études Juives* 30 (1895): 65–69; Heinrich Goussen, *Die christlich-arabische Literatur der Mozaraber* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1909), 9, 13–15; Douglas M. Dunlop, “Ḥafṣ b. Albar—the Last of the Goths?,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 86 (1954): 137–151; Emilio García Gómez, “Dunlop (D.M.), ‘Ḥafṣ ibn Albar—the Last of the Goths,’” *Al-Andalus* 19 (1954): 481–482; D.M. Dunlop, “Sobre Ḥafṣ ibn Albar al-Qūṭī al-Qurṭubī,” *Al-Andalus* 20 (1955): 211–213; P.S. van Koningsveld, “La literatura cristiano-árabe de la España medieval y el significado de la transmisión textual en árabe de la Collectio Conciliorum,” in *Concilio III de Toledo: XIV Centenario 589–1989*, ed. M. González Martín (Toledo: Arzobispado de Toledo, 1991), 697–700; idem, “Christian Arabic Literature from Medieval Spain: An Attempt at Periodization,” in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period*,

of the Christian community of Cordoba, where he lived between the ninth and tenth centuries. He is also the first arabicized Christian author from al-Andalus we know of and the author of an Arabic translation in rhyme of the Psalms, the only one of his works that has survived in full.⁹² It has been suggested that he was the son of the famous Latin writer Paulus Alvarus (Albar), best known for his association with Eulogius of Cordoba during the time of the so-called Cordoba martyrs' movement in the mid-ninth century.⁹³ It has also been proposed, based on information provided by the Andalusī historian Ibn al-Qūṭīyya (d. 367/977), that Ḥaḥṣ ibn Albar, like Ibn al-Qūṭīyya himself, was a descendant of the Visigothic king Witiza (d. 710).

In the last part of the *I'lām*, al-Qurṭubī quotes several passages from "one of the books of Ḥaḥṣ" in which the author responds to the inquiries of an apparently non-Christian questioner concerning different aspects of Christian practice.⁹⁴ This fact has led scholars to identify this work of Ḥaḥṣ with the *Kitāb al-masā'il al-saba' wa-l-khamsīn* which al-Qurṭubī mentions elsewhere in the *I'lām*.⁹⁵ We shall see below that al-Qarāfi has incorporated Ḥaḥṣ's five *responsa* (and al-Qurṭubī's remarks on them) into the *Ajwiba*. The first question concerns the practice of obligatory fasting.⁹⁶ The second has to do with the seven

207–212; Marie-Thérèse Urvoy, "La culture et la littérature arabe des Chrétiens d'al-Andalus," *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 92 (1991), 273–275; 'Ubāda Kuḥayla, *Tārīkh al-Naṣārā fī l-Andalus* (Cairo: 'U. Kuḥayla, 1993), 130–132; Mayte Penelas, "A Possible Author of the Arabic Translation of Orosius' *Historiae*," *Al-Masāq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 13 (2001): 113–135; Burman, *Religious Polemic*, 14–15, 99, 158–159; and J.P. Monferrer Sala, "Ibn Albar al-Qūṭī," in *Diccionario de autores y obras andalusíes, tomo 1*, 433–435.

92 Marie-Thérèse Urvoy, ed. and trans., *Le Psautier de Ḥaḥṣ le Goth* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1994); Augustine Casiday, "The Sweetest Music that Falls upon the Ear": Translating and Interpreting the Psalter in Christian Andalusia," in *Meditations of the Heart: The Psalms in Early Christian Thought and Practice*, ed. A. Andreopoulos et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 225–242.

93 The literature on this episode is vast. See, among others, Kenneth B. Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

94 *I'lām*, 422–437.

95 *I'lām*, 61, 80–81, 128, 432–433. For this identification, see Koningsveld, "La literatura cristiano-árabe," 699; idem, "Christian Arabic Literature," 210–211. On this well-known genre ('Questions and Answers') of Christian apology in response to the religious challenge of Islam, see Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 81–85. Kuḥayla (*Tārīkh al-Naṣārā*, 132) thinks that the earlier mentioned *Kitāb al-ḥurūf* should likewise be attributed to Ḥaḥṣ ibn Albar, but there is little textual basis for this attribution in al-Qurṭubī's text.

96 *I'lām*, 422; *Ajwiba*, 565 (334). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 142.

holy days of obligation.⁹⁷ The third passage explains why Christians offer bread and wine instead of animals.⁹⁸ The fourth question is on the Christians' practice of blessing their houses with salt.⁹⁹ Finally, the fifth passage has to do with the Christians' custom of crossing themselves on the face.¹⁰⁰

The above-mentioned are not the only Christian sources al-Qurṭubī was able to access. In another section of his book, he censures Christians for disregarding the dietary laws of the Torah, which are clear and admit of no interpretation, nor were they changed by any of Israel's prophets, including the Messiah. Al-Qurṭubī quotes a passage from "one of their books of jurisprudence" in which these laws are said to be parables that Jesus explained in the Gospel. When he said, "I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17), Jesus meant fulfillment through interpretation, explains the Christian book. The prohibition against eating carrion, for instance, stands for the prohibition against committing murder and bearing false witness, and the prohibition against eating pork refers to the prohibition against adultery and fornication. Once again, this passage is taken up by al-Qarāfi, who likewise paraphrases al-Qurṭubī's comments, without acknowledging his source,¹⁰¹ just as he also reproduces another passage in which al-Qurṭubī discusses the Christian practice of baptism and which includes a quote from "the letter of Bishop Leon to the Bishops of Sicily" explaining the meaning of the threefold immersion.¹⁰²

A final example showing the extent to which al-Qurṭubī made use of Christian texts, and how al-Qarāfi was able to benefit from it, is the section in

97 *I'lām*, 424; *Ajwiba*, 674–675 (404). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 139.

98 *I'lām*, 427; *Ajwiba*, 678–679 (405–406). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 141.

99 *I'lām*, 430; *Ajwiba*, 683 (409).

100 *I'lām*, 430; *Ajwiba*, 565 (334).

101 *I'lām*, 397–398; *Ajwiba*, 658–661 (393–395). Generally speaking, early Christians developed a consensus that the dietary laws in the Pentateuch no longer applied to them and interpreted them figuratively. For instance, in his treatise *On Jewish Foods*, Novatian of Rome (d. 258) maintains that the animals that were classified as unclean were intended to symbolize vices, in the same manner as the passage quoted by al-Qurṭubī does. I have not attempted to identify the provenance of this passage, but a possible origin could be the writings of Isidore of Seville (d. 636). On early Christian attitudes toward Jewish dietary laws, see Peter J. Tomson, "Jewish Food Laws in Early Christian Community Discourse," *Semeia* 86 (1999): 193–211.

102 *I'lām*, 403; *Ajwiba*, 664 (397). The passage is from Leo the Great's (d. 461) *Letter to the Bishops of Sicily* (Letter XVI): "for in the baptismal office death ensues through the slaying of sin, and threefold immersion imitates the lying in the tomb three days, and the raising out of the water is like Him that rose again from the tomb" (quoted from *The Letters and Sermons of Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome*, trans. Charles L. Feltoe [New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1895], 28).

which the former discusses laws not based on scripture which Christians have imposed upon themselves.¹⁰³ Al-Qurṭubī, who refers to “what I have found in their books,” explains that Christians consider the breaking of these canons (*qawānīn*) to be a sin and divide them into forgivable and unforgivable. He then gives several examples (pederasty, incest, bestiality, marriage without the blessing of a priest, and manslaughter) and comments on them. There can be no doubt that al-Qurṭubī had access to a Christian compendium of canon law, more specifically to the Arabic translation of the *Collectio Conciliorum*, which was already circulating in al-Andalus in the first half of the eleventh century, as can be deduced from the fact that Ibn Ḥazm, who died in 456/1064, was already aware of it.¹⁰⁴

It must be noted that the foregoing examples do not exhaust al-Qarāfī’s borrowings from the *I’lām*, but are limited to the Christian sources that al-Qurṭubī used in writing his refutation and which eventually found their way into the *Ajwiba*.

5.4 *Al-Khazrajī’s Maqāmi’ al-ṣulbān*

Muslim Spain is also the origin of yet another work of anti-Christian polemic which greatly influenced al-Qarāfī, even if perhaps indirectly: the *Maqāmi’ al-ṣulbān* (‘Mallets for Crosses’) of Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Šamad al-Khazrajī al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī.¹⁰⁵ Born in Cordoba in 519/1125, al-Khazrajī lived in

103 *I’lām*, 405–409; *Ajwiba*, 668–673 (400–404). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 143.

104 Koningsveld, “Literatura cristiano-árabe,” 705; idem, “Christian Arabic Literature,” 221. The passages quoted by al-Qurṭubī, as well as the above quotation from Leo the Great, can be found literally in the Arabic Conciliar manuscript of the Escorial (MSS Madrid Biblioteca Nacional—Arabic 4877). On the Arabic translation of the *Collectio Conciliorum* and what it reveals in terms of the arabization of Christians living under Muslim rule in Spain and the influence of their Islamic environment, see the important study of Ana Echevarría Arsuaga, “Los marcos legales de la islamización: el procedimiento judicial entre cristianos arabizados y mozárabes,” *Studia histórica, Historia medieval* 27 (2009): 37–52. See also, by the same author, “Vincentius,” in *CMR*3, 81–83.

105 On this author and the circumstances of the composition of the *Maqāmi’*, see Fernando de la Granja Santamaría, “Milagros españoles en una obra polémica musulmana (El ‘Kitāb Maqāmi’ al-ṣulbān’ del Jazrayī),” *Al-Andalus* 33 (1968), 311–331; P.S. van Koningsveld, “Muslim Slaves and Captives in Western Europe during the Late Middle Ages,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 6 (1995), 12–13; Burman, *Religious Polemic*, 80–84; and Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, “Al-Khazrajī,” in *CMR*3, 526–528. The *Maqāmi’* was first edited by ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Sharfī (Tunis: Markaz al-Dirāsāt wa-l-Buḥūth al-Iqtiṣādiyya wa-l-Ijtīmā’iyya, 1975), on which see the extensive review of Khalil Samir, “Maqāmi’ al-ṣulbān li-Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd aṣ-Šamad al-Ḥazrajī (519/1125–582/1186), éd. critique par ‘Abd al-Mağīd ash-Sharfī, Tunis, 1975,” *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980): 242–254. It has also been edited by

Granada and in Béjaïa, eventually settling in Fez where he taught *ḥadīth* at the reputed Qarawiyyīn madrasa, dying there on 30 Dhū l-Ḥijja 582/13 March 1187. Several biographers mention that al-Khazrajī was captured in the year 540 of the Islamic calendar (between 24 June 1145 and 13 June 1146) and taken prisoner to Toledo, where he remained in captivity for about two years. Most probably, al-Khazrajī's capture took place following King Alfonso VII of Castile's intervention after the Almoravid governor of Seville, Ibn Ghāniya, conquered Cordoba in January 1146.¹⁰⁶ It was during his sojourn in Toledo, or shortly after it, that al-Khazrajī, then in his early twenties, wrote his book of anti-Christian polemic in response to an attack on Islam written by a Toledo priest of Visigothic descent (§ 1). According to the prologue, which is written in the third person and appears to be the work of a disciple, the priest was in the habit of confronting the Muslims coming into the city with objections against their religion. The Muslims in question brought these objections to al-Khazrajī and returned to the priest equipped with answers. When the priest finally learned about al-Khazrajī, he wrote a letter to him and asked the messengers to bring back his reply. Al-Khazrajī scolded them and refrained from replying, fearing the consequences because of the high status enjoyed by the priest in question. On the insistence of his fellow Muslims, al-Khazrajī finally agreed to write a response: *Maqāmi' al-ṣulbān 'alā radd 'abadat al-awthān* ('Mallets for Crosses in Refutation of the Worshipers of Idols'), which he left with them on his departure from Toledo (§ 10).

Just as with the *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya*, preserved in al-Qurṭubī's work, the letter which occasioned al-Khazrajī's response has survived only in the refutation it occasioned. We know next to nothing regarding the identity of its author. We can presume that he was a Mozarabic priest active in Toledo in the mid-1140s, even though certain anomalies in the text have raised suspicions about its authenticity, at least in its current form.¹⁰⁷ There is no need to rehearse

Muḥammad Shāma under the title of *Bayna l-Islām wa-l-Masīḥiyya: Kitāb Abī 'Ubayda al-Khazrajī* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1979). All references hereafter to the *Maqāmi'* will be from al-Sharfi's superior edition, conveniently divided into paragraphs.

106 As Fierro remarks, however, there is some contradictory data in the sources concerning the exact circumstances of al-Khazrajī's stay in Toledo, and it is not completely clear whether he was a captive or a refugee after the collapse of Almoravid power in Cordoba. See Maribel Fierro, "Christian Success and Muslim Fear in Andalusī Writings during the Almoravid and Almohad Periods," in *Dhimmi and Others: Jews and Christians and the World of Classical Islam*, ed. U. Rubin and D.J. Wasserstein (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 169.

107 The Arabic text of the letter from Toledo is found in *Maqāmi'* §§ 2–10. An abridged English translation by Burman is found in *Medieval Iberia*, 190–194. For an analysis of its contents

the entire debate here. Suffice it to note that the purportedly Christian letter includes, among other irregularities, a contradictory description of the Trinity as consisting of three hypostases (*aqānīm*) in one hypostasis (*uqnūm*) (§ 2), and spurious quotations from the Hebrew Bible (§§ 6–8). At the same time, it has been remarked that the text contains Arabic calques from Latin which were not common in Christian Arab writings originating in the East, such as *iltaḥama* and *ṣalūbiyya*, translating *incarnatus est* and *crucifixio* respectively, which suggests the local origin of this material.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, it seems better to conclude that, in its present state, the Christian text to which al-Khazrajī replies is either a reworking by a Muslim writer, perhaps al-Khazrajī himself, of an existing Christian text, or an entirely new composition by a Muslim author who was nevertheless familiar with the topics of Muslim-Christian polemics and with Christian apologetic arguments current in the Iberian Peninsula.

Unlike al-Jaʿfarī's *Takhjīl* or al-Qurṭubī's *I'lām*, the *Maqāmi'* does not contain an introduction by the author explaining the structure of the work. An examination of the contents, however, reveals that it can be divided into four main parts.¹⁰⁹ The first (§§ 17–61) is a polemical refutation of the main Christian doctrines, such as Jesus' divinity, the Incarnation, crucifixion, redemption, and the Trinity, which are presented as the result of Constantine's efforts to reunite his empire under one single religion.¹¹⁰ The second part, apologetic in character, includes a comparison between Muslim law and the laws of the Torah and the Gospel (§§ 62–63), and a defense of the Qurʾān and of Muḥammad's prophethood as foretold in the previous scriptures (§§ 64–113). The third part begins with a section on the disagreement between Christians and Jews about the Messiah (§§ 114–119) and follows with the polemical accusation of *taḥrīf* (§§ 120–136). In the fourth part, al-Khazrajī responds to the attacks on Islam in the Toledo document: errors in the Qurʾān (§§ 137–138); polygamy and repudiation (§§ 139–140); prophetic-sanctioned violence (§ 141); the abrogation of previous religious legislation (§§ 141–144a), the carnal rewards of Paradise (§§ 156–162), and Islam's expansion through conquest (§§ 163–164). Although mostly apologetic, this part also contains a polemical section on the false miracles

and the question of its authenticity, see Samir, "Maqāmi' al-ṣulbān," 242–248; Dominique Urvoy, *Pensers d'al-Andalus: La vie intellectuelle à Cordoue et Séville au temps des empires Berbères (fin XI^e siècle–début XIII^e siècle)* (Paris: CNRS; Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail), 166; Burman, *Religious Polemic*, 65–70; and Tieszen, *Christian Identity amid Islam*, 212–220.

108 Samir, "Maqāmi' al-ṣulbān," 253.

109 Samir, "Maqāmi' al-ṣulbān," 243–244.

110 See *Maqāmi'* §§ 46–49. The text is reproduced in *I'lām*, 244–246, and summarized by al-Qarāfi in *Ajwiba*, 549–552 (326–328).

with which monks and priests deceive gullible Christians, in response to the claim by the Toledo priest that there are saintly Christians who continue to perform miracles when there is a need (§§ 144b–149).¹¹¹ In the last paragraph, al-Khazrajī draws his opponent's attention to the contradictory Christian statements concerning the Messiah, who is described with attributes belonging to an insignificant human being and not to a powerful God (§ 168). The *Maqāmi'* then closes with some brief remarks by the reviser of the work, perhaps the same person who wrote the prologue, for whom there is no religion on earth more inimical to faith in God than the religion of the Christians (§§ 169–171).

That the *Maqāmi' al-ṣulbān* was an important source for al-Qurṭubī in composing the *I'lām* is beyond any doubt, as can be established from a number of direct textual borrowings.¹¹² Less clear is the question of whether or not al-Qarāfi made use of al-Khazrajī's book. I have not been able to locate in the *Ajwiba* any material from the *Maqāmi'* that is not also present in the *I'lām*. On the other hand, we are sure that al-Qarāfi knew the *I'lām*, from which he has derived material that does not appear in the *Maqāmi'*.¹¹³ It may be concluded, therefore, that the *Maqāmi'* is, for al-Qarāfi, an important but indirect source through the *I'lām*. Further on the question of the transmission of knowledge, al-Khazrajī and al-Qurṭubī are the channels through which some of Ibn Ḥazm's ideas influenced al-Qarāfi, as established by Abdelilah Ljamai in his study of Ibn Ḥazm's *al-Fiṣal fī l-milal wa-l-ahwā' wa-l-niḥal* ('Judgment Regarding the Confessions, Inclinations, and Sects') and its influence on later Muslim polemicists.¹¹⁴

111 See De la Granja, "Milagros españoles," and Fierro, "Christian Success," 169–171. Al-Khazrajī's section on the false Christian miracles became very popular among later Muslim controversialists. Most of this material is reproduced by al-Qurṭubī (*I'lām*, 384–386) and by al-Ja'farī (*Takhjīl*, 589–592). Al-Qarāfi (*Ajwiba*, 557–558 [331]) has also incorporated material which goes back to al-Khazrajī via the *I'lām*, such as the well-known miracle of Saint Ildefonsus (d. 667), Bishop of Toledo, to whom the Virgin Mary appeared on her feast day (August 15) and bestowed a chasuble.

112 See references in al-Sharfi, "Maqāmi' al-ṣulbān," 17; Koningsveld, "La Apología," 124–125; and Ljamai, *Ibn Ḥazm*, 158–159.

113 In addition to the already mentioned Christian sources (Aghushtīn, Ḥafṣ ibn Albar, etc.) which al-Qarāfi takes from al-Qurṭubī, another obvious example of textual dependency is al-Qarāfi's second account of how "Paul the Jewish king" corrupted Christianity (*Ajwiba*, 543–548 [323–326]), which has been literally taken from *I'lām*, 241–244. Al-Qarāfi's portrayal of Paul of Tarsus is discussed below in chapter 5, section 3.

114 On Ibn Ḥazm's influence on al-Khazrajī, see Ljamai, *Ibn Ḥazm*, 147–152. On the transmission of Ibn Ḥazm's ideas through al-Khazrajī to al-Qurṭubī, and from al-Qurṭubī to al-Qarāfi, see note 87 to chapter 4.

5.5 *Al-Samaw'al al-Maghribī's Iḥām al-Yahūd*

Following his public conversion to Islam, on 9 Dhū l-Hijja 558/9 November 1163 in Maragha, Azerbaijan, the prominent physician and mathematician, al-Samaw'al ibn Yaḥyā al-Maghribī (d. 570/1175), composed a polemical tract against his former co-religionists entitled *Iḥām al-Yahūd* ('Silencing the Jews'). Four years later, he attached a brief autobiography to a revised edition of this work in which he provides details about his family background, his intellectual development, and the reasons for his conversion, including a vision of the prophet Muḥammad.¹¹⁵ Al-Samaw'al's father was a rabbi and poet named Yehūda ibn Abūn, who had moved from Fez, in Morocco, to Baghdad and married the educated daughter of a distinguished local Jewish family. The young al-Samaw'al learned Hebrew writing and studied the Pentateuch with his father, whom he describes as "the most learned man of his time in Torah studies, and the most gifted and prolific stylist and exquisite extemporizer in Hebrew poetry and prose."¹¹⁶ In addition to the traditional religious curriculum, al-Samaw'al also studied mathematics and medicine, fields in which he excelled and wrote several works.¹¹⁷

Al-Samaw'al's best claim to fame rests, however, on his polemical tract against Judaism which, as he states in his autobiography, soon became a best-seller: "The book became well known, its fame 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 of polemics against the Jews, the like of which had never been produced in Islam."¹¹⁸ The many extant manuscripts suggest that the earlier, shorter

115 See "Samaw'al b. Yaḥyā al-Maghribī, Abū Naṣr" in *EI2*, Suppl., s.v. (Reuven Firestone); "Samaw'al al-Maghribī, al-," in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, s.v. (Sabine Schmidtke); and Perlmann, "The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism," 114–120. An edition and translation of the *Iḥām*, including al-Samaw'al's autobiography, was published by Moshe Perlmann, *Iḥām al-Yahūd: Silencing the Jews* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1964). On his autobiography, see also Sarah Stroumsa, "On Jewish Intellectuals who converted in the Early Middle Ages," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. D. Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 191–196; and Adnan A. Husain, "Conversion to History: Negating Exile and Messianism in al-Samaw'al al-Maghribī's Polemic against Judaism," *Medieval Encounters* 8 (2002): 3–34. All references hereafter to the *Iḥām al-Yahūd* are given from Perlmann's work.

116 *Iḥām al-Yahūd*, 95 (Arabic), 75 (English).

117 See Adel Anboubā, "Al-Samaw'al, Ibn Yaḥyā Al-Maghribī," in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, ed. C.C. Gillispie (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970–1980), 12:95–96.

118 *Iḥām al-Yahūd*, 118 (Arabic), 86 (English).

version of *Ifhām al-Yahūd* circulated mainly in Iran and the East over the following centuries, whereas the later recension became more popular in the Western part of the world of Islam, where it also circulated under the titles *Ghāyat al-maqṣūd fī l-radd ‘alā l-Naṣārā wa-l-Yahūd* ('The Ultimate Goal in Refuting the Christians and the Jews') and *Badhl al-majhūd fī iqnā‘ al-Yahūd* ('The Great Endeavor in Persuading the Jews').¹¹⁹

Al-Samaw'al's tract was used by later Muslim authors polemicizing against Judaism, among them al-Qarāfi, whose *Ajwiba* includes several unacknowledged excerpts from *Ifhām al-Yahūd*.¹²⁰ It was also read by Jews, some of whom responded to al-Samaw'al's objections against Judaism. Sabine Schmidtke remarks that *Ifhām al-Yahūd* has been reprinted in the Arab world several times during the twentieth century, "clearly for the purposes of political propaganda."¹²¹

Concerning the structure of *Ifhām al-Yahūd*, in addition to the preamble and the epilogue, the longer version contains seventeen sections whose titles give an indication of the content and intention of the book: (i) Forcing them to admit abrogation; (ii) Silencing the Jews and the Christians with rational proof, and compelling them to accept Islam; (iii) Another way of establishing abrogation on the basis of their own sources; (iv) Another way of forcing them to admit abrogation; (v) Another way of establishing the fact of abrogation; (vi) Compelling them to accept the prophethood of Jesus; (vii) Compelling them to accept his prophethood and the prophethood of Muḥammad;

119 On this question, see the introduction to *Samaw'al al-Maghribī's (d. 570/1175) Ifhām al-Yahūd: The Early Recension*, ed. Ibrahim Marazka et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006). See also Bruno Chiesa and Sabine Schmidtke, "The Jewish Reception of Samaw'al al-Maghribī's (d. 570/1175) *Ifhām al-yahūd*: Some Evidence from the Abraham Firkovitch Collection I," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 32 (2006), 329–330.

120 The most obvious borrowing appears in chapter 2, in the section where al-Qarāfi responds to Jewish objections to the Muslim accusation of *tahrīf* (discussed below, chapter 4, section 3.2). Al-Samaw'al's *Ifhām al-Yahūd* also served as reference to the aforementioned Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, who draws on it in his polemical books *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā fī ajwibat al-Yahūd wa-l-Naṣārā* and *Ighāthat al-lahfān min maṣā'id al-Shayṭān*. See Moshe Perlmann, "Ibn al-Qayyim and Samaw'al al-Maghribī," *Journal of Jewish Bibliography* 3 (1942): 71–74.

121 Schmidtke, "Samaw'al al-Maghribī, al-," 4:239. See, among other, Samaw'al ibn Yahyā al-Maghribī, *Badhl al-majhūd fī ifhām al-Yahūd*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamid al-Fiḳī (Cairo: s. n., 1939); *Badhl al-majhūd fī ifhām al-Yahūd*, ed. 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ṭawīla (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam; Beirut: al-Dār al-Shāmiyya, 1989); *Badhl al-majhūd fī ifhām al-Yahūd wa-qīṣṣat al-islām al-mu'allif*, ed. Muḥammad Maḥmūd 'Abbās and Riyāḍ Muṣṭafā al-'Abd Allāh (Damascus: Dār al-Anwār, 1996); and *Ghāyat al-maqṣūd fī l-radd ‘alā l-Naṣārā wa-l-Yahūd*, ed. Imām Ḥanafī Sayyid 'Abd Allāh (Cairo: Dār al-Āfāq al-'Arabiyya, 2006).

(viii) Section on what they tell of Jesus; (ix) An account of the verses and allusions referring in the Torah to the prophethood of our master Muḥammad the Chosen; (x) The allusion to his name in the Torah; (xi) On the passage alluding to the prophethood of Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad; (xii) Refutation of their claim that God loves them; (xiii) Section devoted to some aspects of their unbelief and falsification; (xiv) Why the Torah was falsified; (xv) Section on what they think about the religion of Islam; (xvi) Section demonstrating some of their ignominy; (xvii) Account of the cause for their increasing the burden upon themselves.¹²²

As Perlmann points out, Jewish faith and religious practice are based on the twofold belief in the reliability of the Hebrew Bible as a record of God's salvific dealings with his people and in the permanent validity of the divine promises. The main polemical strategy of al-Samaw'al consists precisely in attacking these two premises by trying to show that the scriptures now possessed by the Jews are lacking from the point of view of their reliable transmission, and by establishing God's abrogation of previous religious dispositions.¹²³

6 Concluding Remarks

It is significant that, following mention in the introduction to the *Takhjil* of his efforts to collect the scriptures of the Jews and those of the Christians, al-Ja'farī felt the need to justify his action, for not only had the Muslim community not been commanded to study those books, but one famous companion had been explicitly forbidden by Muḥammad to do so.¹²⁴ Al-Ja'farī explains that what

122 That is, the burden of the precepts of the law, understood as a form of chastisement for the transgression and rebelliousness of the Jews.

123 Perlmann, introduction to *Silencing the Jews*, 20–24. Al-Samaw'al's arguments against the Hebrew Bible are also analyzed in Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 19–49. Both Perlmann and Lazarus-Yafeh observe that al-Samaw'al shows much affinity with Ibn Ḥazm's ideas, even if he also has original material. They may have used common sources independently, or there may have been a literary mediator between them yet to be identified.

124 See *Takhjil*, 101–104, where al-Ja'farī recalls that Muḥammad had reacted with displeasure when he saw one of his companions holding in his hands pages from the scriptures of the People of the Book. The prophet said, "I have brought you something white and pure!" The companion, whose name al-Ja'farī does not mention, is 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), who became the second caliph after Muḥammad's death. On this episode, see Goldziher, "Über muhammedanische Polemik," 345, and Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998), 15–16. Al-Qarāfī refers to this tradition in *Ajwiba*, 688 (412).

is not allowed, especially in the case of the inexperienced layman, is to study these scriptures as if they deserved exaltation and reverence and to take them literally, which can lead one astray. However, if the aim is to expose the corruption of their doctrine from their own books and uncover the predictions of Muḥammad which lie hidden in them, then, he concludes, examining these books is not only not forbidden, but it must be counted among the greatest acts of devotion that bring the believer closer to God.¹²⁵ Al-Ja'fari's words are illustrative of the attitude with which most Muslim polemicists approached the Jewish and Christian scriptures and, generally, any Christian writing (theological works, compendia of canon law, etc.). These were carefully mined for evidence to strengthen the already held conviction that the Christians and the Jews had purposely distorted their holy books and that Christianity in its current form had nothing to do with the religion preached by the Messiah.

A similar approach was followed by Christians writing in contexts in which Christianity was politically dominant, as can be seen in the letter of the Toledo priest to which al-Khazraji replied. This author had no qualms about discrediting the Qur'ān as being a book written by Muḥammad, which allows things that the Gospel forbids, such as polygamy and repudiation of the wife, and which contains obvious mistakes, as when it refers to Mary the mother of Jesus as daughter of 'Imrān and, in another passage, as sister of Aaron.¹²⁶ More polite, but no less disturbing, was Paul of Antioch's use of the Muslim scripture to uphold the very Christian doctrines that Muslims condemned as polytheism and irrationality.

From the above survey, it becomes clear that each community had its champions, individuals within their ranks to whom they could turn when facing a challenge. Al-Khazraji and al-Qurṭubī in Muslim Spain, and al-Ja'fari in Egypt, were clearly seen as such individuals to whom their co-religionists made explicit appeal. Al-Ṣafi ibn al-'Assāl likewise played the role of a *defensor fidei* of the Coptic community. Al-Qarāfi does not say that he was asked to write a rebuttal of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, but the preamble to his work suggests that he perceived it as his duty to do so. Unlike the jousting knights, however, who could only rely on their own strength and combat skills, our champions made use of a formidable wealth of existing literature, from which they culled

125 According to al-Ja'fari, the reason for Muḥammad's prohibition was that Islam was still in its infancy and the prophet might have feared that if the leaders of the Muslim community applied themselves to reading the distorted scriptures of Christians and Jews, Muslims would imitate them with the consequent danger of reverting to polytheism. For that reason, concludes al-Ja'fari, the prophet commanded 'Umar to occupy himself with the "white and pure" Qur'ān (*Takhjil*, 104–105).

126 *Maqāmi'* §§ 6–8.

their arguments and counter-arguments. Al-Ja'farī being definitely an exception (perhaps because he was not only a religious scholar but also a book-dealer and a *littérateur*), these scholars would seldom mention their sources. However, it would be unfair and anachronistic to judge them by present-day standards of scholarly writing and plagiarism. They did not see themselves as defending their own individual causes or promoting their literary careers, but as standing up for communally-held truth, which gave them license to appropriate and reproduce—sometimes to the letter—whichever convincing arguments they found in the writings of their co-religionists. Christian-Muslim polemics was definitely a collegial affair which resulted in the forming of scholarly networks connecting Muslim and Christian thinkers across distance and times.

What is interesting, and at the same time intriguing, is that none of these scholars seems to have harbored hopes that their writings would change the minds of their opponents. We have seen how al-Qurṭubī expressed his doubts that Christians would take advantage of the guidance offered them, and how al-Ṣafī also considered it very unlikely that the power of Christian truth would impact those who stubbornly opposed it and wished its destruction. This is a clear indication that this type of literature was written first and foremost for the members of one's own community, either to reassure them in the face of religious challenge, like the *Mudéjares* (Muslims living under Christian rule) in Toledo for whom al-Khazrajī wrote, to help them resist pressures to convert to the religion of the majority, as many Copts experienced in the thirteenth century, to strengthen one's co-religionists when adverse political circumstances appeared to shake long-held assumptions of superiority, or simply as a response to direct challenges by representatives of the opposing religious community.¹²⁷

127 For example, al-Qarāfi's later contemporary, Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfi, explicitly states in the first of his two books written in response to a contemporary Christian refutation of Islam that his main goal was to protect the weak among his co-religionists: "I have noticed that a certain Christian has compiled a book in which he attacks the religion of Islam and by which he impugns the prophethood of Muḥammad, peace be upon him. This fills with doubt the weak in faith, who lack the ability to draw distinctions. Therefore, I have resolved to refute him and to direct against him the proofs that will undermine his words" (*Muslim Exegesis of the Bible in Medieval Cairo: Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfi's* (d. 716/1316) *Commentary on the Christian Scriptures*, ed. and trans. Lejla Demiri [Leiden: Brill, 2013], 97). See a similar statement by al-Qarāfi in *Ajwiba*, 689 (412–413). The Christian refutation to which al-Ṭūfi responded was attributed by another Muslim author (Ghāzī ibn al-Wāsiṭī, d. 712/1312) to the aforementioned al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl. It seems to have been widely known and the subject of fierce criticism by Muslim scholars. See Lejla Demiri "Al-sayf al-murhaf fi l-radd 'alā l-Muṣḥaf," in *CMR*4, 662–665.

It is important to comprehend a point that can easily escape the modern reader living in a secularized society: that at stake were not simply particular religious doctrines, but religion itself understood as a communal way of life. Something that might also appear foreign to the modern mind is the connection between religious truth and political dominance that medieval Christian and Muslim writers often assume. Thus, it is not coincidental that Toledo and Cairo were at the origin of so much polemical literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries respectively, precisely at a time when each city became the center of a campaign of territorial and religious expansion: the Christian *reconquista* of Muslim Spain and the Ayyūbid restoration (and Mamlūk consolidation) of Sunnism in Egypt

Al-Qarāfi's Reply to the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*

In the pages that follow I explore the first chapter of the *Ajwiba*, which in some sense can be said to be the most original part of the entire composition. In it, al-Qarāfi exerts himself to refute the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* systematically. He adapts the classical arguments of Muslim anti-Christian polemic to the particular points made in the letter, and formulates his own replies when he cannot find ready-made answers. Here al-Qarāfi shows a high degree of ingenuity and dialectical skill. More importantly, he reveals a willingness to engage his interlocutor which contrasts with Ibn Taymiyya's attitude towards the *Letter from Cyprus*, which the latter used primarily as an opportunity to diagnose the religious decadence of the Muslim community of his time, as was said earlier.¹ While al-Qarāfi might have shared with Ibn Taymiyya the already formed conviction that Christians were wrong, one senses nevertheless a determination not to leave unanswered any claim of this particular Christian apology which, everything leads us to think, was becoming popular in the Cairene inter-confessional milieu. And yet, despite this willingness, it becomes immediately apparent as soon as one begins to read al-Qarāfi that he and Paul of Antioch are talking past one another since they are starting from very different theological points of departure. In order to highlight this fact, the first chapter of al-Qarāfi's refutation will be examined here in terms of three main areas of concern in monotheistic discourse: first, theology of religions, or the believer's understanding of religious history; second, theology of the word of God, or theological reflection on God's acts of revelation; and third, theology of divinity, or human discourse about God's nature and attributes. However, before looking at the particular points into which al-Qarāfi breaks down the contents of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, attention needs to be given to the overtly polemical opening pages which set the tone for the chapter, and indeed

1 See above, chapter 2, section 4. David Thomas writes in this regard, "The contents of the *Letter [from Cyprus]* have no appeal at all for Ibn Taymiyya. He approaches it with the strong conviction—already formed—that all Christians are wrong, and his purpose in composing this reply is both to show this on the basis of what the Cypriot author has written, and also to widen it out to include those within Islam who have departed from the truth in the same way as Christians. With this as his stated position, it is no surprise that he is not open to what the *Letter* might be trying to say, or that he does not respond to it in any constructive manner" (Thomas, "Christian-Muslim Misunderstanding," 22).

for the entire composition. This introductory section reveals theological predispositions that will hinder the possibility of meaningful dialogue.

1 A Blind Nation and an Ignorant Sect

Al-Qarāfi begins by explaining why his replies will be short and to the point. Simply put, the reason is that Christians are “a blind nation and an ignorant sect, which servile conformism has overcome.”² They neither investigate the truth of what their bishops teach them nor reflect on what their strongmen authorize in their religion. Were it not because of this lack of interest, the Christian religion would have long disappeared, its corruption having been exposed. To substantiate this harsh judgment, al-Qarāfi goes on to give various examples of the state of heedlessness in which Christians live. It is important to note that, while some examples concern religious beliefs and cultic practices, others have to do with wider societal issues, such as the administration of justice and the treatment of confessional minorities. Al-Qarāfi's objective is to show that when a people abandon the prophetic guidance they have received, not only is true religion replaced with trickeries and deceptions, but the entire edifice of communal life becomes irrational and foolish. This confirms, as said earlier, that in medieval Christian-Muslim polemics, particularly from the Muslim perspective, not merely was a dispute of doctrinal issues at play, but religion as the basis of human civilization.³

Al-Qarāfi's first example of Christian negligence is that, as their own historians report, their notables gathered in Constantinople and Alexandria ten

² *Ajwiba*, 130 (53).

³ On this important point, see Mohammed Arkoun's study of Abū l-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī's (d. 381/992) philosophical defense of Islam, which he takes as representative of classical Islamic thought. Arkoun speaks of a function “à la fois civilisatrice... et salvatrice” of the Islamic creed in the work of al-ʿĀmirī, “un message divin *déjà lie à une réalisation historique*: celle de la civilisation et de la culture dites islamiques. Les œuvres de cette civilisation et de cette culture sont interprétées et vécues comme l'expansion de la vérité de l'Islam. La fécondité, l'efficacité, le dynamisme des œuvres sont autant de *signes* de la supériorité de la religion enseignée par le Coran et Muḥammad. Inversement, une telle religion est la source, le cadre indispensable à toute réalisation historique exemplaire, assurant simultanément le salut terrestre et supraterrrestre de l'homme” (M. Arkoun, “Logocentrisme et vérité religieuse dans la pensée islamique d'après *al-Iʿlām bi-Manāqib al-Islām* d'al-ʿĀmirī,” *Studia Islamica* 35 [1972], 48). See also Charfi, “La fonction historique de la polémique,” 55–56.

times to decide what the truth should be.⁴ Each time they reached a consensus, they denied it after a while, and established a new version of the truth, declaring those who opposed it heretics. “They were following the evil suggestions of the bishops,” al-Qarāfi asserts, “not the prophetic messages from their Lord.”⁵ The issue comes back in greater detail in a later section of the *Ajwiba* devoted to exposing the corruption of the Christian creed. Al-Qarāfi explains how it came to be adopted at Nicaea. Arius had caused much uproar by declaring Christ to be a creature. Constantine convened a council in which Alexander, the Patriarch of Alexandria, vehemently opposed Arius. Surprised by the level of discord, the emperor requested the bishops to agree on a formula, which was eventually adopted after endless discussions and multiple modifications. This creed, he claims, was based neither on the Gospel nor on the words of the disciples.⁶

Al-Qarāfi’s second example is an interesting reference to the Holy Week attacks on the Jewish quarters that took place in many cities of the Iberian Peninsula, southern France, and Italy during the Middle Ages, and which have been analyzed in depth by David Nirenberg.⁷ For this scholar, who follows the view of Mark Cohen, al-Qarāfi used this annual event to draw an unfavorable

4 *Ajwiba*, 131 (54). Al-Qarāfi mentions in particular the Christian author of the *Tārīkh*, in clear reference to the Melkite author Saʿīd ibn Baṭrīq (d. 328/940), also known as Eutychius of Alexandria, whose historiographical treatise *Kitāb al-tārīkh al-majmūʿ ʿalā l-taḥqīq wa-l-taṣdīq* (‘The Book of History Compiled through Investigation and Verification’) became an important source of information on Christian history and Christian inter-confessional rivalries for many Muslim scholars.

5 *Ajwiba*, 132 (54). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 52.

6 *Ajwiba*, 511–517 (308). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 141. The narrative is taken from al-Jaʿfarī (*Takhjīl*, 499–503). Muslim controversialists had long been aware that some of the conciliar formulae over which Christians argued among themselves were not to be found *verbatim* in the Scriptures and exploited this fact polemically. See, for instance, Sidney H. Griffith, “Muslims and Church Councils: The Apology of Theodore Abū Qurrah,” *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993): 270–299. For Eutychius’s account of the Arian controversy and the convocation of the first ecumenical council, see *Eutichio, Patriarca di Alessandria: Gli Annali*, trans. Bartolomeo Pirone (Cairo: Franciscan Centre of Christian Oriental Studies, 1987), 195–197.

7 David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 200–230. Against those who see these episodes as emblematic of a transition from tolerance to intolerance in Europe, Nirenberg stresses the annual, customary, and quasi-liturgical character of the Holy Week riots, which represented, paradoxically, “a violent ritual paradigm for Christian toleration of Jews” (p. 201).

comparison of Christian violence against minorities with Muslim tolerance.⁸ Although such a comparison may be implicitly present, al-Qarāfī's main purpose is to show the absurdity that results from replacing prophetic guidance with human opinion, particularly the whims of bishops who seek only to perpetuate their positions of privilege:

In all the lands of the Christians—such as Barcelona, Tarragona, Marseilles, and Florence—and in all the cities of the Franks, they have three days in the year that are known when the bishops say to the populace: 'The Jews have stolen your religion,' referring to the Jews who live with them in their lands.⁹ Upon which the populace and all the people of the city together rush about in search of Jews, and when they find one, they kill him, and pillage any house they are able to break into. The Jews, who know these days, barricade themselves in their houses and get ready for them. When these days are over, the main bishop goes out to the outskirts of the town, enters into a crypt and remains there for an hour. He then comes out with a magnificent box, covered in jewels and perfume, which, according to them, contains their religion. He tells them, 'Free the Jews. I have found your religion!' They then let the Jews go and live with them amicably until the same dates come around and the situation repeats itself. This is something on which the Franks agree. They never disapprove of it.¹⁰

A third example of Christian folly in al-Qarāfī's eyes is the type of justice they impart in Acre, the capital of the crusader kingdom, describing in detail a case of trial by combat in which a person accused of homicide confronts his accuser. "They are convinced," he observes in astonishment, "that the one who is defeated is always the wrong-doer and that the victor is the one who says

8 Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 191.

9 Nirenberg speculates whether the accusation "The Jews have stolen your religion" could be a reference to the story of Jacob and Esau in the Book of Genesis. Yet, as it becomes apparent in al-Qarāfī's account, the reference is to the Eucharistic Host, allegedly stolen by the Jews.

10 *Ajwiba*, 133–134 (55–56). It has been suggested that al-Qarāfī could have derived this material from an Arabic anti-Christian work originally composed within the Mudejar milieu. See P.S. van Koningsveld and Gerard A. Wiegers, "The Polemical Works of Muḥammad al-Qaysī (fl. 1309) and their Circulation in Arabic and Aljamiado among the Mudejars in the Fourteenth Century," *Al-Qanṭara* 15 (1994), 197.

the truth.”¹¹ Furthermore, the individual who loses is forced to confess his sins to a monk before they put him to death. For al-Qarāfī, this is a glaring example of the lack of intelligence of this people and another proof that they have founded their religion on their own opinions, since such sentences have no basis in the Torah or in the Gospel.¹²

The bishops and the practice of excommunication are the target of the next attack. When an individual does not agree with the opinion of a bishop, the latter excommunicates him, explains al-Qarāfī. This means that he has incurred God’s wrath and people are obliged to shun him. Those excommunicated are told that if they persist in their situation they will lose God’s blessing, their animals will perish and their sustenance be lost, and that if they die in this state they will suffer eternal punishment. “They imagine that their bishops can dispose of human beings on earth as if they were God,” writes al-Qarāfī, “and that happiness and misfortune is in their hands, when in reality their bishops are of little worth.”¹³ He then goes on to describe the Christian bishops as individuals who spend their lives accepting bribes and eating forbidden things, not interested in the cultivation of virtues or in the pursuit of science. They and those who follow them live as in a dream, but one day—Judgment Day—they will wake up to find themselves among the losers. Al-Qarāfī’s strong diatribe against the bishops echoes Ibn Ḥazm’s harsh attack against the rabbis, and understandably so, as both groups play a similar role in their respective polemics: they are responsible for the introduction and perpetuation of corrupted beliefs and practices. They think themselves higher than God and the prophets.¹⁴

11 *Ajwiba*, 135 (57). Al-Qarāfī’s amazement echoes the remarks of Usāma ibn Munqidh (d. 584/1188), who relates in his memoirs two cases of Frankish justice. The first is precisely a judicial duel between two Franks of Nāblus in the presence of the lord of the city. The gruesome combat ends with the death of one of the two contestants, whose corpse is then dragged away and hanged, leading Usāma to comment: “This case illustrates the kind of jurisprudence and legal decisions the Franks have—may Allah’s curse be upon them!” The second case is an ordeal by water which ends with a young man having his eyes pierced with red-hot awls. See Philip K. Hitti, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usāmah ibn-Munqidh* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 167–169.

12 Al-Qarāfī refers again to the trials by combat held in Acre in *Ajwiba*, 588 (346). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 147.

13 *Ajwiba*, 137 (161). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 148. Compare with Q 9:31: “They have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords apart from God.”

14 See Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 102–103. If al-Qarāfī knew that the author of the *Letter to a*

Al-Qarāfī's final example is a commonplace of Muslim polemical literature, namely, the false miracles with which monks and priests deceive gullible Christians, artificially keeping alive a religion which would not be able to survive on the strength of its truth claims. These ruses have been invented by shrewd Christians who, knowing that their religion lacked a basis, filled the minds of the populace with fabricated delusions placed in churches and sanctuaries, such as stone images that shed tears or produce breast-milk when the Gospel is recited; statues, lamps, and crosses of iron suspended in the air without anything touching them; the annual descent of the 'Holy Fire' in the Church of the Anastasis in Jerusalem; and the hand of God that appears in a certain church on a fixed day of the year.¹⁵ In each case, al-Qarāfī provides an explanation of the false miracle. However, more important than exposing the trick—for instance, the iron statue which remained suspended in the air thanks to six magnetic stones hidden in the walls of a Christian sanctuary—is to point out that this scam was happening in Constantinople, "the capital of their kingdom and the place where their notables and scholars gather," that is, under the very eyes of the people who were supposed to watch for the integrity of the Christian religion.¹⁶ There is no need for further examples, he

Muslim Friend was a bishop, he would not have failed to point it out at this point. But he does not, reinforcing the suspicion that he had access to a shortened version of Paul of Antioch's apology.

- 15 *Ajwiba*, 138–144 (61–65). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 145–146. We saw earlier that al-Khazrajī's *Maqāmi'* contains a section on false miracles in response to the claim by the Toledo priest that saintly people among the Christians continue to perform miracles. Al-Qurṭubī and al-Ja'farī, who are direct sources of al-Qarāfī, reproduce most of this material. The latter, however, must have had other sources, as some details in his account differ from al-Khazrajī's. A possible source is the Syrian 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Jawbarī (fl. first half of thirteenth century), author of *al-Mukhtār fī kashf al-asrār wa-hatḥ al-astār fī 'ilm al-ḥiyāl* ('The Selection on the Disclosing of the Secrets and Stripping of the Veils Concerning the Knowledge of Tricks'), which is a compendium of ruses used by fake Sufis, fraudulent alchemists, beggars, quacks, and other charlatans, and includes a chapter on Christian monks. See French trans. René R. Khawam, *Le voile arraché: L'autre visage de l'Islam*, vol. 1 (Paris: Phébus, 1979), 103–114. For Eutychius's account of an image of the Virgin Mary from whose breast milk flowed on her feast day and the outrage of the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus (r. 829–843) when he discovered the fraud, see *Gli Annali*, 409–411. On Muslim reactions to the 'miracle' of the Holy Fire, see Marius Canard, "La destruction de l'Église de la Résurrection par le Calife Hakim et la descente du feu sacré," *Byzantion* 35 (1965): 16–43; and Jan M.F. Van Reeth, "Al-Qumāma et le Qā'im de 400 H.: le trucage de la lampe sur le tombeau du Christ," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras 2*, ed. U. Vermeulen and D. de Smet (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 171–190.

- 16 *Ajwiba*, 140 (64).

concludes, as it is obvious that Christians have not been gifted with a penetrating intelligence:

Thus, I did not feel the need to extend my conversation with them, because talking to the beasts is foolishness. On the contrary, I have limited myself to explain the mistakes of the person who speaks through this letter, and to reply to it with questions and with texts extracted from their scriptures, hoping that God will make it a warning for some of the heedless, so that they will wake up and realize their repugnant offences.¹⁷

Al-Qarāfi ends these introductory pages by recalling a public debate which he held with a prominent Christian.¹⁸ He did not request him to prove the truth of Christianity, but simply to form a mental concept of a God who is one substance and three hypostases. His interlocutor replied that Christ had only asked his followers to believe, thus confirming their indolence and lack of reflection on the truth of what they follow. “Contemplate this people incapable of conceiving a mental concept of their religion, let alone of proving it,” al-Qarāfi asks his Muslim readers. “How could it be fitting for an intelligent person to judge them worthy of conversation?”¹⁹ In other words, Christians are beyond reform and nothing can be done to undo the religious corruption in which they live. Some individuals at the most will be able to benefit from the guidance which al-Qarāfi is about to offer. Why the effort then? We need to keep in mind that the main goal of writing the *Ajwiba* was not to convince Christians, but to reassure Muslims who might feel disturbed by the apparent plausibility of some arguments advanced in the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* and to provide them with a stock of ready answers and counterarguments.

2 Theology of Religions: Faith among Faiths

As noted above, al-Qarāfi divides the contents of the Christian letter into fifteen arguments most of which are directly related to or involve interpretation of the Qur’ān. His principal concern is to discredit this qur’ānic-based defense

¹⁷ *Ajwiba*, 145 (66).

¹⁸ The episode has already been discussed above, chapter 1, section 4.

¹⁹ *Ajwiba*, 147–148 (68). Al-Qarāfi’s depiction of Christians as unintelligent beasts and similarly offensive epithets which he uses elsewhere in the *Ajwiba* must be read within the historical context and the literary genre. Applying present-day standards of scholarly writing and dialogical sensibilities is anachronistic.

of Christianity by offering Islam-acceptable alternative readings of the passages quoted and by drawing attention to other passages that contradict the letter's interpretation. If we examine the subject matter of the arguments themselves, it is possible to classify them according to three broad areas of theological discourse: theology of religions, theology of the word of God, and theology of divinity.

Theology of religions is the term used in contemporary Christian theology to refer to theological reflection on the relationship between Christianity and other religions. Simply put, it is the effort to make sense, theologically speaking, of the fact that religions are many and different. Its most basic question is whether this religious diversity is merely a *de facto* plurality, consequence of the diversity of human cultures and world-views, or a *de iure* plurality, intended by God as part of an overarching salvific design. In the latter case, the theologian needs to explain the relationship between the truth-claims of other traditions and the definitiveness traditionally accorded to Christ. In this sense, although the term is recent, the question is as old as Christianity itself, which, from its very inception, had to confront the question of its relationship with the Jewish matrix from which it emerged, and with the plurality of religions, philosophies, and cults that it found in the Roman and Hellenic world.

The arrival of Islam in the seventh century posed a new formidable challenge, even though the first Christian intellectuals who took notice of it might not have taken it too seriously, as yet another heresy of Christianity.²⁰ However, it did not take long before Christian thinkers, particularly those living in contact with an increasingly self-assertive Islam, were forced to integrate the new religion into their own theological thinking, especially since Muslims were developing their own version of the religious history of humankind, in which Jesus played a significantly different role from that accorded to him in Christianity. In fact, the entire *Letter to a Muslim Friend* can be said to be a Christian theology of religions devoted to explaining the relationship between Islam and Christianity.²¹ Strictly speaking, three of the fifteen arguments—

20 See Griffith, "The Melkites and the Muslims," 417–422.

21 Indeed, as Griffith has clearly shown, a preoccupation with the response to the religious challenge of Islam is one of the twin intellectual concerns that characterize the Melkites, the other one being the articulation and defense of Byzantine, conciliar orthodoxy against the objections of their Christian adversaries in the Caliphate. In addition to the reference cited above in note 14 to chapter 2, see also, by the same author, "The Church of Jerusalem and the 'Melkites': The Making of an 'Arab Orthodox' Christian Identity in the World of Islam (750–1050 CE)," in *Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land: From the Origins to the Latin Kingdoms*, ed. O. Limor and G. Stroumsa (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 176–204; idem, "Theology and the Arab Christian: the Case of the 'Melkite' Creed," in *A Faithful*

the first, the tenth, and the last—deal with the main questions of a Christian theology of Islam: the prophetic status of Muḥammad and the relationship between the Gospel law of grace and Muḥammad's dispensation. It is no surprise that these two questions come up at the beginning and at the end of Paul of Antioch's letter, the tenth argument being but a corollary of the first point, as we shall see.

2.1 *Muḥammad: A Prophet for the Pagan Arabs*

The *Letter to a Muslim Friend* opens with the crucial question of Muḥammad's claim to prophethood, upon which the very credibility of Islam rests. It is not difficult to find examples of Christian polemicists who found no easier way of denigrating Islam (and at the same time avoiding its theological challenge) than portraying the Arab prophet as a scoundrel who was “variously shown to be a pervert, drunkard, epileptic, magician, heretic, swindler, murderer, Machiavellian political schemer, and intimate of Satan.”²² In contrast, Paul of Antioch chose to acknowledge a divine initiative in the sending of Muḥammad, thus opening up the possibility of an exchange of theological ideas.²³ Nonetheless, accepting the genuineness of Muḥammad's mission required explaining why Christians did not feel compelled to adopt the religion that he preached, especially after the proclamation in *sūrat āl Imrān* (3):85 that “Whoever wants a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him; in the hereafter he will be among the losers.”

It is a moot point whether this was only a calculated concession in order to use the Qurʾān in defense of Christianity (for what would be the point of arguing from the book of a false prophet?), or a genuine acceptance of

Presence: Essays for Kenneth Cragg, ed. D. Thomas with C. Amos (London: Melisende, 2003), 184–200; idem, “‘Melkites,’ ‘Jacobites’ and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria,” in *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. D. Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 9–55; and idem, “What Has Constantinople to Do with Jerusalem? Palestine in the Ninth Century: Byzantine Orthodoxy in the World of Islam,” in *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?*, ed. L. Brubaker (Aldershot: Variorum, 1998), 181–194.

22 John V. Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims through European Eyes in the Middle Ages* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 19.

23 Although Paul of Antioch never says explicitly that Muḥammad was actually sent by God, this seems to be implied in his words, “he was not sent to us, but to the pagan Arabs” (§ 7, *lam yursal ilaynā bal ilā l-jāhiliyya min al-ʿArab*). As Thomas observes, in his conscious choice of the verb *arsala*, repeatedly used in the Qurʾān in connection with the sending of prophets and messengers, Paul appears “if indirectly, to be according a measure of validity to Muḥammad's status” (Thomas, “Paul of Antioch's *Letter*,” 208).

Muḥammad's religious role. It is difficult to ascertain Paul of Antioch's true intentions. The fact is that, as it reached its Muslim respondents, the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* appeared to contain an acknowledgment of the prophet of Islam as a messenger sent by God, but with an important caveat: his mission was limited to the pagan Arabs, to whom he brought knowledge of the one true God. This nuanced acknowledgment did not correspond with the Muslim view of Muḥammad, but at least did not preclude the debate by portraying him as part of a satanic ploy. Moreover, it was not mere conjecture, but an assertion based on a plausible reading of several verses of the Qur'ān which stressed the Arabic character of his proclamation and that he was the first messenger raised up from among his people. After listing these passages,²⁴ the Melkite Bishop of Sidon had summarized his argument as follows:

When we considered [these quotations], we knew that he was not sent to us, but to the pagan Arabs, to whom, he said, no one had come to give a warning before him. We are not bound to follow him because messengers (*rusul*) have already come to us before him, addressing us in our own languages. They warned us and they handed over to us the Torah and the Gospel in our own vernacular languages. It is clear from the book [i.e., the Qur'ān] that he was sent only to the pagan Arabs. So, according to the demand of justice, the quotation, 'Whoever wants a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him; in the hereafter he will be among the losers,' would mean, [the book's] own people, to whom it came in their own vernacular language, and not anyone to whom it did not come—and this according to its own testimony.²⁵

The argument here is that, unlike the pagan Arabs of Muḥammad's time, Christians had already received messengers who proclaimed the good news about Christ in their own languages and who handed over to them the Gospel and the Torah in their languages, and not that these scriptures were *revealed* in those vernacular languages.²⁶ That the Melkite writer was referring to Christ's

24 They are found in *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 6 and are reproduced in *Ajwiba*, 148–149 (68).

25 *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 7.

26 In this respect, Paul of Antioch is heir to a long apologetic tradition, going back at least to Theodore Abū Qurra. See Sidney H. Griffith, "The Gospel in Arabic: An Inquiry into its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century," *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985), 165. Likewise, the ninth-century Jewish philosopher, Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ, argued that one condition for accepting a prophet is that news concerning him must have been handed

Apostles with the word “messengers” in the above paragraph is clear from a later passage in his letter, not quoted in the *Ajwiba*:

As for those who are extolled in the Qurʾān and who are venerated in its statement, ‘We have sent our messengers (*rusul*) with clear signs and with The Book . . . , so that people might stand up for fairness’ (Q 57:25), it means [Christ’s] messengers, the Apostles. For had it meant Abraham, Moses, David, or Muḥammad, it would have said, ‘and the books with them;’ it would not have said, ‘The Book,’ which is the Gospel. It also says in the Qurʾān, ‘A man in a hurry has come from the furthestmost part of the city. He said, O People, follow the messengers who have been sent; follow those who do not ask for a wage, the rightly guided ones’ (Q 36:20–21). It means the Apostles, for it did not say, ‘the messenger.’²⁷

Al-Qarāfī, however, takes “messengers” according to the Islamic usage of the term to refer to those prophets who had been charged by God to deliver a legislation to their people, a definition which included Moses and Jesus but not the Apostles.²⁸ Thus, in his reply, he points out that Torah and the Gospel were sent down in Hebrew and Greek respectively, and that, according to his opponent’s logic, Copts and Ethiopians are wrong for having followed these books.²⁹ This misunderstanding is another indication that al-Qarāfī did not have access to the original *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, for he would have at once corrected Paul of Antioch’s reading of the word “messengers” in the Qurʾān, just as he disputes other interpretations advanced in the letter.

down by different nations and in different languages, so as to eliminate the possibility of collusion. He then points out that the Torah has been transmitted in Syriac, Greek, Persian, and Arabic, apart from the original Hebrew. The non-stated conclusion is that Muḥammad’s book does not satisfy the condition. For Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), however, it is the stylistic perfection of the Qurʾān and hence its miraculous nature that made its translation impossible, in contrasts to other scriptures (see Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 163–164, 170).

27 *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 13.

28 For al-Qarāfī’s distinction between messengers (*rusul*, sing. *rasūl*) and prophets (*anbiyāʾ*, sing. *nabī*) see his *al-Iḥkām fī tamyiz al-fatāwā ‘an al-aḥkām wa-taṣarrufāt al-qāḍī wa-l-imām*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1995), 103–105; and his *Kitāb al-furūq: anwār al-burūq fī anwāʾ al-furūq*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Sarraj and ‘Alī Jum’a Muḥammad (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2001), 667–668.

29 *Ajwiba*, 151–152 (71–72).

Still, Paul of Antioch's carefully selected qur'ānic quotations demanded a clarification on the part of al-Qarāfī.³⁰ For, did not the Qur'ān clearly say that Muḥammad had been sent to his nearest of kin (Q 26:214), the people of Mecca and the surrounding areas (Q 42:7), with a proclamation sent down in Arabic (Q 12:2) for a people whose fathers had not been warned before (Q 36:6)? In addition, was it not God's custom to send messengers speaking the language of their people (Q 14:4)? In reply, al-Qarāfī explains that God's acting in this way is to facilitate the communication between the people and the messenger, who is thereby able to understand their objections, reply to their doubts, and eliminate any excuse. However, once the messenger has been accepted by his own people, who are better informed about his circumstances and the arguments of those who opposed him, the authenticity of his mission becomes established for all peoples. "This is the wisdom of sending a messenger who speaks the language of his people and is taken from among them," concludes al-Qarāfī. "The aim is not that he should not transmit his message to others than his people."³¹ Moreover, this Christian does not understand the plain meaning of *sūrat Ibrāhīm* (14):4, which says, "We have never sent a messenger except in the language of his people," and not, 'We have never sent a messenger except to his people.' Only the latter would justify his claim.

More interesting perhaps is al-Qarāfī's claim that if Christians admit that Muḥammad was a messenger sent by God to his own people, then they must admit that he was sent to all human beings. According to Islamic distinctive prophetology, God's messengers, "who are the elite of God's creation and the best among his servants," as al-Qarāfī reminds his readers, are not only truthful and virtuous people, but are protected from error and therefore are incapable of contradicting themselves.³² It is well known that Muḥammad combatted the Jews once he lost any hope in the utility of his proclamation, as it is known that he wrote to the Christian rulers of neighboring nations warning them.³³

30 In fact, the concept of the 'Arab prophets' (Hūd, Shu'ayb, Ṣāliḥ, and Muḥammad) as found in *ḥadīth* literature, Qur'ān exegesis, and other genres of Islamic scholarship stimulated much debate among Muslims concerning precisely the issues raised by Paul of Antioch. See a survey of these discussions, with parallels from other religious traditions, in Brannon M. Wheeler, "Arab Prophets of the Qur'an and Bible," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2006), 24–31.

31 *Ajwiba*, 150 (70). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 133.

32 *Ajwiba*, 152 (72). See "Impeccability," in *EQ*, s.v. (Paul E. Walker).

33 See Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 132. The authenticity of these letters has been subject to controversy. According to Muslim tradition, they were sent to the Byzantine Emperor, the Negus of Abyssinia, and the Governor of Alexandria, among others. See Suleiman A. Mourad, "Christians and Christianity in the *Sīra* of Muḥammad," in *CMRI*, 57–71. For

Such actions, which cannot be taken to be mistakes on the part of Muḥammad, given his protection from error, prove necessarily the universal scope of his prophetic charge. Moreover, al-Qarāfi points out, the Qurʾān explicitly proclaims this universality where it says, ‘We have sent you as a bearer of glad news and a warner to the whole of humankind’ (Q 34:28), a passage which had been conveniently ignored by Paul of Antioch.³⁴

Al-Qarāfi goes on to show that other Qurʾānic statements cited in the Christian letter do not have the restrictive meaning that its author had fallaciously ascribed to them. For instance, when God says in *sūrat yā’ sīn* (36):6, “You shall warn people whose fathers had not been warned,” the intention is to call attention to God’s favor toward the Arabs, who are thus mentioned as the first recipients of Muḥammad’s message. Whenever God’s purpose is to warn Christians and Jews, they are mentioned in the verses that concern them. Any discourse refers to the particular persons or objects that the speaker has in mind: “Not even the most ignorant person can be convinced that predicating something of Zayd requires negating it for ‘Umar!”³⁵

In short, concludes al-Qarāfi, the attempt to restrict his prophetic mission contradicts Muḥammad’s self-understanding and the experience of his contemporaries, supporters and detractors alike, and it contradicts the consistent understanding of these Qurʾānic verses in the history of Muslim exegesis. Moreover, these verses are written in Arabic and Arabs are therefore the most qualified to understand them:

These expressions belong to our language and we know them better than others. Muḥammad, God bless him and grant him salvation, who pronounced them, did not understand by it the particularization of his role as messenger, nor was this his will, but he rather warned the Byzantines, the Persians, and all the other nations. Neither did the Arabs understand such particularization, nor did Muḥammad’s enemies among

Muḥammad’s relations with the Jews, see Rizwi S. Faizer, “Muhammad and the Medinan Jews: A Comparison of the Texts of Ibn Ishaq’s *Kitāb sirat rasūl Allāh* with al-Waqidi’s *Kitāb al-maghāzī*,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (1996): 463–489, and Michael Lecker, “The Ḥudaybiyya-Treaty and the Expedition against *Khaybar*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984): 1–11.

34 The same arguments are addressed in the third chapter of the *Ajwiba* to those Jews who, like Paul of Antioch, restricted Muḥammad’s prophethood to the pagan Arabs of his time. In this passage, al-Qarāfi further quotes two sayings of Muḥammad where he states having been sent “to the red and to the black,” and to both humans and jinns. See *Ajwiba*, 633 (374–375).

35 *Ajwiba*, 156 (75).

his contemporaries allege such a thing or understand it in that sense, for otherwise they would have used it as an argument against him; nor have we understood it so. If this is the case, then nobody has understood such a thing except this Christian, who was hard of hearing and of understanding, and thus gave the wrong responses.³⁶

Paul of Antioch's conclusion that Christians should not jettison their tradition to follow a prophet who was not sent to them is repeated later in the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, after having quoted additional qur'ānic support for Christian doctrine and practice.³⁷ In reply, al-Qarāfī reiterates his earlier rejoinder:

If Muḥammad, on whom be peace, was not sent to them, I wish I knew who wrote to the Emperor Heraclius, King of the Byzantines, and to Muqawqas, Emir of the Copts, inviting them to embrace Islam! If he had not been sent to them, the sword would have not been raised against Christianity for six hundred years until today.³⁸

This remark is congruent with al-Qarāfī's views on *jihād* as expressed elsewhere in his juridical works.³⁹ As Muhammad Fadel has observed, al-Qarāfī considered *jihād* to be a specific instance of the general qur'ānic obligation to command the good and forbid the evil. "And because there was no greater evil (*mafsada*) than theological error, it was the obligation of Muslims to remove this evil whenever they were reasonably capable of doing so."⁴⁰ The fact that Islamic law protected non-Muslims living under Muslim rule despite their persistence in unbelief was seen by the Mālikī jurist as an act of God's mercy.

36 *Ajwiba*, 157–158 (75–76).

37 *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 24, summarized in *Ajwiba* (236 [135]) as follows: "It is not part of God's justice, may He be exalted, to demand of us that we follow a messenger whom He has not sent to us and whose Book we are unacquainted with in our own language."

38 *Ajwiba*, 236 (135).

39 Al-Qarāfī's theory of *jihād* is briefly explored in Mohammad Fadel, "No Salvation Outside Islam: Muslim Modernists, Democratic Politics, and Islamic Theological Exclusivism," in *Between Heaven and Hell: Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others*, ed. M.H. Khalil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 40–42, 57. See al-Qarāfī's original discussion in *al-Dhakhīra* (ed. Ḥajjī and Bū-Khubza, 1994), 3:385–386; and *Kitāb al-furūq* (ed. Sarraj and Muḥammad, 2001), 1262–1266.

40 Fadel, "No Salvation Outside Islam," 41. This is also consistent with al-Qarāfī's statement in *Ajwiba*, 163 [82] to the effect that Muḥammad commanded armed *jihād* against theological error—in this case, the affirmation of Jesus' divinity—and that his example was followed by his companions and other virtuous Muslims who succeeded them.

2.2 *The Law of Justice and the Law of Grace*

Paul of Antioch's second important claim from the viewpoint of theology of religions is developed in the closing paragraphs of his letter-treatise. It is summarized in the *Ajwiba* in a paragraph that explains the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the Law of the Gospel, and the necessity of the Incarnation:

God, be He praised and exalted, owns justice and grace and He disposes freely of both of them. He sent Moses, on whom be peace, with the religion of justice, due to the severity in it, and when it was well established in their souls, there remained the perfection that only the most perfect of the perfect could bring about, namely, God, may He be exalted. Because He is bountiful, it was necessary that He exercise His bountifulness through the most grace-filled of beings, and among the existing beings there is none more grace-filled than His word, that is, His *nutq*. So He exercised His bountifulness by means of it, it having united with the most grace-filled of perceptible beings, namely, man, that His power might become evident. And so the result was the ultimate of perfection, and beyond perfection there remains only diminution.⁴¹

The above paragraph includes a tightly packed sequence of argumentative steps that need to be spelled out. It begins with the axiomatic claim that there are only two types of religious laws (*sharī'a*, in the general sense of religious dispensation): the law of justice and the law of grace. Both are expressions of God's own justice and grace, which he uses according to his sovereign will. God's justice (*'adl*) was manifested in the Mosaic Law. Because of their rebelliousness, the Children of Israel had to be treated with severity.⁴² This was not, however, God's last word to humanity. Because God is bountiful, he could not fail to give the best thing he can give, namely, his grace (*fadl*, in the sense of God's graciousness and unmerited favor). This perfection which is God's grace transcends any human mediation and could only be instituted by the most

41 *Ajwiba*, 274 (153–154), summarizing *Letter to a Muslim Friend* §§ 59–62. See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 135.

42 That many Mosaic laws were imposed by God as punishment to the Israelites for their stubbornness and rebellion is an ancient Christian interpretation which is also echoed in the Qur'ān (4:160; 6:146; 7:157). Muslim versions of this polemical motif generally stress the more humane character of the Qur'ānic legislation in comparison to the excessively arduous duties of the Torah. See Brannon M. Wheeler, "Israel and the Torah of Muḥammad," in *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. J.C. Reeves (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 61–85; and Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 193–197.

graceful of existent beings, which is God's word, his reason or logos (*nutq*, a term about which more will be said below). God's word needed to assume a created essence in order to manifest itself in the phenomenal world. So it united with the most grace-filled of perceptible beings, which is the human being. The perfection of God's revelation having thus occurred, nothing can come after it that will be superior, for nothing can be above perfection itself.⁴³

With this argumentation, the Melkite Bishop of Sidon shows himself once more to be thoroughly familiar with earlier Arab Christian writings. Variants of this argument had been used by writers both within his ecclesiastical tradition and beyond it. Perhaps the most well-known instance is found in a letter-treatise addressed to a Jewish scholar of the day by the Jacobite philosopher from Baghdad, ʿĪsā ibn Ishāq ibn Zurʿa (d. 398/1008).⁴⁴ In this composition, we find arguments similar to those employed later by Paul of Antioch, most crucially the idea that nothing is more remote from God than jealousy and avarice, so that it would be inconceivable that this bountiful God does not see that human beings attain their highest possible perfection, namely, union with God, in whose image and likeness they were created. Ibn Zurʿa's treatise also reflects the patristic view of revelation as a gradual process adapted to the circumstances of the people, and a teleological understanding of the cosmos, in which things that have a beginning must necessarily reach their intended end,

43 In his aforementioned *Exposition to the Nations and the Jews*, Paul of Antioch summarizes the contrast between the Mosaic dispensation and the new dispensation inaugurated by Christ in more concrete terms: "As for the new law which God has given to the nations in Zion through us the disciples, it consists of Baptism instead of circumcision, the Sunday instead of the Sabbath, bread and wine instead of animal offerings, praying toward the east instead of toward the Temple, and grace (*faḍl*) instead of the *lex talionis* (*qīṣāṣ*).⁴³" See Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, 220–221.

44 For an introduction to the thought of Ibn Zurʿa and his relationship with his master, Yahyā ibn ʿAdī (d. 364/975), also a Jacobite, see Cyrille Haddad, *ʿĪsā ibn Zurʿa, philosophe arabe et apologiste chrétien du x^e siècle* (Beirut: Dār al-Kalima, 1971). The Arabic text of the *Risāla ilā l-Yahūdī Bishr ibn Finḥās* is found in Paul Sbath, ed., *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens du ix^e au xiv^e siècle* (Cairo: Friedrich, 1929), 19–52. A more recent edition with an English translation is provided in Peter J. Starr, "The Epistle to Bīshr b. Finḥās (Maqālah ʿamilahā ilā Bīshr b. Finḥās) of Ibn Zurʿah (m. A.H. 398/A.D. 1008)" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2000). See also the important study of Shlomo Pines, "La loi naturelle et la société: la doctrine politico-théologique d'Ibn Zurʿa, philosophe chrétien de Bagdad," in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization*, ed. U. Heyd (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 154–190; and Sidney H. Griffith, "'Īsā ibn Zurʿah on the Abrogation of Mosaic Law and the Redundancy of the Islamic *Sharīʿah*," in *Orientalia Christiana: Festschrift für Hubert Kaufhold zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. P. Bruns and H.O. Luthe (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 151–170.

as befits an intelligent Creator. Concerning the different types of laws or ways of life (*sunan*, sing. *sunna*), Ibn Zur'a distinguishes between natural (*ṭabīʿiyya*), rational (*ʿaqliyya*), and positive (*waḍʿiyya*). The last-mentioned type—positive—comprises the two laws established by the Creator: the law of justice, promulgated through Moses, and the higher law of grace (*tafaḍḍul*), instituted by Christ, calling human beings to imitate God's own grace, which is a higher virtue than justice, indeed the utmost limit of virtue.⁴⁵

Unlike Ibn Zur'a, however, whose main purpose was to justify rationally Jesus' abrogation of the Mosaic *sharīʿa* and the impossibility that Jesus' *sharīʿa*, given its perfection, be abrogated in turn by a later one,⁴⁶ other Arab Christian writers had used the antithesis between the law of justice and the law of grace to make explicitly polemical attacks on Islam. The clearest example is found in the apology attributed to a certain ʿAbd al-Masīḥ ibn Ishāq al-Kindī that was composed in all likelihood by a ninth-century Nestorian writer in the east, but also circulated widely in the medieval west.⁴⁷ At a certain point, the apology states that all laws and judgments are of three sorts. First there is the law which is divine and therefore beyond reason and nature. This law was revealed by Christ, who asked his followers to love their enemies, "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt 5:45). The second is the law of nature, based on reason, a law that resonates in the instincts of fallen man. This is the law of which Moses wrote, "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Lev 24:20; Exod 21:24). The third is the law of Satan, which is the reign of violence and wrong, pure and simple. Al-Kindī then asks his Muslim interlocutor to reflect on the precepts promulgated by Muḥammad, his argumentation leading to the following choice: either he accepts that the Qurʾān

45 On these two terms—*faḍl* and *tafaḍḍul*—as translations of the Greek *charis*, see the comments of Pines in "La loi naturelle," 175, n. 61. See also Griffith's discussion in "ʿĪsā ibn Zur'ah on the Abrogation of Mosaic Law," 162, 164–165. For this scholar, Ibn Zur'a's distinctive use of *tafaḍḍul* in this context can be adequately translated into English as "clemency."

46 This second claim is more extensively developed in a treatise that Ibn Zur'a wrote in response to the refutation of Christian beliefs and claims found in Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī's (d. 319/931) *Awā'il al-adilla fi uṣūl al-dīn*. See Ibn Zur'a's text in Sbath, *Vingt traités*, 52–68.

47 The literature on this work and the Muslim letter to which it allegedly replied has attracted much scholarly attention. See Laura Bottini, "The Apology of al-Kindī," in *CMR*, 585–594. A complete English translation and commentary is provided in Neal A. Newman, ed., *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632–900 A.D.): Translations with Commentary* (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), 365–545.

is a contradictory pastiche of phrases taken from the Torah and the Gospel, or that Muḥammad promulgated a new type of law, in which case, given that Moses and Christ had already instituted the natural and divine laws, only the law of violence is left.⁴⁸ A more concise version of the argument is advanced by the Toledo priest to whom al-Khazrajī replied:

[Many of our bishops] tell of the author of your law and they describe things in such a way that we see that you do not follow the truth; but rather the truth is with us, and there is no [further] profit in your religious law because we find that the [basic] ordinances of religious law are two. The first is from the Torah: 'Whoever strikes you, strike him.' The second is from the Gospel and is this: 'Whoever strikes your right cheek, present him your left.' You see that this second is superior to the first, and you will not find any other third ordinance except such as are really included in these two.⁴⁹

Even if Paul of Antioch had articulated it in less confrontational terms, this reduction of all religious dispensations to either the law of justice or the law of grace as instituted by Moses and Christ within a general scheme of progressive perfection left Islam in a theologically awkward position, something that al-Qarāfī immediately sensed. In the best of cases, Muḥammad's religion would be a late version of the Mosaic dispensation meant for refractory pagan Arabs,

48 See the relevant passage in Newman, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 449–452.

49 Arabic text in *Maqāmi'* § 6. Translation taken from Burman in *Medieval Iberia*, 191–192. In addition to these examples, see also al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl, who, in his summary of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, refers to the Mosaic Law as the initial law of justice (*sharī'at al-bidāya wa-l-'adl*) and to the Gospel as the law of completion and grace (*sharī'at al-kamāl wa-l-faḍl*). Unlike Paul of Antioch, who refrains from explicitly referring to Islam in this context, Ibn al-'Assāl remarks that what Muḥammad brought must either agree with the Mosaic Law or the Gospel, or else contradict both of them (see Samir, "La réponse d'Al-Ṣafī, 324–325). Pines also mentions a similar use of the antithesis between the law of justice and the law of grace by the little-known twelfth-century (or perhaps earlier) Coptic author, Yuhannā ibn Mīna (see Pines, "La loi naturelle," 176, n. 61). Finally, in the *Kitāb burhān dīn al-Naṣrānīyya* ('The Proof of the Christian Religion'), a work mistakenly attributed to Sa'īd ibn Baṭrīq, the ninth-century Melkite writer, Peter of Bayt Ra's, distinguishes between the natural law, the written law of Moses, and the sublime law of grace brought by Christ, which is "the most excellent and most exalted and most noble . . . for such is God's way of acting." See an English translation of the relevant passages in *Eutychius of Alexandria: The Book of the Demonstration (Kitāb al-Burhān)*, Part 1, P. Cachia, ed., and W.M. Watt, trans. (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1960), 116–120.

to bring them to knowledge of the one God and discipline them into obeying his commandments, hoping that one day they will be ready for the disclosure of God's grace. This was better than excluding Islam from God's designs, yet far below Islam's self-understanding as the final and clearest expression of God's offer of guidance to humankind.⁵⁰

Al-Qarāfi begins his reply by stating that the Mosaic Law was an expression of both divine justice and favor, not only of justice as the author of the Christian letter had claimed. In fact, it is rare that pure justice or pure favor, which God reserves for the inhabitants of hell and paradise respectively, should happen in this world. In classical Ash'arī fashion, al-Qarāfi argues that God being the possessor of all sovereignty, as *sūrat āl Imrān* (3):26 proclaims, he can freely dispose of any creature in whichever way he pleases, without ever being unjust, for injustice by definition can only be done to what belongs to someone else.⁵¹ So rather than being an expression of God's justice, Moses' Law also contained manifestations of divine favor, such as the prohibition of homicide, rape, and fornication, and its permission of marriage, certain types of meat, fruits, and other things. Jesus confirmed these prescriptions, adding only spiritual advice, like the commandment to be humble, meek, and compassionate. He did not bring a new religious law that can be said to be "the law of grace," but followed the Torah.⁵² Actually, if a religious dispensation can claim to represent the perfection that God intended from the start, that would be Muḥammad's, as al-Qarāfi thinks that it can be shown. Before that, however, he contests briefly (he has already dealt with these points elsewhere) the proof of the Incarnation which was included in the argument of the two types of religious laws. Al-Qarāfi concedes that God is bountiful (*jawwād*), but his bountifulness cannot justify that which is impossible *per se*, such as that God's word should leave the divine essence and be transferred to Mary. Even if that were possible, why should God's word be considered the most gracious among

50 In this connection, Damian Howard ("Islam and Christianity: On 'Religions of Law,'" *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24 [2013], 174) has somewhat misrepresented, or not fully understood, Paul of Antioch's contrast between the religion of grace and the religion of justice, which Howard portrays as a grace-law opposition, declaring the Melkite bishop to be a "proto-Lutheran." Paul is in fact contrasting *two types of law* or ways of conduct: the law of justice, by which he means the *lex talionis*, and the law of grace, by which he means the commandment to present the other cheek and to love one's enemy.

51 *Ajwiba*, 274–275 (155–156). The same point is made by al-Qurṭubī in *I'lām*, 456–457.

52 In a later passage, al-Qarāfi observes that the Gospel consisted only of exhortations (*mawā'iz*) and not of a new religious code, quoting in support Jesus' words, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail" (Lk 16:17), by which he meant the prescriptions of the Torah. See *Ajwiba*, 655 (390).

the existing beings and not God's knowledge, which is logically prior to his word? Or why did not two divine attributes unite with the humanity, since two attributes together are more perfect than only one?⁵³

More interesting than these dialectical rejoinders are, however, al-Qarāfī's examples showing that Muḥammad's law contains a greater measure of perfection, generosity, and divine favor than the rest of the religious laws. Like his denial above that Christ had instituted a new *sharīʿa*, these examples reveal an understanding of religion strongly identified with the particular code of laws that regulate the life of the believer, individually and collectively. The underlying conviction that religions so understood are prescribed by God for the sake of human beings⁵⁴ leads al-Qarāfī to argue for the preeminence of Muḥammad's law on the grounds that the benefits attained through its implementation are wider and more universal than those resulting from previous divinely-sanctioned legislation. He gives ten examples of this superiority:

First, only Islam has a miracle that continues through time. In other religions, those who witnessed the miracles of their prophets eventually passed away, making it easy for later generations to deviate from the prophetic teaching. In the case of Islam, however, generation after generation of believers re-experiences the foundational miracle which was the proclamation of the Qurʾān, thus keeping monotheism pure and religious fervor alive.

Second, unlike other messengers who were sent exclusively to their people, only Muḥammad was sent to both jinn and men (Q 55:31).⁵⁵ Moses, whose law was the most perfect of all previous laws, was sent only to the Israelites, as he never returned to Egypt to warn its people. A religion which brings benefits to a larger number of people is surely more perfect.

Third, the Qurʾānic witness that the Muslims are "the best nation ever brought forth to men" (Q 3:110) is attested by their literary and scientific production, which exceeds that of other confessions. It follows that their laws and prescriptions must also be the more excellent.

Four, unlike the followers of other confessions who pray in a disorderly fashion, Muslims have been requested to pray according to the model of the angels, that is, ranged in rows (Q 37:165–166). A religion that requires its adherents to imitate the disposition of the angels is necessarily superior.

Five, unlike others who are only required to purify their interior disposition, Muslims have been commanded to purify both the interior and the exterior by

53 *Ajwiba*, 277–278 (164–165). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 123–124.

54 On the notion of *maṣlaḥa* or human welfare as the purpose of divine law, see what was said in chapter 1, section 5.1.

55 See also *Ajwiba*, 743 (445).

means of ablutions and the avoidance of impurities and forbidden foods and drinks.⁵⁶

Six, only Muslims are requested to orient their prayer to the most excellent direction, which is that of the Ka'ba, also known as the Sacred House (*al-bayt al-ḥarām*, Q 5:97). This building is forty years older than the Temple of Jerusalem. Beginning with Adam, who was forgiven by God on Mount 'Arafa, near Mecca, all prophets made their pilgrimage to this city.⁵⁷

Seven, Moses allowed men to take as many wives as they wished, thus not taking into consideration the interest of women. Jesus allowed them only one wife, thus taking into consideration the interests of women alone. Only Muḥammad's law combines the interests of both male and female.⁵⁸

Eight, unlike other religious laws which require their adherents to pray in edifices of worship, only Islam allows the believer to pray anywhere, provided that it is clean. As a result, the exaltation and glorification of God in this religion is higher than in other religions.⁵⁹

56 In this regard, al-Qarāfi (*Ajwiba*, 284–285 [170]) makes disparaging comments about the lack of cleanliness of the monks, who pray while their feces are still sticking to their body. If they would present themselves in such a state in front of a village chief, they would be rebuked. How much more the Lord of Lords! Similar comments are found in *Ajwiba*, 609–610 (358). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 144. The Christians' apparent neglect of ritual washing was an easy target for Muslim polemicists. Thus, 'Abd al-Jabbār (*Critique*, 86) writes: "Christ professed ritual purity (*tahāra*), including the major ablution (*ghusl*) for intercourse. He also required the major ablution for a menstruating woman. Yet these sects are agreed that this is not required, that a person may pray without being purified and without having wiped himself, and that he may pray while impure from intercourse. They are all agreed that intercourse, urine, feces, and other things do not preclude prayer, that one may even pray while urinating, defecating, and having intercourse, even fornication. These things neither preclude nor corrupt prayer. In fact, it is preferable according to them to pray while impure from sexual intercourse, or while defecating, urinating, or farting, for this is the furthest thing from the prayer of the Muslims and the Jews. All of this is in opposition to the prayer of Christ."

57 Mount 'Arafa (or 'Arafāt) is located about 21 kilometers east of Mecca. This small hill and the plain on which it is situated serve as one of the main stations of the pilgrimage to Mecca. See 'Arafāt, in *ET3*, s.v. (Uri Rubin). For the debates on the relative sanctity of Jerusalem and Mecca in Islam, see Meir J. Kister, "Sanctity Joint and Divided: On Holy Places in the Islamic Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 18–65, especially 61–62. See also Uri Rubin, "Between Arabia and the Holy Land: A Mecca-Jerusalem Axis of Sanctity," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 345–362.

58 See Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 147.

59 The same point of made in *Ajwiba*, 744–745 (446).

Nine, only Islam allows keeping the spoils. Avoiding the destruction of riches and using them for the benefit of society and religion is surely better than burning the spoils as an offering.

Ten and last, only in Islam are the times of prayer announced by means of something that procures a benefit in addition to the announcement itself. The Muslim call to prayer (*adhān*) includes an exaltation of God, an opportunity to renew the profession of faith, and an invitation to pray.⁶⁰

While al-Qarāfī cannot be blamed for replying on the basis of his own religious presuppositions (just as Paul of Antioch reflects a manifestly Christian reading of salvation history, which is then presented as universally compelling), it is regrettable that he does not examine the claim that Jesus' command to love one's enemies is a revelation of God's own perfection and an invitation to be like God.⁶¹ Some reasons which al-Qarāfī adduces for the superiority of Islam may appear inconsequential to a modern reader, but it must be borne in mind that the *Ajwiba* was primarily intended as a handbook of polemics for the use of a general Muslim public. We turn now to the second category of arguments contained in the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, namely, the qur'ānic confirmation of Christianity.

3 Theology of the Word of God: The Qur'ānic Proof for Christianity

It has often been noticed that the most striking feature of Paul of Antioch's letter-treatise is the use of the Qur'ān to argue that Muḥammad had acknowledged the validity of Christianity in its core beliefs and liturgical practices, and that he did not claim to be sent to the Christians. Less attention has been given the fact that the Melkite writer went on to argue that Christians were the people on whom God had bestowed favor and whose straight path an uncertain Muḥammad had been commanded to follow in the Qur'ān. One can only imagine how provocative this claim would have appeared to a Muslim reader. The argument is presented in the *Ajwiba* as follows:

60 These ten examples are found in *Ajwiba*, 278–291 (164–176). See also 'Abd al-Khāliq, *al-Qarāfī wa-juhūduhu*, 742–746.

61 On this particular point, Ibn Taymiyya's reply is more developed and interesting. For this scholar, Muḥammad represents the middle way of perfection between Moses' severity and Jesus' compassion. This middle ground is also reflected in Islam's moderate position in relation to the laws of purity and impurity and in the honor given to all God's envoys, whose status is neither undervalued nor exaggerated. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, 5:57–113; trans. *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 350–369.

How can we [Christians] follow someone [Muḥammad] about whom God, may He be exalted, gave notice that he doubts his own situation, in His saying: “Surely, either we or you are upon right guidance or in manifest error” (Q 34:24). God commanded him in the opening *sūra* that he should ask for guidance to the straight path—“the path of those on whom You have bestowed favor, who do not evoke God’s anger nor go astray” (Q 1:7). The ones on whom He has bestowed favor are the Christians, and the ones against whom He is angered are the Jews, and those going astray are the worshippers of idols.⁶²

Thus, it is important to stress at the outset that underlying the polite and irenic tone of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* is in fact a deeply subversive reading of the Qur’ān, which threatens Islam’s self-image as the final and most complete revelation. No wonder al-Qarāfi disputes each and every one of Paul of Antioch’s interpretations of the Muslim scripture. Since these are too many to be analyzed in detail, I shall focus on the most significant ones, enough to grasp the terms of the debate. Before proceeding, however, it should be mentioned that the Bishop of Sidon had anticipated the objection that he was deliberately ignoring those passages which speak of Christians in unfavorable terms or which challenge his readings of other passages. We saw earlier, for instance, how al-Qarāfi brings up a qur’ānic verse that openly declares the universality of Muḥammad’s prophethood: ‘We have sent you . . . to the whole of human-kind’ (Q 34:28). In anticipation, Paul of Antioch had devised an ingenious simile, in what appears to be an adaptation of the Muslim doctrine of abrogation for his own apologetic purposes:

Suppose a man has a bill of debt for a hundred *dīnārs* against another man, on which it is written that he has paid, and the creditor produces the bill [again] and demands that the debtor pay a hundred *dīnārs*. Is it possible that in response to the debtor’s argument that the bill says that he had paid [the debt in full] the creditor should say to him, ‘Just as you acknowledge this part of the bill, acknowledge the hundred *dīnārs* too

62 *Ajwiba*, 224–225 (129–130), summarizing *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 24. For a similar argument in the (ninth-century?) pseudonymous, Arabic account of Abū Qurra’s debate with a group of Muslim scholars, see David Bertaina, “An Arabic Account of Theodore Abū Qurra in Debate at the Court of Caliph al-Ma’mūn: A Study in Early Christian and Muslim Literary Dialogues” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2007), 397 (English), 440–441 (Arabic). See also Griffith, “The Melkites and the Muslims,” 432.

and pay them'? No, the man would refuse the hundred *dīnārs* that are on the bill since it is also on the bill that he had already paid.⁶³

The Muslim doctrine of qur'ānic abrogation was based on the common-sense idea that later revealed verses revoke the legal implications of earlier passages dealing with the same issues when there is a contradiction between them. The simile of the bill of debt, however, failed to offer a clear reason as to why qur'ānic verses commending Christians and Christianity should be preferred to those offering a critique of them. It was perhaps because of this that the Cypriot editor of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* eliminated it from his extended revision. Be that as it may, the simile is incorrectly presented in the *Ajwiba* to the point of not making sense, as al-Qarāfī notes, what is perhaps another indication that he was reading an abridged (and in some places faulty) version of the *Letter*:

When we advance one part of the Qur'ān in argument, we are not bound by the rest of it. It is just as when the creditor produces a bill of debt for a hundred *dīnārs* on which it is written that the debt has been paid, such a bill of debt does not benefit the debtor.⁶⁴

This leads al-Qarāfī to remark,

Such a comparison does not make any sense. If the bill of debt contains proof that the money was borrowed and returned, then the bill is to the advantage of the debtor. If it contains proof that the money was borrowed, but not returned, then the bill is not helpful to him. The proof of the truth of the Qur'ān is the miracle that indicates the inerrancy of the Prophet. Each word of one who is inerrant is true and accurate. His case is like the bill of debt that contains proof that the money was borrowed and returned: one argues from everything in it.⁶⁵

This response reveals once more the Islamic understanding of prophecy. The inimitability of the Muslim scripture is the evidentiary miracle that confirms the prophethood of Muḥammad. However, once his prophethood is established, it follows that, like other prophets, Muḥammad was inerrant in

63 *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 45. See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 46.

64 *Ajwiba*, 266 (150).

65 *Ajwiba*, 267 (150).

everything he said. Hence, there can be no question of arguing from some parts of the Qurʾān while ignoring others.

3.1 *Jesus the Messiah: A Spirit of God and His Word*

Several arguments in the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* revolve around the figure of Christ. The first one states in general terms that the Qurʾān proposes extolling Jesus and his mother Mary, as Christians do, and therefore that the two religions are one in this regard.⁶⁶ Al-Qarāfi is quick to specify that Christians were not declared infidels for extolling Jesus and Mary, but for attributing to them things unbecoming to both the divine majesty and human lowliness, such as paternity, sonship, inhabitation, union, or that God should take consort and son. Less compelling is, however, what al-Qarāfi presents as the “decisive proof of Islam’s superiority over other confessions and religions,” namely, that Muslims honor all of God’s envoys. Thus, even if Christian claims about Jesus were true, the Muslims would still be in a better position, since at least they speak approvingly of him, whereas the Christians accuse Muḥammad of lying and debauchery, and of shedding blood without God’s permission.⁶⁷

More concretely, Paul of Antioch had pointed out that the Qurʾān proposes that Jesus is the Spirit of God and His Word, which corresponds with Christian belief.⁶⁸ Al-Qarāfi replies that if this were the case, why did Muḥammad declare unbelievers those who accepted what he had proclaimed and commanded to fight those who upheld the divinity of Jesus? For al-Qarāfi, this is the most decisive proof that the qurʾānic meaning of ‘spirit’ (*rūḥ*) and ‘word’ (*kalima*) in reference to Jesus cannot be what the Christians claimed. Nevertheless, in order to dispel any doubt among his readers, he proceeds to explain the meaning of these expressions, which Christian apologists had quoted again and again since the time of John of Damascus.⁶⁹ One of the possible meanings

66 *Ajwiba*, 158 (76–77).

67 *Ajwiba*, 160–161 (79–80).

68 *Ajwiba*, 162 (81). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 114. The Melkite Bishop of Sidon is referring to *sūrat al-nisāʾ* (4):171, “O People of the Book, do not exceed the bounds of your religion, nor say about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only Allah’s Messenger and His Word, which He imparted to Mary, and is a spirit from Him!” See also Q 3:39; 3:45; 21:91; and 66:12.

69 Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The ‘Heresy of the Ishmaelites’* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 132–133. On the use of Q 4:171 as a qurʾānic testimony to the three persons of the Trinity by Melkite apologists, including Paul of Antioch, see Griffith, “The Melkites and the Muslims,” 424, 430; and 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), 141–168. For a survey of Muslim responses to this claim, see

of 'spirit' is the soul that supports the human body. So when *sūrat al-anbiyā'* (21):91 says that God breathed into Mary of His spirit, it means that God created the human soul of Jesus and breathed it into his mother's womb. In this sense, any human soul and even the soul of any living animal can be said to be 'a spirit of God,' since God is their Creator and disposes freely of them. As for Jesus being described as "His word," the meaning is that when God decrees a thing, He need only say to it "Be," and it is (Q 3:45–47).⁷⁰ Why then is Jesus alone the one who is singled out in the Qur'ān as a spirit of God and His word? This is simply to draw attention to his superior nobility, explains al-Qarāfī, just as when God refers to some individuals in *sūrat al-ḥijr* (15):42 as "His servants" it does not imply that others are not God's servants too. Al-Qarāfī recalls again that these are Arabic words in a book written in Arabic, and that only the person with a sound knowledge of the language of the Arabs should speak about this book and make inferences from it.⁷¹ As for Paul of Antioch's attempt to validate the Christian belief about Jesus from the verse that says in reference to him, "I will place those who follow you above those who have disbelieved unto the days of resurrection" (Q 3:55), al-Qarāfī quickly dismisses it by stating that this divine statement applies exclusively to the Apostles and those who followed them before tritheism (*tathlīth*) made its appearance. Those are Jesus' true followers, and Muslims belong to them.⁷²

Di Matteo, *Divinità di Cristo*, 14–42; and Wilde, "Produce Your Proof If You Are Truthful," 130–140. See also al-Ja'fari's discussion in *Takhjīl*, 404–408.

70 Here al-Qarāfī is selecting from among the various interpretations of the qur'ānic meaning of *rūḥ* and *kalima* in reference to Jesus that earlier Muslim scholars had put forward. See, for instance, Abdelmajid Charfi, "Christianity in the Qur'an Commentary of Ṭabarī," *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980), 127–129.

71 *Ajwiba*, 169 (89).

72 *Ajwiba*, 169–170 (91–92). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 44. The same point is made by Ibn Ḥazm in *al-Fiṣal fī l-milal wa-l-aḥwā' wa-l-niḥal*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Naṣr and 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Umayra, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Jīl, 1996), 2:208–209; trans. Miguel Asín Palacios, *Abenḥázam de Córdoba y su historia crítica de las ideas religiosas* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1927–1932), 3:118–119. The Arabic term *tathlīth* literally means the act of making three. It is commonly used by Muslim authors for the Christian doctrine of God, on the model of the Islamic term for monotheism: *tawḥīd*, literally the act of making one. It is not uncommon to find Arabic-speaking Christian authors who also use *tathlīth* for the Trinity, which shows that the term itself was not considered necessarily inappropriate. Al-Qarāfī's use of it in this passage is, however, intended polemically. Thus, I have translated it as "tritheism." Other Christian authors preferred to use the term *thālūth*, which does not convey the idea of the division of an object into three parts.

3.2 *The Qur'ān and Christian Liturgy*

Paul of Antioch had also claimed qur'ānic support for Christian prayer and liturgy by pointing out that monks' cells and churches are mentioned before synagogues and mosques as places in which God's name is much remembered (Q 22:40), and by identifying the table sent down from the heavens at Jesus' command (Q 5:112–115) with the Eucharistic table.⁷³ Al-Qarāfi's response to the first point is surprisingly long by comparison with his rejoinders to other arguments dealing with apparently more weighty theological matters. His arguments are principally based on grammatical and rhetorical considerations. He seeks to prove that the verse in question, properly understood, establishes in fact the precedence of mosques over churches, and that, in any case, when the Qur'ān speaks positively of Christian places of prayer, it refers to these places *only* when God is worshipped in them according to the right religion.⁷⁴ As for the identification of the heavenly table mentioned in the fifth *sūra* with the Eucharistic offering, al-Qarāfi staunchly rejects it. In accord with Islamic prophetology, he compares this qur'ānic episode with the story of the prophet Ṣāliḥ and the she-camel. Just as the latter came out of a rock as a sign for the people of Thamūd, so the table sent down from the heavens was a miracle so manifest as to compel faith in those who witnessed it. Thus, those who refused to believe in Jesus were immediately punished by God.⁷⁵ Al-Qarāfi concludes,

There is no relation between the table [in the Qur'ān] and their Eucharist (*qurbān*). On the contrary, whereas the table is a great and extraordinary miracle, their Eucharist is something ordinary. There is nothing in it that exceeds comprehension. Why should the two be compared except out of blindness and error?⁷⁶

73 A recent hypothesis on the origin of this qur'ānic episode relates it with a passage in a little-known Syriac text entitled "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles." See Emmanouela Grypeou, "The Table from Heaven: A Note on Qur'ān, Sūrah 5, 111 ff," *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 2 (2005): 311–316. See also S. Khalil Samir, "The Theological Christian Influence on the Qur'ān: A Reflection," in *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, ed. G.S. Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2008), 148–150.

74 *Ajwiba*, 173–180 (94–98).

75 Several details mentioned by al-Qarāfi in this regard are not from the Qur'ān but from the exegetical tradition. See, for instance, William M. Brinner, *Arā'is al-majālis fī qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, or, *Lives of the Prophets, as Recounted by Abū Ishāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha'labī* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 664–668.

76 *Ajwiba*, 224 (129). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 141.

These words are perhaps the clearest illustration of what was said earlier about al-Qarāfī and Paul of Antioch talking past one another.

3.3 *That Is The Book, Wherein There Is No Doubt*

The *Letter to a Muslim Friend* further included a Qurʾān-based defense of the soundness of the Christian scriptures. If the Qurʾān confirmed the books that were before it, as *sūrat al-māʾida* (5):48 claims, it follows that the Torah and the Gospel had not been altered by the time of Muḥammad. Nor could they have been changed after that because of their renown in all times and places.⁷⁷ In a more daring exegetical move, Paul of Antioch also adduced that *sūrat al-baqara* (2):2, “That is the Book, wherein there is no doubt, a guidance for the God-fearing” and *sūrat āl Imrān* (3):184, “If they call you a liar, the messengers before you were called liars; they brought clear signs, the Psalms, and the enlightening Book,” necessarily referred to the Gospel, because if God had meant the Qurʾān, he would not have said *that* is the Book but *this* is the Book. Moreover, God had commanded Muḥammad to say, “I believe in whatever Book God has sent down” (Q 42:15).⁷⁸ In his reply, al-Qarāfī insists that the names Torah and Gospel stand in the Qurʾān for the books which were sent down to Moses and Jesus respectively. These books were in perfect accord with the Muslim scripture and Muḥammad was instructed to acknowledge them. These are not, however, the books that Christians and Jews now possess. As for the Gospel being the book mentioned in Q 2:2, al-Qarāfī considers it an astonishing fabrication contradicting the unanimous consensus of the Muslims.⁷⁹ Despite this protestation, he goes to considerable length to show on the basis of grammatical considerations that the demonstrative pronoun of distance in Q 2:2 (*that* is the Book) could be employed to refer to the Qurʾān, and that “the enlightening Book” in Q 3:184 refers to the genre of revealed books, and not to one of them in particular. These clarifications provide another occasion for

77 *Ajwiba*, 181 (98–99).

78 *Ajwiba*, 182 (99). For earlier Christian versions of the same argument, see Barbara Roggema, “A Christian Reading of the Qurʾān: The Legend of Sergius-Baḥīrā and its Use of Qurʾān and Sira,” in *Syrian Christians under Islam*, 62; and idem, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 131–132. See also the discussion in Wilde, “Produce Your Proof If You Are Truthful,” 184–189.

79 As a matter of fact, some Muslim authorities had suggested that Q 2:2 referred to the Torah and the Gospel, and not to the Qurʾān. See Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qurʾān and its Interpreters*, vol. 1 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 62–63; and Herbert Berg, “Ṭabarī’s Exegesis of the Qurʾānic Term *al-Kitāb*,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63 (1995), 767–768.

him to observe that “the Noble Qur’ān cannot be understood except by someone who understands perfectly the language of the Arabs.”⁸⁰

Al-Qarāfi introduces at this point a long excursus on the contradictoriness of the four Gospels with a view to showing that they cannot be the original Gospel sent down by God.⁸¹ Moreover, while the Gospel consists only in what Jesus proclaimed, these accounts are mostly the words of the narrators. Those who transmitted them corrupted the Gospel by adding stories and sayings which they had not heard from the Messiah or from his companions. Not without sarcasm, al-Qarāfi remarks that the *Annals* of the Muslim historian and exegete Abū Ja’far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) are more reliable than the Gospels from the viewpoint of its transmission.⁸² Even more, among the relatively few sayings of Jesus quoted in the Gospels, we cannot distinguish what belongs to the original Gospel from other things that he might have said, just as not everything that Muḥammad said belongs to the Qur’ān. In short, the Christians failed in two accounts: they did not determine what came down from God and they did not guarantee its proper transmission.⁸³

3.4 *Christians Should Not Be Considered Polytheists*

Another key argument of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* consisted in contrasting *sūrat al-shūrā* (42):15 with *sūrat al-kāfirūn* (109):1–6. Paul of Antioch interpreted the first verse as Muḥammad’s recognition of Christianity:

I believe in whatever scripture God has sent down and I am bidden to deal justly among you. God is our Lord and your Lord. We have our works and you have your works. There is no argument between us and you. God will bring us and you together; the journey is to Him.

80 *Ajwiba*, 186 (102).

81 *Ajwiba*, 195–208 (110–121). Al-Qarāfi reproduces *verbatim* fifteen examples from al-Ja’farī’s long list (fifty-two cases) of contradictions and inconsistencies in the Gospels (*Takhjīl*, 285–325). See a similar list by Ibn Ḥazm in *al-Fiṣal*, 2:27–200; trans. *Abenházam*, 3:21–107. See also the shorter list provided by al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) in his *Shifā’ al-ghalīl fī bayān ma waqa’a fī-l-Tawrāt wa-l-Injīl min al-tabdīl* (‘Quenching the Thirst of Those Who Seek the Truth about the Alteration of the Torah and the Gospel’), in Michel Allard, *Textes apologetiques de Ġuwainī* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1968), 58–81 (Arabic and French trans.).

82 *Ajwiba*, 210 (121).

83 In a later passage, after admitting that Muslims were commanded to believe in all that was sent down to the People of the Book (Q 42:15), al-Qarāfi remarks ironically, “Where is that which was sent down? By God, it is more difficult to be found than the phoenix!” See *Ajwiba*, 217–218 (125). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 58.

By way of contrast, the second passage rejected the religion of the polytheists in uncompromising terms:

Say, 'O unbelievers, I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship. I am not going to worship what you worship, nor will you worship what I worship. You have your religion and I have my religion.'

The point, however, is wholly misrepresented in the *Ajwiba*, where Q 42:15 is not mentioned and Q 109:1–6 is mistakenly presented as qur'ānic praise for the People of the Book.⁸⁴ Not surprisingly, al-Qarāfī points out in his reply that the latter verses were not addressed to the Christians, but to the polytheists of Muḥammad's tribe, and that, in any case, it did not imply a recognition of their religion, but only a temporary truce.⁸⁵ This is perhaps the clearest indication that al-Qarāfī was reading a faulty abridgement of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, the unlikely alternative explanations being that he failed to understand a fairly obvious point or that he deliberately distorted it. Al-Qarāfī goes on to repeat a point made earlier in the chapter, which is that Muḥammad was first charged with preaching and offering guidance, so that those who aspired to it would find the good direction. Later on, when the power of Islam increased, he was commanded to fight with the verse: "Prophet, strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be tough with them. Hell is their final home—an evil destination!" (Q 9:73). This verse abrogated more than twenty earlier verses restraining Muḥammad's actions against those who were unresponsive to his message.⁸⁶

Paul of Antioch had also invoked *sūrat al-mā'ida* (5):82 as yet another endorsement of Christianity and a qur'ānic explicit denial that Christians should be considered polytheists:

You [Prophet] surely will find the people with the strongest enmity toward those who believe to be the Jews and those who practice polytheism. And you will certainly find the closest in affection to those who believe to be those who say, 'We are Christians.' That is because there are priests and monks among them and they do not act arrogantly.⁸⁷

84 *Ajwiba*, 212 (123). Compare with *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 17.

85 *Ajwiba*, 214 (124–125).

86 *Ajwiba*, 214–215 (125).

87 Quoted in *Letter to a Muslim Friend* §§ 20–21. See also *Ajwiba*, 213 (124). For a similar argument that the Qur'an has acquitted the Christians from unbelief, see Bertaina, "Abū Qurra

Al-Qarāfi responds implacably that kindness and amicability do not prevent Christians from being destined to hellfire, since good manners and praiseworthy qualities are not an indication of the correctness of their religion.⁸⁸ As for the fact that the Qurʾān denies that the name “polytheism” (*shirk*) applies to Christians, he interprets it as referring to the polytheism of idol worship, not to the polytheism of worshipping the Son. Arab idolaters proclaim the multiplicity of deities, but unlike Christians they do not identify one of them with Allāh. For that reason, they better deserve the name of polytheism, whereas Christians are more entitled to the name of unbelief (*kufīr*).⁸⁹ Although al-Qarāfi’s reasoning is not easy to follow in all its details in this particular passage, his conclusion is uncompromisingly clear: Christians have made themselves equal to idol worshippers in adoring something that is not God, and they have exceeded them by claiming the union of divinity with humanity or that God has a consort and a son.⁹⁰

To conclude this section, we have seen that al-Qarāfi admits none of Paul of Antioch’s qurʾānic arguments in favor of Christians and Christianity, either by denying that they should be understood in the sense alleged, or, when this proves difficult, by insisting that such statements apply to an uncorrupted religion which disappeared with the arrival of tritheism, long before the time of Muḥammad, as we shall see later. It remains now to explore the third type of arguments contained in the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, those related to human discourse about God.

in Debate,” 411–412 (English), 450–451 (Arabic). See also Griffith, “The Melkites and the Muslims,” 433–434.

88 *Ajwiba*, 219 (126).

89 See Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 40, 103.

90 *Ajwiba*, 220 (126). As Friedmann remarks, the perception that Islam considers Jews and Christians as monotheists and bestows upon them certain rights not granted to members of other confessions is only generally true and does not represent the whole spectrum of Muslim opinion, where the assertion that Jewish and Christian beliefs were contaminated with polytheistic elements is commonly found. See Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 70–72. For instance, in his comprehensive survey of Christianity in al-Ṭabarī’s commentary, Charfi notes that this famous Qurʾān commentator clearly relates Christians to polytheism in connection with *sūrat al-ʾImrān* (3):166 and 181; *sūrat al-nisāʾ* (4):200; *sūrat al-anʾām* (6):46; and *sūrat al-ʾankabūt* (29):117. See Charfi, “Christianity in the Qurʾan Commentary of Ṭabarī,” 135, n. 213.

4 Theology of Divinity: Philosophizing about God

Three arguments will be briefly considered in this section. First, Paul of Antioch's claim that if Muslims knew what Christians mean by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, they would not criticize them for it. Second, the *ad hominem* argument that Muslims too use ambiguous terms which suggest corporeity in God to those to hear them. Finally, that Muslims wrongly censure Christians for using the term *jawhar* in connection with God.

4.1 *If Muslims Knew What We Mean*

The *Letter to a Muslim Friend* contains a forceful defense of the reasonableness of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, which reflects a centuries-old effort to explain these core Christian beliefs to an audience aware of Muslim objections.⁹¹ Strictly speaking, the argument is not a rational demonstration attempting to *prove* these doctrines, as it also includes scriptural elements from both the New Testament and the Qur'ān. For instance, Paul of Antioch argues that Christians have not attributed the names 'Father,' 'Son,'

91 The most comprehensive study written so far is Rachid Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes: 750–1050* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985). Haddad lists three undercurrents of Christian Arab literature: Patristic thought, Greek philosophy, and Islamic theology. It is particularly as a result of its interaction with the latter that Christian Arab theological discourse presents a unique conceptual profile, as Griffith has emphasized on multiple occasions. Christian treatments of the Trinity in particular were complexly related to Muslim debates on the divine attributes. For the early period, see, among others, Harry A. Wolfson, "The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity," *The Harvard Theological Review* 49 (1956): 1–18; and Sidney H. Griffith, "The Concept of *Al-Uqnūm* in 'Ammār al-Baṣṭī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 218 (1982): 169–191. See also the recent works by Thomas W. Ricks, *Early Christian Contributions to Trinitarian Theology: The Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity in an Islamic Milieu* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), and Sara L. Husseinī, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century C.E.)* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). For the later period, see Samuel Noble and Alexander Treiger, "Christian Arabic Theology in Byzantine Antioch: 'Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭākī and his *Discourse on the Holy Trinity*," *Le Muséon* 124 (2011): 371–417. Also worthy of note are Mark N. Swanson, "Are Hypostases Attributes? An Investigation into the Modern Egyptian Christian Appropriation of the Medieval Arabic Apologetic Heritage," *Parole de l'Orient* 16 (1990–1991): 239–250; and the chapter 'The Trinitarian Dialogue between Islamic Monotheism and Medieval Christianity' in Michael Igrave, *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue: Plenitude and Plurality* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003), 181–300. A survey of Muslim polemical attacks on the Trinity can be found in Di Matteo, *Divinità di Cristo*, 50–83.

and 'Holy Spirit' to God on their own initiative, but following Jesus' command in Mt 28:19. Likewise, the reason for the Incarnation of the word of God as a human being is said to be that God only addresses anyone "from behind a veil," as *sūrat al-shūrā* (42):51 proclaims: "It is not granted to any mortal that God should speak to him except through revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal by His command what He will: He is exalted and wise."⁹² Nevertheless, the main purpose of the argument is to provide a rational ground for the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, based on shared notions about God that Muslims might accept. Thus, the Melkite Bishop of Sidon confidently asserts, "What we mean by the Father is the essence, and by Son, the *nuṭq* (reason, logos), which subsists in that essence, and by the Holy Spirit, the life. The three are one same God. The Muslims too believe in these three."⁹³

A key point in Paul of Antioch's exposition is the identification of the second and third Trinitarian persons with two attributes—reason (*nuṭq*) and life (*ḥayāt*)—subsisting in the divine essence (*dhāt*). Essence—reason—life is only one among the several triads which Arab Christian writers had employed to explain the Trinity since early 'Abbāsid times.⁹⁴ A common feature of these

92 For the use of this argument by earlier Melkite authors, see Mark N. Swanson, "Beyond Proof-texting: Approaches to the Qur'ān in Some Early Arabic Christian Apologies," *Muslim World* 88 (1998): 297–319; Sidney H. Griffith, "Answers for the Shaykh: A 'Melkite' Arabic Text from Sinai and the Doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation in 'Arab Orthodox' Apologetics," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. E. Grypeou et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 288, 292; and idem, "The Melkites and the Muslims," 430–431.

93 *Ajwiba*, 237 (136).

94 See a list in Haddad, *Trinité divine*, 232–234. The same triad used by Paul of Antioch is also found in the *Discourse on the Holy Trinity* by the eleventh-century Melkite 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Faḍl (see Noble and Treiger, "Christian Arabic Theology," 405, 416), and in the aforesaid *Kitāb al-majālis* of Elias of Nisibis, which is a textual source of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*. Elias's explanation of the term *nuṭq* requires that it should be translated as reason (or logos), rather than as speech. After describing God as "subsistent by itself, living by a life, and rational by a reason" (*qā'imun bi-naḥsihi, ḥayyun bi-ḥayātini, nātiqun bi-nuṭqini*), he clarifies that *nuṭq* is not to be taken in reference to the sound produced by the friction of bodies and air (*nuṭq al-ṣawt*), but in reference to the understanding (*nuṭq al-fahm*). In this sense, *nuṭq* is "the rational faculty that exists in the soul, by means of which there is science, wisdom, and perception of things, and without which none of these realities would be. This *nuṭq* is proper to all immortal beings, such as the rational soul, the angels, and the Creator" (see Samir, "Entretien d'Élie de Nisibe," 79–80). A few lines later, Elias adds: "We call the reason 'word' (*kalima*), since there is no reason without word and no word without reason, and we call life 'spirit' (*rūh*), since there is no life without spirit and no spirit without life" (88–89).

attempts is the use of the notion of the divine attribute (*ṣifa*), which, as has been remarked, had the advantage not only of being known in the Muslim theological tradition, but also of being precisely “the category which represents the Muslim manner of reconciling the inevitable multiplicity of human language (even though revealed) about God with the absolute uniqueness of the divine essence.”⁹⁵ However, the assimilation of the Trinitarian hypostases to the divine attributes required some theological fine-tuning, since the divine attributes are attributes of the divine nature and therefore equally possessed by the three Trinitarian persons. It follows that the divine attributes by themselves cannot serve to distinguish the persons strictly speaking.⁹⁶ That is why most Arab Christian writers avoid a direct identification of the divine persons or hypostases with the *ṣifāt Allāh* as understood in Ash'arī theology. For instance, Paul of Antioch refers to essence, reason, and life as “substantival attributes (*ṣifāt jawhariyya*) that follow the course of names,” and further emphasizes that any consequent attribute that might apply to God presupposes that God is a living and rational being.⁹⁷ According to him, moreover, the Qur'ān echoes these three—and only three—substantival attributes where it says, “In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful” (Q 1:1).

These clarifications, however, are not considered in the *Ajwiba*, where ‘reason’ and ‘life’ are simply taken according to their understanding in the classical Ash'arī doctrine of the divine attributes.⁹⁸ Al-Qarāfī then proceeds to draw the incoherences and absurdities which, in his eyes, derive from the Christian position, for which he denies, moreover, scriptural support, biblical

95 Robert Caspar, *Islamic Theology: Doctrines* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 2007), 77. The literature on the divine attributes in Islamic theology is very extensive. The article “Attributes of God” in *EI3*, s.v. (Claude Gilliot) provides a brief survey of the debate as it developed in Sunnī theology and a comprehensive bibliography.

96 The doctrine of appropriation, however, allowed theologians, particularly in the western tradition, to attribute certain names, properties, or operations to a Trinitarian person in preference to, but not to the exclusion of, the others. This was needed to reconcile theological discourse on the Trinity with the witness of Scripture and the usage of early creeds. See, for instance, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 39, a. 7.

97 See *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 32.

98 Compare *Letter to a Muslim Friend* §§ 25–44 with its summary in *Ajwiba*, 237–239 (136–138). A complicating factor here, as Michael Ipgrave notes, is that Muslim theologians did not understand ‘essence’ (*dhāt*) as an attribute, but rather as the substrate in which the attributes subsisted. Paul of Antioch, instead, uses *dhāt* to indicate the attribute of existence, while keeping the term ‘substance’ (*jawhar*) to refer to that aspect of God which is the bearer of divine unity (see Ipgrave, *Trinity*, 270–271). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 109.

or qur'ānic.⁹⁹ He concentrates his reply on the attribute of *nutq*, which is conflated with the late Ash'arī concept of interior speech (*kalām nafsī*), one of the eternal attributes subsisting in the divine essence in a relationship of inseparable but irreducible non-identity.¹⁰⁰ From this perspective, Paul of Antioch's claim that "God, may He be exalted, sent His *nutq* without any separation from the Father, his progenitor, just as the light of the sun is sent onto the earth without being separated from the orb, its progenitor," and that "the *nutq* became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Lady Mary Virgin,"¹⁰¹ appears as pure and simple irrationality on two counts. First, it suggests that an attribute can leave its substrate or subject of attribution, which is impossible; and second, it suggests that a divine attribute, which according to Ash'arī ontology (more on which later) is an entitative property (*ma'nā*), that is, a real entity that needs a substrate in which to reside, has now become a body (*jism*), occupying a space by itself and admitting division, what is tantamount to an overturning of the ontological order (*qalb al-ḥaqā'iq*).¹⁰²

Another important limitation of the attempt to commend the Trinitarian belief in terms of the Muslim doctrine of the divine attributes is further illustrated by al-Qarāfī's remark that only God, not any of his attributes, deserves adoration. Thus, even supposing that one of the divine attributes did become incarnate, this would not justify Christian worship of Jesus. "Whoever extols one of God's attributes—whether his knowledge (*'ilm*), his life (*ḥayāt*), his speech (*kalām*), his hearing (*sam'*), or his sight (*baṣar*)—with the same extolling that is given to God," denounces al-Qarāfī, "is an unbeliever who associates what is other than God with God and claims a multiplicity of gods."¹⁰³ Indeed, one of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī's arguments against the Mu'tazilī attempt to

99 In like fashion, Ibn Ḥazm remarked that there is no basis in the Gospel or in any revealed book for the claim that God's knowledge (*'ilm*) should be called 'Son' (see *al-Fiṣal*, 1:113; trans. *Abenházam*, 2:154). See also al-Qurṭubī's discussion in *I'lām*, 63–70.

100 On the attribute of interior speech, see al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-irshād ilā qawāṭi' al-adilla fi uṣūl al-i'tiqād*, ed. Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā and 'Alī al-Mun'im 'Abd al-Ḥamid (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1950), 99–130; trans. Paul E. Walker, *A Guide to the Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief* (Reading: Garnet, 2001), 56–72. "Inseparable but irreducible non-identity" is Iḡgrave's apt description of the ontological relationship signified by the Ash'arī formula "*lā huwa wa-lā ḡayruhu*," which seeks to affirm the inseparability of the divine attributes from the divine essence, while insisting on a real distinction between the two (see Iḡgrave, *Trinity*, 250–252, 270).

101 *Ajwiba*, 238 (137).

102 *Ajwiba*, 250 (141).

103 *Ajwiba*, 263 (147).

conflate the divine attributes with the essence (i.e., the formula “God is knowing by a knowledge that is He”), had been to point out that this would imply that Muslims address their prayers to God’s knowledge, which is not the case.¹⁰⁴

Al-Qarāfī’s conclusion is as clear as it is severe. Christians have not understood that the only reason a being deserved to be adored is by virtue of its divinity. Hence they adore three gods without realizing it: “It is as if someone who does not understand the meaning of homicide kills a person and then censures those who disapprove of it and impute to him the homicide. He shows surprise at them and accuses them of being wrong!”¹⁰⁵

4.2 *Human Language and God*

Reacting against Muslim criticisms of Christian language about God, Paul of Antioch had pointed out that Muslims too use ambiguous terms which suggest corporeity in God to those who hear them, such as when they say “that He has eyes to see with, hands to extend, a shin to bare, a face to turn to every direction, and a side, and that He comes in canopies of clouds,” and yet Muslims do not believe that God is a body.¹⁰⁶ It is somewhat unfortunate that al-Qarāfī avoids the question of how human language—even after being assumed by God’s revelation—relates to the divine reality, and prefers to concentrate his reply on the issue of scriptural transmission. He emphasizes that Muslims attribute these ambiguous expressions to God only after having established without a shred of doubt that they were part of the qur’ānic revelation, whose contents have been transmitted by multiple independent channels. Al-Qarāfī further explains that God commanded the recitation of these verses as a test, to guide whomsoever he wills and to lead astray whomsoever he wills. Thus, God multiplies the reward of those who make an effort to understand, but increases the punishment of those who make categorical claims about their meaning. The situation is very different, however, with regard to the questionable things that Christians say of God. They attribute some on their own, such as the terms *aqānīm* (hypostases) and *jawhar* (which al-Qarāfī understands as ‘atom,’ as we shall see immediately). Other things are based on their books, he concedes, only that these have not been transmitted with the guarantees that assure their reliability. Indeed, by Muslim standards of textual transmission,

104 On this question, see Ipgrave, *Trinity*, 248–250, 264–265.

105 *Ajwiba*, 264 (147).

106 *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 50, alluding to Q 11:37, 5:64, 68:42, 2:115, 39:56, and 2:210 respectively.

the Christian scriptures could not be used to argue even a minor legal question, still less to establish the circumstances of the Divine Lordship.¹⁰⁷

4.3 *A Substance Not Like Created Substances*

A long-standing disagreement between Arab Christian and Muslim scholars concerned the appropriateness of applying the term *jawhar* to God. Christian thinkers often began with the premise that any existing being must either be a substance (*jawhar*, pl. *jawāhir*) or an accident (*ʿaraḍ*, pl. *aʿrāḍ*), understanding by substance that which can subsist by itself, and by accident that which can subsist only in a substance. Considered to be an existing being, God was then said to be a substance, since it would not befit him to be dependent on something else.¹⁰⁸ For their part, Muslim scholars, philosophers and theologians alike, denied the applicability of the term *jawhar* to God, as they typically understood by it that which occupies a space and is capable of accidents.¹⁰⁹ Aware of the debate, Paul of Antioch attempted a solution by insisting that the Muslim definition of *jawhar* applied to the material substance (*al-jawhar al-kathīf*), but not to the subtle or ethereal substance (*al-jawhar al-laṭīf*), such as the substance of the soul, the substance of the mind, and the substance of the light.¹¹⁰ Aware moreover of the general reluctance of Muslims to apply to God categories derived from the observation of the phenomenal world, he further specified that Christians do not say that God is a substance like created substances:

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- 107 *Ajwiba*, 269–270 (152). According to al-Qarāfi, it is impossible to find a Christian who can trace the oral transmission of the Gospel from one transmitter to another back to Jesus. By contrast, Muslims are able to transmit even the least important of books, literary works or other, from the person who first dictated it. On the paramount Muslim concern for the accurate transmission of knowledge, particularly but not only religious knowledge, see Paul L. Heck, “The Transmission of Knowledge in Islam,” in *The Islamic World*, ed. A. Rippin (London: Routledge, 2008), 312–324.
- 108 A detailed discussion of how the Greek notions of substance and nature were incorporated into Arab Christian theological writings can be found in Haddad, *Trinité divine*, 135–151. For a defense of the Christian use of *jawhar* against Muslim objections, see Samir, “Entretien d’Élie de Nisibe,” 64–75.
- 109 See, for instance, al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-irshād*, 46–51; trans. *Conclusive Proofs*, 28–30; and Muḥammad Legenhausen, “Ibn Sina’s Arguments against God’s Being a Substance,” in *Substance and Attribute: Western and Islamic Traditions in Dialogue*, ed. C. Kanzian and M. Legenhausen (Frankfurt: Ontos, 2007), 117–143.
- 110 Elsewhere, al-Qarāfi himself makes use of this distinction when he writes: “The soul (*al-naḥs*) is a subtle (*laṭīf*) body dwelling transparently within the physical (*kathīf*) body, from which it is distinguished as a fetus” (*al-Ummiyya fi idrāk al-niyya*, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1984, 18), quoted in Powers, *Intent in Islamic Law*, 36, n. 31.

Everything in existence is either a substance or an accident . . . Since the Creator, hallowed be His names, is the noblest of existing entities, given that He is the cause of all the rest of them, it is necessary that He belong to the noblest of the categories and the noblest of them is the substance. Due to this fact, we say that He is a substance, not like created substances, just as we say that He is a thing, not like created things.¹¹¹

In other words, substance is said of God analogically, without cancelling the ontological distance that separates God from the created reality.

Al-Qarāfī, however, would have none of this, insisting on the classical Ash'arī division of finite reality into atoms (*jawāhir*, sing. *jawhar*), bodies (*ajsām*, sing. *jism*), and entitative properties (*ma'ānī*, sing. *ma'nā*).¹¹² In this scheme, *jawhar* is understood as the single unit of created reality, occupying a space by itself and not admitting division, unlike the body, which occupies a space by itself but admits division, and unlike the entitative property or accident, which does not occupy a space by itself but subsists in the atom. All three categories of being, however, receive their existence from the Creator. According to al-Qarāfī, what the Christian letter advanced as definition of *jawhar* and *'araḍ* was in fact the definition of necessary being and contingent being. However, this is not surprising, he tells his readers, for "the entire discourse of the Christians is bizarre, to the point that one would be surprised to find anything correct in it!"¹¹³

5 Concluding Remarks

The foregoing analysis of the first chapter of the *Ajwiba* reveals the extent to which al-Qarāfī's view of Christianity is influenced by the qur'ānic criticism directed to the People of the Book as having taken their rabbis and their monks as lords apart from God, and also the Messiah, instead of worshipping only one God, as they had been enjoined to do (Q 9:31). Some Christian leaders think themselves higher than God and the prophets, deciding what the truth should be and acting as if the eternal destiny of people was in their hands. Others fill the minds of the common folk with tricks and fabricated illusions. Still others

¹¹¹ *Letter to a Muslim Friend* §§ 56–57.

¹¹² *Ajwiba*, 271 (153). On classical Ash'arī ontology, see Richard M. Frank, "Bodies and Atoms: The Ash'arite Analysis," in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, ed. M.E. Marmura (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 39–53, 287–293; and, more extensively, the first part of Daniel Gimaret, *La doctrine d'al-Ash'arī* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 43–208.

¹¹³ *Ajwiba*, 273 (154).

promulgate laws and regulations based on their own whims.¹¹⁴ They are able to get away with this because of the conformism of the masses and lack of interest in the truth of what their leaders authorize. Were it not for this slackness, Christianity would have collapsed long ago. Thus, while it is true that Paul of Antioch had selected only those verses that suited his apologetic project and disregarded the rest, it is no less true that al-Qarāfi allows this particular motif to become the controlling factor of his entire evaluation of Christianity. As a result, other qur'ānic passages that speak favorably of Jesus' followers and their religion are said to apply to a pristine Christianity unconnected with the beliefs and practices of the Christians of his time, just as the Torah and the Gospel confirmed by the Qur'ān are said to be scripture other than the books which Jews and Christians had in their possession.¹¹⁵

Al-Qarāfi's determination to undermine the apologetic strategy of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* leads him to contest each and every qur'ānic argument advanced therein, insisting several times that the language of the Qur'ān "is our language" and that the task of interpreting its meanings is up to Muslims. He was certainly aware that educated Copts of his time knew Arabic and even wrote books in this language, but their knowledge of this language was only by way of learning, as al-Qarāfi himself points out, their native tongue being Coptic.¹¹⁶ Did he think that the author of the Christian letter was a Copt? We cannot know for sure, but he obviously thought that the author, not being an Arab, could not grasp the real meanings of the qur'ānic verses he quoted. Ironically, all of Paul of Antioch's writings are in Arabic and were intended primarily for Arabic-speaking Christians living in the fully Arabicized Melkite

114 The issue of the laws that Christians follow and whether they are in the Gospel or not appears already in what some scholars deem the oldest extant Christian-Muslim disputation. See François Nau, "Un colloque du Patriarche Jean avec l'Émir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716," *Journal asiatique* ser. 11, 5 (1915), 251–252 (Syriac), 261–262 (French). On this work, see also Barbara Roggema, "The Disputation of John and the Emir," in *CMR*, 782–785.

115 Al-Qarāfi's position reflects the general attitude of Muslim exegetes towards the qur'ānic view of Christians as a religio-social group: "The commentators understand the Qur'ān to make a clear distinction between true Christians, a tiny minority, and those who have appropriated and propagated a corrupted form of the religion of Jesus." See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 285–292, here at 286. See also Charfi, "Christianity in the Qur'an Commentary of Ṭabarī," 138–141.

116 *Ajwiba*, 152 (75).

Patriarchate of Antioch.¹¹⁷ As a matter of fact, this linguistic identity of the Melkites of Antioch led other Christians to describe them as pseudo-Muslims, which proves that the identification of the Arabic language with Islam was a cultural assumption not restricted to Muslims alone.¹¹⁸ Teule remarks that for Paul of Antioch, however, his linguistic Arabic identity was something to be proud of, "something which would make the Melkites the privileged interlocutors of the Muslim community, as is suggested in a passage of one of his treatises."¹¹⁹

Also worthy of note is al-Qarāfī's contention that Jesus did not establish a new religious law, but confirmed the *sharī'a* of Moses, adding only some spiritual advice. In other words, according to al-Qarāfī's criterion of what constitutes the scriptural basis for a prophetic religion, the Gospel, even the original, undistorted version of it, does not qualify as such. We touch here one of the principal difficulties hindering the dialogue between Paul of Antioch and al-Qarāfī, namely, that each of them evaluates the religion of the other from within their own frames of reference, which they take as axiomatic and universal. Thus, for Paul of Antioch the best he could say about Muḥammad is that

117 The Melkites were indeed the first among the Christians of the Caliphate to adopt Arabic for the expression of their Christian faith with all its confessional nuances, firstly by producing Arabic translations of their literary patrimony and, already by the second third of the eighth century, by producing original compositions of Christian theology in Arabic. On this process of Arabization, see Griffith, "The Church of Jerusalem," 186–191; idem, "The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic," *Muslim World* 78 (1988): 1–28; and idem, "Arab Christian Culture in the Early Abbasid Period," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 1 (1999): 24–44. See also Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, "Between Hellenism and Arabicization: On the Formation of an Ethnolinguistic Identity of the Melkite Communities in the Heart of Muslim Rule," *Al-Qanṭara* 33 (2012): 445–471.

118 See the reference to the *Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, a work written in the second quarter of the twelfth century by an Armenian living in the Syrian city of Edessa, in Teule, "Paul of Antioch," 95, n. 22.

119 Teule ("Paul of Antioch," 95–96) is referring to the disputed treatise *On Predestination and Free Will*. At a certain point, the Melkite writer stresses the commonalities that he shares with his Muslim interlocutor and which are not cancelled by their difference of doctrine, such as that they belong to the same kind and species, that their God is one and the same, that both descend from Adam and Eve and are cousins because of their relation to Abraham, and that a single country and a single language unite them. See Arabic text in Louis Cheikho, ed., "Thalāth maqālāt falsafiyya li-Būlus al-Rāhib usquf Ṣaydā," *Al-Machriq* 7 (1904), 376–377; trans. Georg Graf, *Christlicher Orient und schwäbische Heimat: kleine Schriften; anlässlich des 50. Todestags des Verfassers*, ed. H. Kaufhold (Beirut; Würzburg: Ergon, 2005), 2:469–470.

he was God's envoy to a pagan people who, like the Hebrews of old, were not yet ready for the full disclosure of divine grace. This recognition fell short of the Muslim view of Muḥammad as the bearer of God's final offer of guidance to humankind. It also contradicted a well-established doctrine of prophetology by al-Qarāfi's time, in which prophets were seen as individuals protected by God from error and sin. This meant that everything the Qur'ān says about Christians had to be considered, along with Muḥammad's own dealings with them. Did he not write to Christian rulers inviting them to embrace Islam?¹²⁰ And did he not bid his followers to fight the People of the Book once it was clear that they will not accept his guidance? Those actions speak louder than words, al-Qarāfi argues, and show that Muḥammad, the infallible prophet, did not think of himself as a messenger for his people alone.

The literary encounter between Paul of Antioch and al-Qarāfi illustrates how complex, even in our days, is the issue of the recognition of Muḥammad's prophethood, which reappears in almost every Christian-Muslim conversation. One obvious source of the difficulty lies in the fact that the two faith traditions have overlapping but significantly different prophetologies.¹²¹

120 For a contemporary adoption of this same argument by a modern Muslim theologian, see Tim Winter, "Realism and the Real: Islamic Theology and the Problem of Alternative Expressions of God," in *Between Heaven and Hell*, 126–127. For Winter, Muḥammad's act of dispatching letters to the main Christian rulers of his time, summoning them to Islam, shows that the qur'ānic critique of Christianity was not merely directed to minor heresies, as it is sometimes said, but to mainstream Christianity.

121 Michael Ipgrave, ed., *Bearing the Word: Prophecy in Biblical and Qur'ānic Perspective: A Record of the Third 'Building Bridges' Seminar Held at Georgetown University, Washington DC, 30 March–1 April 2004* (London: Church House, 2005); David Marshall, "Muhammad in Contemporary Christian Theological Reflection," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24 (2013): 161–172.

Apologia Pro Religione Islamica

Like the first chapter of the *Ajwiba*, the second is fundamentally apologetic in intent. Al-Qarāfi devotes it to replying to yet another series of arguments raised against Islam and against Muslim claims concerning other religions, even if, as in the previous chapter, his explanations often turn into polemical attacks. At the same time, several features distinguish this chapter. The first and most noteworthy of these is that a significant number of the objections that al-Qarāfi attributes to the Christians and the Jews in the second chapter concern issues that had been the object of considerable intra-Muslim debate. Second, these objections do not originate from one single source, but have been collected from the various works al-Qarāfi consulted and, perhaps, from his own participation in interreligious debates. As a result, the issues discussed in chapter two are highly heterogeneous in content, ranging from important theological questions about God's dealings with humanity to less weighty objections, intended to score debating points against a Muslim opponent.

Further, the questions raised in the second chapter of the *Ajwiba* are, generally speaking, not expressed with the same politeness that characterizes the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*. It will be remembered that, even while challenging the Muslims' perception of their faith in significant ways, Paul of Antioch had avoided any disparaging remarks about Muḥammad, the Qur'ān, or the first generation of Muslims. By contrast, many arguments discussed here are openly confrontational. It is no longer a question of offering an alternative interpretation of a qur'ānic passage, for instance, but of accusing the Qur'ān of containing errors, or suggesting that the Muslims stand on the verge of irrationality when they claim that a phantom image of Jesus was crucified in his stead, or that Islam could only spread through military conquest, given its inherent weakness.

In the following pages, the arguments will be examined according to their subject matter and not according to their order of appearance. From the content perspective, the fifteen objections can be divided into four groups, the first three having to do with Jesus, the Qur'ān, and the Torah, respectively, and the fourth constituted by a number of miscellaneous issues, such as the qur'ānic vision of paradise, Islam's alleged triumph by the sword, and Muḥammad's deathbed instructions to his followers. The previous chapter of this book showed how al-Qarāfi and Paul of Antioch were talking past one another in terms of some broad theological themes, such as the understanding

of religious history, the doctrine of revelation, and what constitutes acceptable human language about God. Here, too, we shall see the same dynamic at work but under a different aspect. Namely, we shall see how one author (in this case al-Qarāfi) projects his notion of religion onto other traditions, which are evaluated according to his own standards of true religion and with a terminology specific to Islam.¹

1 Jesus the Messiah, the Prophet Who Did Not Die

A total of six arguments are directly related to the figure of Jesus, more particularly the disputed question of his death on the cross, the miracles he is said to have performed, and the union of the divine and the human that Christians claim to have occurred at the Incarnation.

1.1 *Crucifixion: Reality or Delusion?*

It should be emphasized at the outset that the point at stake is not the salvific meaning which Christianity has traditionally attached to this event (a question that will appear later, when al-Qarāfi discusses the issue of redemption), but only its factual historicity. The sole qur'ānic reference to the crucifixion of Jesus is *sūrat al-nisā'* (4):157–158, which, strictly speaking, only asserts that the Jews did not crucify him.² Curiously, the first on record to have interpreted this passage as a denial of the crucifixion as an historical event was not a Muslim but a Christian, John of Damascus.³ Nonetheless, this interpretation was also

1 Just as the aforementioned al-Āmirī, for instance, attempts to make an 'objective' case for the superiority of Islam by comparing the teachings of the six religions mentioned in Q 22:17 on four particular categories of behavior—creedal, ritual, social, and punitive—which happen to be four main divisions in Muslim manuals of positive law. See Arkoun, "Logocentrisme," 27. On al-Āmirī's project, see also Paul L. Heck, "The Crisis of Knowledge in Islam (1): The Case of al-Āmirī," *Philosophy East and West* 56 (2006), 117–124.

2 This verse is part of a series of verses in which the Qur'ān reproaches the Jews for having killed prophets unjustly, for their calumnies against Mary, "and for their boast, 'We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.' They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them (*wa-lakin shubbiha lahum*); those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition: they certainly did not kill him—God raised him up to Himself" (Q 4:157–158).

3 He refers to the Qur'ān as saying that "the Jews, having themselves violated the Law, wanted to crucify him [Christ] and after they arrested him, they crucified his shadow, but Christ himself, they say, was not crucified nor did he die; for God took him up to himself into heaven because he loved him" (Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 133). It is an open question whether this

the prevalent—although not unanimous—view among Muslim exegetes, the vast majority of whom took the passage to mean that someone else was substituted for Jesus on the cross and died in his stead.⁴ This is also the view that al-Qarāfi adopts here and whose plausibility he defends against two important objections.

The first objection revolves around the notion of *tawātur* (literally ‘recurrence’), which is part of the general theory of knowledge in medieval Islam. It has to do with our knowledge of the truth of statements about phenomena which lie outside our sense perception (for instance, that Muḥammad said such-and-such, the existence of a city that one has never visited, or that Jesus died on the cross). The doctrine is often summarized in the phrase *al-tawātur yufīd al-‘ilm*, ‘recurrence imparts knowledge.’ Simply stated, what is affirmed here is that such statements are true when they have been transmitted by such a number of original witnesses that precludes the possibility of collaborative fabrication. This requirement also applies to the intermediaries who transmitted the report from the original witnesses. Statements that fulfill these conditions are called *mutawātir* (‘widely recurrent’ or ‘widespread’) and are said to impart necessary knowledge, that is, knowledge that imposes itself upon the intellect without any conscious deductive reasoning.⁵ The objection reported

represents John’s original exegesis of the Qur’ān or reflects a Muslim view already current at his time. For a persuasive defense of the latter position, see Mark N. Swanson, “Folly to the *Ḥunafā*: The Crucifixion in Early Christian-Muslim Controversy,” in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, 237–256.

- 4 The most comprehensive study of the subject is Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’ān: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009). See also Mahmoud M. Ayoub, “Towards an Islamic Christology, 11: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion,” *Muslim World* 70 (1980): 91–121; Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity: The Representation of Jesus in the Qur’ān and the Classical Muslim Commentaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 106–141; Michael G. Fonner, “Jesus’ Death by Crucifixion in the Qur’ān: An Issue for Interpretation and Muslim-Christian Relations,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 29 (1992): 432–449; Heribert Busse, “Jesu Errettung vom Kreuz in der islamischen Koranexegese von Sure 4:157,” *Oriens* 36 (2001): 160–195; Gabriel S. Reynolds, “The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72 (2009): 237–258; Suleiman A. Mourad, “Does the Qur’ān Deny or Assert Jesus’ Crucifixion and Death?,” in *New Perspectives on the Qur’ān: The Qur’ān in its Historical Context* 2, ed. G.S. Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2011), 347–355; and F. Peter Ford, “The End of Jesus’ Mission and the Honor of God in the Qur’ān: The Search for Common Ground between Muslims and Christians,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24 (2013): 15–26.
- 5 This succinct description draws from Bernard Weiss, “Knowledge of the Past: The Theory of *Tawātur* according to Ghazālī,” *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 81–105. See also Martin Whittingham, “How Could So Many Christians Be Wrong? The Role of *Tawātur* (Recurrent Transmission of

by al-Qarāfī notes that the denial of Jesus' death on the cross contradicts the witness of the Gospel and the testimony of both the Jews and the Christians. These two, however, are large nations spread over the entire world, which rules out the possibility of collusion. Thus, to deny a piece of information that enjoys such attestation as the crucifixion of Jesus would be as irrational as denying the existence of Baghdad or Damascus. In short, the Qur'ān's denial of the crucifixion is problematic, since it calls into question the accepted principle of *tawātur*.⁶

According to al-Qarāfī, this reasoning is based on a wrong understanding of *tawātur*, which only Muslims have grasped. The senses can be sure that a person was crucified, but not that the crucified person is the Messiah, since the senses cannot distinguish among similar things. Moreover, it is not impossible to think that God intervened by raising Jesus up to himself and by casting his likeness on someone else, as the Qur'ān declares. Indeed, such intervention to protect him from humiliation by his enemies befits God's beneficence towards his prophets and friends.⁷ Besides, even supposing that those who witnessed the crucifixion could distinguish between Jesus and his double, they were not enough as to exclude their conspiring to lie, since only a small number of Jews were present, the disciples having deserted Jesus at the time of his arrest. Hence, the reports which both the Jews and the Christians transmit about Jesus' death cannot be said in any way to impart necessary knowledge.⁸

Reports) in Understanding Muslim Views of the Crucifixion," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 19 (2008), 169–172; and Heck, "Transmission of Knowledge," 323. Al-Qarāfī discusses the concept of *tawātur* and its conditions of applicability in his work of legal theory, *Sharh tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl*, 337–341.

6 *Ajwiba*, 292–293 (179–180). Essentially the same objection is reported by 'Abd al-Jabbār but without using the technical term of *tawātur*. He writes in reference to Jesus' passion and death: "The Jews and the Christians claim to have certain knowledge regarding this through their observation and witness. [They claim] that this was passed down from large groups to large groups and communities to communities. The Christians, in particular, mock Muslims who say that none of this occurred, saying, 'What is the use in your master [i.e., Muḥammad] arrogantly [opposing] all of the communities in that. They preceded him and were before him. They are the people of this man [Christ] and his companions. He was born and grew up among them. His enemies, the Jews, and his faithful companions, the Christians, are in consensus about this. Yet your Prophet denies it. Is this not, as it is said, The adversaries were in agreement but the judge refused?' " ('Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique*, 47–48).

7 *Ajwiba*, 298–300 (182–184).

8 *Ajwiba*, 300–301 (184–185). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 67. This is the same conclusion reached by al-Ja'farī (*Takhjīl*, 340), from whom al-Qarāfī derives his line of argumentation and the Gospel passages that he quotes in support. See also Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, 1:122–125; trans. *Abenházam*, 2:163–169.

Rather than suggesting that the Qurʾān is at odds with the principle of *tawātur*, what is really problematic in al-Qarāfī's eyes is invoking the Gospel as a reliable witness for the crucifixion of Jesus. Christians are not able to provide an unbroken chain of oral transmission going back to Jesus for the books which they have, still less to prove that these books satisfy the requisites of *tawātur*.⁹ Moreover, many passages in them indicate that Jesus was not crucified but God raised him up to himself, something that probably happened during Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain, as al-Qarāfī, following al-Ja'farī, affirms.¹⁰ Thus, whereas the person who was crucified asked for something to drink (Jn 19:28), the real Jesus could abstain from food and drink for forty days and forty nights (Mt 4:1–2). Likewise, the person on the cross cried out in despair (Mt 27:36), showing an unwillingness to accept God's designs that is inappropriate in a prophet, and even less in someone said to be the son of God.¹¹

The second objection focuses on the claim that God projected the semblance of Jesus onto someone else. This person was apprehended and crucified in his stead. The Christians complain that this explanation is sophistical and cannot be accepted by rational people, for it would be the same as accepting that we can never be certain of what we see with our eyes. A man, for instance, could not be sure that his son, his wife, and the persons he knows are really them.¹² Al-Qarāfī begins his response by insisting again on the intrinsic possibility of God creating a likeness of anything that exists, since otherwise God would not be able to create that very thing in the first place. The Christians and the Jews, moreover, have no problem accepting other things which are more problematic, for instance, a staff becoming a serpent (Exod 7:8–10; Q 27:10), which is more difficult in itself than casting the likeness of a living being into another living being.¹³

Al-Qarāfī then goes on to claim that the reports about the events surrounding Jesus' arrest actually show that there was a considerable confusion about the identity of the person arrested, which conflicts with the celebrity that the Gospels accord to Jesus (Mk 6:1–3). Thus, the Jewish authorities had to pay one of his disciples to lead them to him (Mt 26:14–15), and when the person arrested was brought in, the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Messiah?' (Mt 26:62–64). The guards sent to arrest Jesus failed to recognize him twice

9 *Ajwiba*, 300–301 (185).

10 *Ajwiba*, 302 (186–187); *Takhjīl*, 340–341.

11 *Ajwiba*, 302–307 (190); *Takhjīl*, 349–350.

12 *Ajwiba*, 308–310 (190–192).

13 *Ajwiba*, 307–308 (190).

(Jn 18:3–8). Furthermore, the person arrested was severely beaten and disfigured, thus making it difficult to recognize him. Jesus had even announced to his disciples that they would doubt him (Mt 26:30–34).¹⁴ For al-Qarāfi, this great confusion undermines the confidence with which the Christians affirm Jesus' death and confirms the qur'ānic statement in that "those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition" (Q 4:157). In fact, several details in the Gospel narratives suggest different possibilities: for instance, that Judas regretted his betrayal and pointed to someone else in the garden, or that one of the disciples offered himself up while Jesus escaped with those who were released, or that the guards sent to arrest him accepted a bribe and allowed him to go, or that God created a demon or something else with the form of Jesus.¹⁵ In short, concludes al-Qarāfi, Christians have no texts that assert categorically the crucifixion of Jesus. As for the Jews, they only rely on the witness of Judas.¹⁶ The Qur'ān therefore does not oppose the principle of *tawātur*.

To conclude this section, it is worth noting that exactly the same objections against the qur'ānic denial of Jesus' death on the cross had in fact been raised in Muslim exegetical tradition and legal literature independently from inter-confessional controversy, and it is probably there that al-Qarāfi first encountered them. For instance, in his qur'ānic commentary, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī discusses several objections raised against the substitutionist interpretation of Q 4:157, such as that it would "open the door of sophistry . . . so that if we saw Zayd, it would be possible that it was not really Zayd . . . This would imply the nullification of social contracts such as marriage and ownership. Also, it would lead to the impugning of the principle of *tawātur*, bringing into serious doubt all transmitted historical knowledge . . . Such confusion about perceived phenomena would threaten the foundations of all religious laws."¹⁷ This does

14 *Ajwiba*, 310–314 (192–195). Compare with *Takhjīl*, 147, 341–346.

15 *Ajwiba*, 310–320 (192–198). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 68–69. Compare with *I'lām*, 413–416, from which al-Qarāfi has taken these possible scenarios of Jesus' escape from his enemies. See also al-Khazrajī, *Maqāmi* § § 42–44. For a survey of Muslim explanations of how another person was crucified instead of Jesus, see Samuel M. Stern, "Quotations from Apocryphal Gospels in 'Abd al-Jabbār,'" *Journal of Theological Studies* 18 (1967), 40–50. For the continuity of this theme in contemporary polemics, see Muhammad 'Ata' ur-Rahim, *Jesus: A Prophet of Islam*, rev. ed. (London: Ta-Ha, 1979), 36–48; and Louay Fatoohi, *The Mystery of the Historical Jesus: The Messiah in the Qur'an, the Bible, and Historical Sources* (Birmingham: Luna Plena, 2007), 439–445.

16 This is exactly al-Khazrajī's conclusion in *Maqāmi* § 45.

17 Quoted in Lawson, *Crucifixion*, 105–196. On al-Rāzī's views, see also Robinson, *Christ in Islam*, 135–138, Ayoub, "Death of Jesus," 101–102; and especially Whittingham, "Many

not mean, however, that Christians and Jews who were familiar with Muslim debates could not have used these arguments in debating with their Muslim opponents.

1.2 *The Probative Value of the Miracles of Jesus*

Jesus' power to bring the dead to life is the theme of another of the arguments discussed in chapter two.¹⁸ The Muslims are said to acknowledge this power, which no other prophet manifested. But Muslims also acknowledge that giving life and death is a divine prerogative. It therefore follows that the Messiah was divine.¹⁹ According to al-Qarāfi, the Christians consider this their most decisive argument, proving that they are the true upholders of the divine unity, while the Muslims are in fact the polytheists, since they allow a mere human being (that is, Jesus as they see him) to share in God's exclusive dominion over life and death. The Christians, moreover, invoke the Qur'ān's declaration in *sūrat yā' sīn* (36):79, "He who created them in the first place will give them life again," arguing that if Jesus gave life to the dead, it means that he created them in the first place. Before we examine al-Qarāfi's response, it is useful to recall that a more concise version of the same argument appears in the Toledo writing that prompted al-Khazrajī to write his polemical treatise:

In the book which the author of your law brought [it is written] that He [Jesus] gives life to the dead and this suffices as evidence that He is God. Then [it says] that He endowed some of his Apostles with the power of raising the dead so that they raised the dead just as did the Messiah.²⁰

Christians," 173–174. See also Martin Whittingham, "Al-Ghazālī on Jews and Christians," in *The Three Rings*, 206, 210–212.

- 18 *Ajwiba*, 339–341 (210–211). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 113; and 'Abd al-Khālīq, *al-Qarāfi wa-juhūduhu*, 527.
- 19 About giving life and death being a divine prerogative, the Christians quoted by al-Qarāfi refer to the Qur'ānic dispute between Abraham and the disbeliever whom Muslim exegetical tradition has identified with Namrūd (the biblical Nimrod): "Have you not thought about the man who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because God had given him power to rule? When Abraham said, 'It is my Lord who gives life and death,' he said, 'I too give life and death.' So Abraham said, 'God brings the sun from the east; so bring it from the west.' The disbeliever was dumbfounded: God does not guide those who do evil" (Q 2:258).
- 20 See Mt 10:8 (Jesus instructs his twelve disciples to cure the sick, *raise the dead*, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons) and Acts 9:36–40 (Peter raises Tabitha from the dead). This is the scriptural reference that al-Khazrajī's Christian interlocutor would have had in mind. However, there is no reference to these events in the Qur'ān.

And the Messiah sent them to all nations and ordered them to spread His authority after He Himself had granted to them His laws.²¹

Al-Khazrajī replies that Jesus' power to raise the dead, like his other miracles, was God's way of authenticating his prophetic status and the veracity of his message, and nothing more.²² Further, according to the logic of the argument, the Apostles who manifested the same power would also have to be God, something which Christians do not claim. And not only those Apostles, but also prophets like Elijah and Elisha, who also brought the dead back to life.²³ Why then should the Messiah be singled out as divine on account of this? The same line of reasoning is followed by al-Qurṭubī, who adds Ezekiel among the prophets who resuscitated the dead,²⁴ and also by al-Qarāfi. In fact, the question of the limited scope of the probative value of Jesus' miracles is an old polemical motif against Christianity that can be traced from the late eighth century onwards, when Muslim scholars began to develop an understanding of prophetic miracles which was based on the Qur'ān, but also shaped by inter-religious controversy.²⁵

Al-Qarāfi begins by pointing out that although Muslims will readily grant that giving life and death is God's prerogative, Christians have misunderstood what the Qur'ān and the Muslims say with regard to Jesus' miracles: they do not happen because of any intrinsic power of Jesus, but entirely *bi-idhn Allāh*, "with God's permission," as the Muslim scripture puts it (Q 3:49; 5:110). In other words, God is the real agent who performs the miraculous feats for him, as he does for other messengers.²⁶ Moreover, al-Qarāfi goes on to note, Christians do not consider divine the Apostles who revived the dead and prophets like

21 *Maqāmi'* § 3; trans. Burman, 191, modified.

22 *Maqāmi'* § 25.

23 See 1 Kg 17:20–24 (Elijah raises the widow's son), and 2 Kg 4:23–26 (Elisha raises the Shunammite's son).

24 *I'lām*, 145–146; Ezek 37:1–10 (Vision of the valley of dry bones; see also Q 2:259).

25 See an account of this process in David Thomas, "Miracles in Islam," in *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, ed. G.H. Twelftree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 199–215; and idem, "The Miracles of Jesus in Early Islamic Polemic," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 39 (1994): 221–243. Thomas notes how Muslim polemicists gradually moved from comparing Jesus' miracles with those of other prophets in order to refute claims of his divinity based upon the uniqueness of his actions to more detailed analysis of the nature of the miracles themselves and the actual manner in which they occurred.

26 *Ajwiba*, 341–342 (212–213). Paul of Antioch is aware that Jesus' mighty deeds in the Qur'ān take place only "with God's permission" (*Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 9), but he does not seem to have considered it fatal to his overall argument.

David, Elijah, Elisha, and Ezekiel, which necessarily invalidates the argument on which they base the divinity of Jesus.²⁷ The rest of his response consists of a series of biblical passages showing that the Messiah is only a servant of God, and thus human. For instance, according to al-Qarāfī, Isaiah's messianic prophecy quoted by Matthew: "Behold, My servant (*fatā*) whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased" (Mt 12:18; Isa 42:1) indicates Jesus' creatureliness, since the meaning of the term *fatā* both in the Torah (Gen 14:14–16) and in the Gospel (Jn 21:4) is servant, not son.²⁸ Likewise, Jesus' temptations (Mt 4:1–11); his not being aware of the death of John the Baptist (Mt 14:1–13); his answer, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone" (Mk 10:18); the scene of the barren fig tree (Mt 21:18–22); his birth and early years (Lk 2:1–51); his words about himself, "The son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9:58); and his anguished prayer in Gethsemane (Mk 14:34–36), are all indicative of a very human Jesus, who never pretended to be more than that.²⁹

Jesus' power to raise the dead reappears in another argument in connection with the claim that this and other miracles on the basis of which Muslims accept the prophethood of Jesus were, in fact, manifestations of natural magic.³⁰ Al-Qarāfī attributes this assertion to the Jews, according to whom only those who are present can distinguish between real miracles, on one side, and sorcery, natural magic, and sleight of hand, on the other.³¹ The Jews, who met Jesus, in a number ruling out collaborative fabrication, agreed that the extraordinary feats he performed, including his raising the dead, were natural magic. This testimony should be admitted by those who came later. It confirms, moreover, Moses' words to the Israelites, asking them to cling to the Sabbath until the end of time, since no other prophetic message would

27 *Ajwiba*, 345–360 (215–223). The inclusion of David among the prophets endowed with the power to resuscitate the dead is odd. Could it be a mistaken reference to Jeremiah's prophecy: "It shall come about on that day, declares the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off their neck and will tear off their bonds . . . they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them" (Jer 30:8–9)?

28 See Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 122.

29 These texts have all been taken from the chapter which al-Ja'fari devotes to establishing Jesus' humanity "from their own books." Compare *Ajwiba*, 341–342 (212–213) with *Takhjīl*, 117–119, 129, 132, 139–140, 150–152, 155.

30 The basis for this seems to be *sūrat al-ṣaff* (61):6, in which the Israelites are said to have reacted to Jesus' clear signs saying, "This is obviously sorcery."

31 Al-Qarāfī discusses at length the distinction between sorcery, natural magic, the use of talismans and incantations, etc., and prophetic miracles in his *Kitāb al-furūq* (ed. Sarraj and Muḥammad, 2001), 1288–1305.

come after him.³² As formulated, the argument is at best ingenuous. A Jew with a minimum of experience in inter-religious debate could hardly expect that the Muslims would be led to retract their recognition of Jesus' prophetic status with an argument that implied that Muḥammad was also a false prophet. Therefore, as it stands, the argument should be credited to al-Qarāfi more than to any real Jewish source, written or oral. This is not to say that the subject was not in the agenda of Muslim-Jewish medieval polemics, but that the discussion was more sophisticated than al-Qarāfi would lead us to believe.³³ In considering his defense of Jesus' prophethood, we should bear in mind that at stake was also Muḥammad's claim to prophethood.³⁴

Al-Qarāfi starts by denying that the evidentiary power of miracles can only be recognized by those who witness them. Conviction of a person's prophethood can also be attained from the transmitted reports about the circumstances surrounding that person and the signs that were manifested through him. In fact, al-Qarāfi says, this is how we come to know about many figures of the past: prophets, saints, scholars, and kings. Moreover, the principle of *tawātur* applies only to sense-perceptible things and cannot be invoked to adjudge claims to prophethood. That is, recurrent transmission can be a proof that someone did claim to be a prophet and that unusual events occurred at his hands, but it cannot prove by itself the validity or invalidity of the claim. This means that, no matter their number, the Jews can still be wrong in claiming that Jesus was a magician. Al-Qarāfi's next argument is the *ad hominem* point that the accusation that Jesus was a magician could work, on the same

32 *Ajwiba*, 360 (223–224). The implicit reference is probably to Exod 31:16: "So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant."

33 For instance, for the celebrated Jewish scholar Sa'adya Gaon (d. 330/942), the authenticity of the prophetic mission of Moses was based not only on the miracles he performed, but on the reasonableness of the course of conduct which he exhorted the Israelites to follow. By themselves, miracles cannot prove the truth of what is inherently unacceptable. See his *Kitāb al-amānāt wa-l-i'tiqādāt* ('The Book of Beliefs and Opinions'), trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 163–164. A useful overview of the terms of the debate can be found in al-Bāqillānī's (d. 403/1013) counter-arguments against the Jewish reasons for not accepting the claims of Christians, Muslims, and Zoroastrians (see Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 178–184).

34 Lazarus-Yafeh (*Intertwined Worlds*, 81, n. 4) observes that Muslim polemicists often lumped together the Jewish rejections of Jesus and Muḥammad, and quotes as example al-Samaw'al al-Maghribī's *Ifhām al-Yahūd*. See also Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 188–189, 211, 220.

grounds, against Jews regarding the miracles of Moses.³⁵ His final argument consists in presenting Gen 49:10 as an apodictic scriptural proof of the prophethood of Jesus. The passage, which is part of Israel's prophecy concerning his sons, states that "kingship shall not depart from the people of Judah nor the [ruler's] staff from among them until the Messiah has come." Al-Qarāfi notes that the Jews had a state and kings up to the time of Jesus, when they lost their political independence, which necessarily proves that Jesus was the promised Messiah. And yet, although some thousand years have passed since they lost the kingship, the Jews still expect the Messiah who will bring victory to the religion of Moses. This can only be manifest obstinacy, asserts al-Qarāfi.³⁶

1.3 *The Incarnation: An Ontological Impossibility*

The third Christological theme discussed in chapter two in addition to the crucifixion and the miracles of Jesus is the question of the union (*ittiḥād*) of God with a human being that Christianity affirms to have occurred in the person of Jesus. Al-Qarāfi brings up for discussion a Christian defense of the Incarnation that he attributes to a certain Aghushtīn, "the leader of the priests in Toledo and a referent for the Christians in science and virtue."³⁷ The argument establishes the possibility of this union on the basis of the Qur'ān, which recounts God's conversation with Moses through the intermediary of a created being,

35 Al-Qarāfi makes the same point in a later passage (*Ajwiba*, 627–628 [370]), arguing that the Jews' attempts to explain away the miracles of Jesus and Muḥammad by saying that it was natural magic, that they used talismans, or that Satan helped them, can be turned against the miracles of Moses. The same point is made by al-Qurṭubī (*I'lām*, 353). On the motif of magic in rabbinic stories about Jesus, see Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 102–106.

36 *Ajwiba*, 364–365 (226). Al-Qarāfi gives first the Hebrew text (in Arabic script) of Gen 49:10 and then the Arabic translation. He takes the argument from al-Samaw'al al-Maghribī (*Iḥām al-Yahūd*, 41–42 [English], 23 [Arabic]), who mentions it under the heading 'Compelling them [the Jews] to accept the prophethood of Jesus.' For Ibn Ḥazm, however, this verse was as failed historical prediction and hence an example of forgery in the Torah: the kingdom of Judah ended at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, yet the expected Messiah had not come. This prophecy is therefore a lie, which cannot be attributed to a prophet (see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 98–101). Yet, for al-Ja'farī, this passage is neither a prophecy of the Messiah nor a failed historical prediction, but a foretelling of Muḥammad (see *Takhjīl*, 434–435).

37 *Ajwiba*, 432 (268). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 116. This Aghushtīn is the earlier mentioned author of *Muṣḥaf al-'ālam al-kā'in*, fragments of which have been preserved in al-Qurṭubī's *I'lām*. According to al-Qurṭubī, the anonymous author of *Tathlīḥ al-waḥdāniyya*, the writing that prompted him to compose the *I'lām*, had derived his defense of the Incarnation from Aghushtīn's book. See above, chapter 2, section 5.3.

that is, the voice that spoke to Moses from the bush. The same episode had been invoked by Muslim partisans of the createdness of the Qur'ān to demonstrate the possibility of God's uncreated word existing in the created form of letters and sounds.³⁸ Christian apologists, aware of Muslim debates on the ontological status of the Qur'ān, were now deploying the argument as a qur'ānic proof for the possibility of God's eternal word uniting with the created nature of Jesus.³⁹ It should be noted, however, that Aghushtīn did not consider the argument a compelling proof of the fact of the Incarnation, but only an exercise of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) that established its possibility.⁴⁰ This important proviso has been left out by al-Qarāfi, who writes:

The Christians say: The Qur'ān voices the possibility of the union (*ittiḥād*) and hence it does not disapprove of us. The explanation of it is as follows: The Qur'ān says that God, may he be exalted, spoke directly to Moses, upon whom be peace. The religious confessions agree that God spoke to him through a voice (*ṣawt*). We assert that it is impossible for this voice to subsist in God, because God is not a body. Hence the voice subsisted in the bush, in the sacred valley.⁴¹ Therefore, the speaker was the tree. It said, 'I am God; there is no god but Me. So worship Me' (Q 20:14), and 'Go, both of you [Moses and Aaron], to Pharaoh, for he has exceeded all bounds' (Q 20:43). Moses said, 'Lord, we fear he will do us great harm or

38 See Wilferd Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran," in *Orientalia Hispanica sive studia F.M. Pareja octogenario dictata*, ed. J.M. Barral (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 505–506. For a recent overview on this central issue of Islamic theology, see "Createdness of the Qur'ān," in *EQ*, s.v. (Richard C. Martin). See also Igrave's interesting exploration of Muslim theological debates on the status of the Qur'ān in reference to early Muslim-Christian controversy on the Word of God in *Trinity*, 205–232.

39 See also the response of the Coptic theologian Paul al-Būshī (d. ca. 1250) to the question (from a presumably Muslim interlocutor) of how the divine Word became flesh in his *Maqāla fī l-tathlīth wa-l-tajassud wa-ṣiḥḥat al-Masīḥiyya* ("Treatise on the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Truth of Christianity"), trans. Stephen J. Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 299–300.

40 See *I'lam*, 145–146. According to Aghushtīn, God's preference for human beings over the rest of his creatures and his desire to be forever in communion with them explains why God steps out of his transcendence as it were and addresses humans by the intermediary of a created veil (*ḥijāb makhluq*), first speaking to them in a language like theirs, and then appearing to them in a form like theirs. In this sense, "his assuming a [human] form (*ṣūra*) is like his assuming the voice (*ṣawt*)" (p. 146).

41 That is, the sacred valley of Ṭuwā, mentioned in Q 20:12 and 79:16 as they place where Moses received a divine message and mission (see Q 28:29–35; Q 20:9–35; 79:15–26).

exceed all bounds' (Q 20:45). Thus, the tree said that it was God, and Moses addressed the tree as if it were God, may He be exalted. If there was no union between God's essence and the essence of the tree, then the speech [of the tree] and [Moses'] response were not correct, nor the affirmation of the religious confessions that God spoke to Moses directly, for in that case only the tree spoke to Moses. But if the union with the tree took place, then it also did with the essence of Jesus and it is correct for us to address him as Lord and God, following the example of Moses. If so, we are in the right and the Muslims are at fault for declaring us unbelievers on account of this.⁴²

In his reply, al-Qarāfi points out that the Christian argument is built upon a false premise, since not all the religious confessions agree that God addressed Moses by means of a voice audible to the physical hearing. On the contrary, the majority of Muslims maintain that God made him hear God's interior word, which subsists in the divine essence without letters or sounds.⁴³ Moreover, even those Muslims who think that God addressed Moses by means of a voice do not claim that the sounds he heard are in themselves God's word, but only that they *indicate* God's word subsisting in the divine essence, thus excluding any union or indwelling of God's essence in the tree. Al-Qarāfi observes that it is the same with all the intermediaries God uses to convey his word, whether angels or other: in no case has God's essence in any time united with the essence of the intermediary. And yet, it is still correct to say that Moses heard God's word, just as it is correct to say that the Torah, the Gospel, and the Psalms are the word of God, even though they are made up of sounds and expressions in Hebrew and in other languages.

Al-Qarāfi dedicates the remainder of his response to further explaining the notion of interior speech (*kalām nafsi*), its difference from uttered speech (*kalām lisānī* or *ṣawti*), and how, while human beings are endowed with both types of speech, only the former can be attributed to God. He then explains Moses' audition of God's interior word in terms of Ash'arī theory in which sensory perception is considered an accident inhering in the atoms that constitute the organs of perception. Since it is within God's power to bring into existence any contingent being according to his will, God can create an

42 *Ajwiba*, 430–432 (267–268). Compare with *I'lām*, 105–106, 112–113 (*Tathlith al-wahdāniyya*), and 143–144 (*Muṣḥaf al-'ālam al-kā'in*).

43 This reflects the Ash'arī position in the debate on the ontological status of the Qur'an, and it is also the same line of argumentation that al-Qurṭubī follows in his reply to the Christian argument. Compare *Ajwiba*, 432–435 (268–269) with *I'lām*, 107–112.

auditory perception of his interior word in the soul of Moses (that is, directly in the atoms of his soul, not in his auditory organs). This perception gives Moses a more distinctive and evident knowledge of God's word than someone who only has an intellectual awareness of the divine attribute of the word subsisting in God's essence. For al-Qarāfi, moreover, this explanation of Moses' audition of God's word is congruent with God's saying in *sūrat al-baqara* (2):253, "We favored some of the messengers above others. God spoke to some." That is, some messengers—Moses being one of them—were distinguished with an audition of God's interior word which was not granted to other prophets, even though all of them were believers who heard the uttered word of God in the Torah and other revealed books.

In addition to the foregoing defense of the Incarnation, al-Qarāfi also discusses a further qur'ānic proof which Christians are said to advance in favor of it.⁴⁴ The argument, which contrasts two almost identical verses from *sūrat Maryam*, presumes that God is the speaker in the Qur'ān. Thus, whereas God says in reference to John the Baptist: "Peace be upon him, the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he is raised up alive!" (Q 19:15), when the Qur'ān refers to the Messiah a few verses later, it is Jesus himself who says, "Peace be upon me, the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised up alive!" (Q 19:33). The union of God with the human being explains why the one invoking peace and the one upon whom peace is invoked coincide in the case of Jesus. By contrast, since such union did not occur in John's case, the Qur'ān employs a formula that implies multiplicity: "Peace be upon him . . ." The argument shows resourcefulness and knowledge of the Qur'ān, but is less theologically sophisticated than the previous one and al-Qarāfi quickly disposes of it on linguistic grounds. In the Arabic use, he explains, it is correct to invoke God's pleasure, God's peace, or God's mercy upon oneself, either as a proclamation or as a supplication, according to whether or not one is conscious of having received them. In either case, this is done with the certainty that nothing has united with one's essence. Therefore, there is nothing out of the ordinary in Jesus saying, "Peace be upon me," which simply means, "may God's peace be upon me." Furthermore, if comparisons are to be made, God invoking peace upon John is superior to Jesus invoking peace upon himself, since God's word is always efficacious and therefore sure to be fulfilled, whereas God is not obliged to answer Jesus' supplication.⁴⁵

44 *Ajwiba*, 442 (272–273). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 115.

45 This last point is reflected in the following tradition that Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) reports in his *Kitāb al-Zuhd* ('Book of Renunciation'): "John and Jesus met and John said, 'Ask God's forgiveness for me, for you are better than me.' Jesus replied: 'You are better

2 The Qur'ān under Fire

A significant number of pages in the second chapter of the *Ajwiba* are devoted to defending the integrity of the Qur'ān against Jewish and Christian challenges. Two of these challenges have to do with alleged errors and mistakes in the Qur'ān concerning biblical characters, putting into question its divine origin. The other two cast doubt on the transmission of the Qur'ānic text on the basis of intra-Muslim disputes in this regard.

2.1 *Errors in the Qur'ān*

According to al-Qarāfi, both the Christians and the Jews point out that the Qur'ān contains mistakes which cannot be ascribed to God. One example of this is the verse that describes Mary the mother of Jesus as “daughter of ‘Imrān” (Q 66:12). A further example is the passage where she is called “sister of Aaron” (Q 19:28). How can this be possible, object the two religious groups, when the ‘Imrān who was the father of Moses and Aaron (see Exod 6:20) lived six hundred years before Mary the mother of Jesus?⁴⁶ Exactly the same objection is found in the writing to which al-Khazraji replied, where these errors are directly imputed to Muḥammad, considered the author of the Qur'ān:

There is a matter for wonder in his [Muhammad's] saying about Mary the mother of the Messiah, ‘And Mary is the daughter of ‘Imrān who guarded her chastity’ (Q 66:12). And he said about her in another passage, ‘Oh sister of Aaron, your father was not a man of iniquity and your mother was not a whore’ (Q 19:28). But the mother of the Messiah was not the

than me. I pronounced peace upon myself, whereas God pronounced peace upon you.’ God recognized the merit of them both.” See Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, ed. Muḥammad Jalāl Sharaf (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍa al-‘Arabiyya, 1981), 169. Translation taken from Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 82.

- 46 Al-Qarāfi mentions these accusations in *Ajwiba*, 333 (207–208) and 335 (209) respectively. See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 99. In his Qur'ān commentary, al-Ṭabarī reports the following tradition according to which six hundred years are said to separate Aaron and Moses from Jesus: “On the authority of Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn: I was told that Ka'b said: God's words ‘Oh sister of Hārūn’ (Q 19:28) do not refer to Hārūn the brother of Mūsā. ‘Ā'isha said to him: you lie! He replied, O mother of the believers, if the Prophet (peace . . .) said so, he is more knowledgeable and better informed; otherwise, I see there are six hundred years between them. And she was silent.” Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 2001), 15:523–524; trans. modified from Charfi, “Christianity in the Qur'ān Commentary of Ṭabarī,” 111.

sister of Aaron and was not the daughter of 'Imrān. The name of her father is Joachim. You have imagined that she was the daughter of 'Imrān who was the sister of Moses and Aaron.⁴⁷

However, the anonymous Toledo priest quoted by al-Khazrajī was far from being the first Christian to draw attention to this apparent case of mistaken identity in the Qur'ān. The exegete and historian al-Ṭabarī reports a tradition according to which the Christians of Najrān, an oasis in south-western Arabia, had already questioned al-Mughīra ibn Shu'ba, one of Muḥammad' companions, about it.⁴⁸

Al-Qarāfi begins his reply by pointing out that the Qur'ān only describes Mary as the "daughter of 'Imrān." It does not say that this 'Imrān is the father of Aaron and Moses. There is nothing strange in two persons sharing the same name. But even if Mary's father was not called 'Imrān, it would still be correct to address her as "daughter of 'Imrān" in reference to her ancestor, since she belongs to the children of Israel. Identifying a person with an illustrious ancestor, whether near or distant, is a common practice amongst the Arabs and other nations, explains al-Qarāfi.⁴⁹ As for the Qur'ān referring to Mary as the "sister of Aaron," he offers several possible explanations similar to those which had already been advanced by Muslim exegetes.⁵⁰ The first is that this Aaron was an exceptionally devout man who lived at the time of Mary. So when Mary went back to her people carrying the child, they accused her of a terrible wrongdoing, improper for the sort of woman she was known to be until then, pious and devout like the said Aaron. A second explanation is that Aaron was not the name of a devout but of a dissolute man, so that Mary was

47 *Friend* § 7; trans. Burman, 193, modified.

48 "... from al-Mughīra ibn Shu'ba: the Prophet (peace ...) sent me on some business of his to the people of Najrān, who asked: Does your prophet not assert that Hārūn the brother of Maryam is the brother of Mūsā? I did not know what reply to give them until I returned to the Prophet (peace ...) and told him. He said: People used to be called by the names of those who were before them." Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 15:524; trans. Charfi, "Christianity in the Qur'an Commentary of Ṭabarī," 111–12. In his *Radd 'alā l-Naṣārā* (ed. al-Sharqāwī, 53–57; trans. Fletcher, *A Reply to the Christians*, 60–64), al-Jāhiz mentions other errors in the Qur'ān that the Christians of his time alleged as evidence of the unreliability of the Muslim scripture.

49 *Ajwiba*, 333–334 (208).

50 *Ajwiba*, 335–338 (209–210). Compare with Suleiman A. Mourad, "Mary in the Qur'ān: A Reexamination of Her Presentation," in *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, 163–166; and Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 132–134.

called the “sister of Aaron” to emphasize her immorality.⁵¹ Finally, it is also possible that the Qur’ān names Mary the “sister of Aaron” simply because she was a descendant of Moses, who was Aaron’s brother. As a confirmation of this linguistic use, al-Qarāfi quotes God’s words to Moses in the Torah: “I will raise up a prophet from among their brothers like you, and I will put My words in his mouth” (Deut 18:15), which he interprets as a foretelling of Muḥammad on the assumption that “their brothers” must necessarily refer to the children of Ishmael, Isaac’s half-brother.⁵² Al-Qarāfi’s point is that if the Ishmaelites are called the brothers of the Israelites because their respective ancestors (Ishmael and Isaac) were brothers, then Mary can also be named the “sister of Aaron,” since she was a descendant of Moses, Aaron’s brother.⁵³ After listing these three possibilities, al-Qarāfi proceeds somewhat abruptly to the next argument. The non-stated conclusion is nonetheless clear: there are no grounds to accuse the Qur’ān of being mistaken on Mary’s account.

2.2 *Muslim Disputes about the Qur’ān*

Attacks on the integrity of the Qur’ān were not limited to alleged cases of mistaken identification of biblical characters. According to al-Qarāfi, Christian polemicists also drew attention to intra-Muslim disputes as embarrassing evidence that the Qur’ān did not enjoy the guaranteed transmission that the Muslims were so eager to deny to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. The two objections mentioned by al-Qarāfi relate to what is technically known in classical Islamic scholarship as the *qirā’āt* or ‘readings’ of the Qur’ān, that is, the different manners of reciting the Muslim scripture. These ‘readings’ include not only *variae lectiones* (alternative spellings, use of synonyms or near synonyms, interpolations, etc.), but also other elements “such as differences concerning length of syllables, when to assimilate consonants to following ones, and where to pause or insert verse endings.”⁵⁴ The term *qirā’āt*,

51 This is the explanation given by al-Khazraji in *Maqāmi* § 138.

52 See the same interpretation of Deut 18:15 in *Takhjil*, 657–658. See also below, chapter 6, section 9.2.

53 In his interesting study of this question, Reynolds (*The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 145) concludes that “the Qur’ān names Mary the ‘sister of Aaron’ for the same reason that Luke names Elizabeth the descendant of Aaron: she is associated with the priestly office of Israel. That Mary was known as Elizabeth’s cousin (Lk 1:36) may have led the Qur’ān to extend Aaron’s association with Elizabeth to Mary as well.” As for Mary’s description as “daughter of ‘Imrān,” Reynolds sees here not a historical confusion but an exercise of literary typology in which Miriam the sister of Moses is seen as a type of Mary the mother of Jesus, an idea already suggested in the Gospel of Luke (ibid., 146–147).

54 Frederik Leemhuis, “Readings of the Qur’ān,” *EQ*, 4:354.

however, can also be used in the narrow sense of variant readings, and it is with this meaning that it is employed in the first objection that al-Qarāfi brings up. The argument recalls the disagreements recorded in Muslim tradition regarding the collection of the Qurʾān, in particular the controversy between the third caliph ʿUthmān (d. 35/656) and the companion ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd (d. ca. 33/653):

The Christians say: The Muslims are not sure about the Qurʾān which they have, and yet they are convinced that it is flawless. The explanation of this is that ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, one of the most illustrious companions of Muḥammad . . . disagreed with them about the Qurʾān and they disagreed with him, to the point that ʿUthmān had him ill-treated. If the Qurʾān had been known beyond doubt, no such disagreement would have occurred between the companions, who were with the Prophet a short while before . . . Ibn Masʿūd confirmed [as part of the Qurʾān] the non-canonical variant readings⁵⁵ which others denied, while they confirmed what he denied, that is, the two *sūras* of taking refuge.⁵⁶ If such a great disagreement about what should or should not be in the Qurʾān occurred, then faith in the whole of it becomes shaky.⁵⁷

The above paragraph refers in a succinct way to the controversies that ensued after ʿUthmān commissioned and promulgated an official recension of the Qurʾān in the main five centers of the expanding Muslim empire (Medina, Mecca, Kūfa, Baṣra, and Damascus), and ordered the codices of other companions to be destroyed, something which Ibn Masʿūd refused to do in Kūfa. These personal copies of the qurʾānic revelations are reported to have contained differences among themselves and in relation to the official text.⁵⁸ Some of these

55 Literally, the 'solitary' or 'isolated' readings (*al-qirāʾāt al-shādhda*), which is how Muslim scholars eventually designated the variant readings of the Qurʾān that, lacking a sufficient number of authoritative chains of transmission, were not allowed for liturgical recitation. Other readings were classified into *mutawātira*, 'widely transmitted,' or *mashhūra*, 'well-known.' For the most recent study on the question, see Shady Hekmat Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qurʾān: The Problem of Tawātur and the Emergence of Shawādhidh* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

56 That is, the last two *sūras* of the Qurʾān, 113 and 114, both of which begin with the words "Say: I seek refuge in the Lord." Known collectively as *al-muʾawwidhatān*, their recitation has often been considered having a strong protective value.

57 *Ajwiba*, 444–446 (273–275). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 97–98.

58 The classical study on the question is John Burton, *The Collection of the Qurʾān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), conveniently summarized by the author

variants became significant in connection with the regional development of Islamic law, whose rulings were understood to be derived from the Qurʾān and from the practice of the early community. The most important of these pre-ʿUthmānic codices appears to have been precisely that of Ibn Masʿūd, which, among other differences, omitted the first *sūra* (to which, curiously, al-Qarāfi makes no reference) and the last two, since Ibn Masʿūd did not consider them to be part of the revealed text. It should be noted, however, that Ibn Masʿūd's recension of the Qurʾān is not attested in manuscripts, and is known only from descriptions in literary sources.

Interestingly, al-Qarāfi opens his reply by noting that this objection was advanced by someone who had apostatized after having converted to Islam, and who was convinced that this was a great argument against the Muslims. Blinded by his evil intention, however, he could not see that the matter was not as he had conjectured. It is not clear whether al-Qarāfi is referring to a particular person, perhaps someone he met while debating with Christians, or is simply assuming that such knowledge of Muslim tradition was only accessible to insiders.⁵⁹ Al-Qarāfi proceeds to explain that the disagreement among the companions was not because the text of the Qurʾān was unknown to them, as the argument fallaciously suggests. Ibn Masʿūd differed from the other companions with regard only to the *meaning* of certain verses. As a result, when reciting the disputed verses, he would add his own interpretation to them. For instance, he would read *sūrat al-māʿida* (5):89 as “three consecutive days” rather than the “three days” as in the ʿUthmānic text. The companions, however, wary of what had happened with the People of the Book, were intent on avoiding that something that was not the Qurʾān be added to it. They were right, al-Qarāfi remarks with approval, and it is thanks to their God-given determination and to Divine Providence that the Qurʾān was preserved without admixture. For the same reason, the companions opposed Ibn Masʿūd's wish to separate the last two *sūras* from the rest of the Qurʾān and use them as

in his “Collection of the Qurʾān,” in *EQ*, s.v. See also Hossein Modarressi, “Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qurʾān: A Brief Survey,” *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993), 10–17. For an overview of the different types of variant readings reported from Ibn Masʿūd and from other companions, see “Codices of the Qurʾān,” in *EQ*, s.v. (Frederik Leemhuis).

59 At any event, the existence of different qurʾānic recensions and of Muslim disputes about the collection of the Qurʾān had been known by Christian polemicists since a much earlier time. The above-mentioned apology pseudonymously attributed to ʿAbd al-Masīḥ ibn Ishāq al-Kindī, for instance, refers to it in great length with the intention of casting doubt on the inspired character of the Muslim scripture. See text in Newman, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 455–458. See also Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, 2:209–210; trans. *Abenházam*, 3:120–121.

charm prayers. In short, concludes al-Qarāfī, the entire argument is a mirage which only the ignorant person thinks to be real.⁶⁰

The question of the readings of the Qurʾān comes back in another objection, also said to originate from the Christians. This time, however, the object of attack are not the *qirāʾāt* in the narrow meaning of variant readings but in the broader sense of systems of recitation. Although the official recension of the Qurʾān ultimately eclipsed its competitors, the Sunnī tradition came to recognize as acceptable for liturgical use a total of fourteen readings of the ʿUthmānic text. It should be kept in mind that the codex sanctioned by ʿUthmān included only the consonantal skeleton, without the diacritical points and other signs introduced later to restrict the ambiguity of the old script, thus allowing for the possibility of different readings. The establishment of the fourteen canonical readings took place over a long period of time and it involved several phases: seven readings were first recognized as authoritative, due mainly to the work of Ibn Mujāhid (d. 325/936), other three were added later, and finally another four.⁶¹ It is to this process that the Christian argument alludes, albeit sketchily:

The Christians say: The Muslims upbraid us because our Gospels are four and are transmitted from four different individuals. Yet, their Qurʾān is transmitted from seven different reciters (*qurrāʾ*), who differ extensively, much more than the differences that exist between the Gospels. In fact, the Muslims recognize that the readings (*qirāʾāt*) [of the Qurʾān] are more than seven, these seven being only the most well-known. In that case, they have seven books, or rather ten, and even more, orally transmitted from different people. Of necessity their disagreement with regard to their scripture is stronger than our disagreement with regard to our scripture.⁶²

Al-Qarāfī dismisses the objection explaining that all seven canonical readings had been orally transmitted from Muḥammad by *tawātur*. The Qurʾān

60 See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 97–98. Understandably enough, al-Qarāfī downplays the question. However, the fact that the codex of Ibn Maṣʿūd omitted the first and the last two *sūras* of the Qurʾān and that the codex of ʿUbayy ibn Kaʿb (d. 21/642) contained two *sūras* absent from the officially promulgated text caused quite a lot of unease among scholars, since it appeared to clash with the fundamental belief in the *mutawātir* transmission of the Qurʾān. See Burton, *Collection*, 220–224.

61 For a detailed description of this process, see Nasser, *Variant Readings*, 35–78; and the article by Frederik Leemhuis, “Readings of the Qurʾān,” in *EQ*, s.v.

62 *Ajwiba*, 444–446 (273–275).

was revealed in the language of Quraysh, Muḥammad's tribe. At the latter's request, however, God made it descend in seven modes of recitation to accommodate the linguistic particularities of the different Arab tribes, which otherwise would have found it burdensome to memorize the Qur'ān.⁶³ Al-Qarāfi then proceeds to attack his opponent, repeating the by now familiar criticism that the Christians are unable to trace the oral transmission of their Gospels back to their authors. Moreover, one never finds the Gospel writers saying, 'The Messiah told me that God revealed to him such-and-such,' but the most they say in some cases is, 'The Messiah said such-and-such.' Thus, it is impossible to know whether such thing belongs to the revealed Gospel, to Jesus' own utterances, or to what was revealed to him but not as part of the Gospel. Such is the pitiful predicament of the Christians: there is no single letter in their books of which they can be certain that it belongs to the original Gospel. On the contrary, most of what they contain is narratives and sayings of priests and infidel rulers, which are surely not the Gospel, says al-Qarāfi in reference to the Jewish high priest and Pilate in the passion narratives; but if one cannot distinguish what came down from God from what did not, then the confidence in the whole disappears. Al-Qarāfi concludes recalling that the Muslims have carefully distinguished between the Qur'ān, the prophetic traditions, and the sayings of the companions. By contrast, the Christians have mixed up everything and called the whole the book of God: "Do not compare yourselves with us! We have nothing in common in this respect: you are in the extreme of negligence, while we have exerted ourselves to the utmost."⁶⁴

3 The Abrogation and Falsification of the Torah

Among the objections against Muslim claims that al-Qarāfi brings up in the second chapter of the *Ajwiba*, two are connected with the Torah. The first of them, which al-Qarāfi attributes to both the Jews and the Christians, challenges the assertion that Muḥammad's law had cancelled an important number of legal rulings from the Torah, although it is difficult to see how Christians could

63 *Ajwiba*, 460–463 (280–281). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 98. Al-Qarāfi is referring here to a famous *ḥadīth* according to which the Qur'ān is said to have been sent down in seven *ahruf*. On this prophetic tradition, see Claude Gilliot, "Les sept 'lectures': corps social et écriture révélée," *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 5–25 and 63 (1986): 49–62, and Yasin Dutton, "Orality, Literacy and the 'Seven *ahruf*' *ḥadīth*," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 23 (2012): 1–49.

64 *Ajwiba*, 466 (283).

have subscribed to this argument, as will be seen below. The second objection conveys the Jewish protest against the Muslim accusation of the falsification of the Torah. In his replies to these two arguments, together with chapter four of the *Ajwiba*, al-Qarāfi condenses the essential elements of Muslim medieval polemics against the Jewish scripture.⁶⁵

3.1 *Can God Change His Mind?*

As noted earlier, the doctrine of abrogation (*naskh*) was developed by Muslim exegetes and legal scholars on the idea that later revealed qur'ānic verses revoked the legal implications of earlier passages dealing with the same issues when there was a contradiction between them. This was no mere legal subterfuge, but what God himself seemed to imply in *sūrat al-baqara* (2):106, "Any revelation We cause to be superseded or forgotten, We replace with something better or similar." The doctrine of abrogation was also applied to conflicting prophetic sayings, and, more reluctantly, to conflicts between the Qur'ān and the prophetic tradition.⁶⁶ The idea of a gradual development in the details of the regulations promulgated by Muḥammad during his prophetic mission was naturally carried over into polemical literature. It allowed Muslim theologians to account for the superseding character of Muḥammad's dispensation while recognizing the past validity of other prophetic legislations, now abrogated. It goes without saying that both the Jews and the Christians found this claim unacceptable, albeit for different reasons. The former considered the Law of Moses to be eternal, never to be abrogated.⁶⁷ The latter believed that Jesus had

65 Lazarus-Yafeh (*Intertwined Words*, 19–49) summarizes the Muslim polemic against the Jewish Scripture into four charges: (1) the accusation of falsification and (2) the related claim that the transmission of the biblical text is unreliable, (3) the theme of abrogation of the Jewish law, and (4) the interpretation of certain biblical passages as predictions of the coming of Muḥammad and the rise of Islam.

66 See John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic Theories of Abrogation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990); and "Abrogation," in *EI3*, s.v. (Andrew Rippin).

67 See Arthur S. Tritton, "'Debate' between a Muslim and a Jew," *Islamic Studies* 1 (1962): 60–64. See also Sa'adya Gaon's defense of the Torah's eternity in the *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 157–163. It has been suggested, however, that Sa'adya's refutation of the argument of abrogation was directed primarily at Christianity and that Islam may have been only a secondary target. See Daniel J. Lasker, "Saadya Gaon on Christianity and Islam," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. D. Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 169–170. For the Jewish-Muslim debate on the validity of the Torah and the possibility of its abrogation by a new dispensation, see more extensively Robert Brunschvig, "L'argumentation d'un théologien musulman du Xe siècle contre le Judaïsme," in *Homenaje a Millás-Vallicrosa*, vol. 1 (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones

abrogated the precepts of the Torah and promulgated the new and definitive law of grace, as we have seen above.⁶⁸ Thus, even though al-Qarāfī reports the following objection as coming from both the Jews and the Christians, it is highly unlikely that the latter would claim, even for polemical purposes, that the Law of Moses remained valid until the end of time, as the argument upholds:

The Muslims maintain that the law of Muḥammad abrogated many of the Torah's legal rulings, for instance, the prohibition against eating the fat of animals and the meat of a camel, the prohibition against hunting on the Sabbath, the prohibition against mixing with a menstruating woman, the permission of a small quantity of wine, and other things. However, this is impossible, because the doctrine of abrogation requires the possibility of a change of mind (*badā'*) and regret (*nadam*) in God, may He be exalted. Since this is impossible, abrogation is also impossible. Therefore, the Law of the Torah remains until the coming of the Hour, and the law that claims to abrogate it is invalid, which was to be demonstrated.

Moreover, we say that the action which in itself brings a benefit (*maṣlaḥa*) should not be forbidden, and that the action which in itself causes a detriment (*maḥṣada*) should not be commanded. However, the doctrine of the abrogation amounts to an overturning of the nature of things in which good becomes evil and evil becomes good. Since this is impossible, abrogation is also impossible.

Científicas, 1954), 225–241; Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 192–222; and Sabine Schmidtke, "Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī on the Torah and its Abrogation," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 61 (2008): 559–580.

68 The belief that the Church had replaced the Jewish people as God's covenantal community and that the benefits of God's covenant had been irrevocably transferred in a new and superior form to Abraham's spiritual descendants, henceforth to be considered the *verus Israel*, was articulated during the second and third centuries by writers such as Justin Martyr (d. 165), Melito of Sardis (d. ca. 190), and Tertullian (d. ca. 220). Although supersessionism was never formally defined as a doctrine (precisely because it was not subject to dispute), it was officially enshrined in the Decree for the Copts of the General Council of Florence (1442), which declared that with the advent of Christ and the promulgation of the Gospel the prescriptions of the Mosaic covenant had not only lost their efficacy for divine worship but their observance entailed the loss of eternal salvation. For a succinct presentation, see the entries "Replacement theology" and "Supersessionism," in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. E. Kessler and N. Wenborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 375–376 and 413–414 respectively.

We also say that the word of God, may He be exalted, is eternal. Since the determination of legal rulings belongs to His word, the command and prohibition are also eternal. God commanding and prohibiting the same action simultaneously is impossible. But abrogation leads to affirming such a thing, hence abrogation is impossible, which was to be demonstrated.⁶⁹

As a matter of fact, these same objections against the admissibility of abrogation had already been raised in Muslim theological literature in connection with the immutability of God's knowledge and the purpose of divine law.⁷⁰ The idea that God could alter a previous determination was encapsulated in the term *badā'*, literally 'appearance,' that is, the intervention of new circumstances resulting in a change of the divine mind. Muslim theologians generally found *badā'* unacceptable, since it presupposed a development in God's knowledge which was incompatible with divine prescience. On the other hand, they did not want to limit God's omnipotence and sovereign will. The Ash'arī solution to this dilemma was insisting that abrogation was no evidence of deficient knowledge, but rather the unfolding in time of a divine plan in which God knows from eternity what regulations would be announced by which prophets and when they will be replaced by other regulations. This is exactly the view that al-Qarāfi adopts in his reply to the above objection, denying that abrogation implies a change of mind or an act of regret on God's part, something that only happens when a person learns something he did not know before: for instance, a traveler who changes his mind and regrets his previous decision upon realizing that there is a greater benefit in not pursuing his trip. This is not the case with God, insists al-Qarāfi, who knows from eternity when eating the fat of animals will be pernicious and when it will be beneficial, and therefore when he will forbid it and when he will allow it. In other words, the fact that God's law varies does not reflect the mutability of the divine essence but only the contingent nature of human existence. In al-Qarāfi's words, "Legal rulings

69 *Ajwiba*, 323–324 (199–201).

70 See Binyamin Abrahamov, "Some Notes on the Notion of *Naskh* in the *Kalām*," in *Islamic Thought in the Middle Ages: Studies in Text, Transmission and Translation, in Honour of Hans Daiber*, ed. A. Akasoy and W. Rave (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 3–19; and Mahmoud Ayoub, "Divine Preordination and Human Hope: A Study of the Concept of *Badā'* in Imāmī Shī'ī Tradition," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106 (1986): 623–632.

depend on the interests of the particular times and the diversity of the nations" (*al-aḥkām tābi'a li-maṣāliḥ al-awqāt wa-ikhtilāf al-umam*).⁷¹

This last sentence constitutes at the same time al-Qarāfi's answer to the second point argued in the paragraph quoted above, namely, that in prohibiting what had been previously permitted and vice versa, abrogation would be declaring good evil and evil good. Some Ash'arī theologians had dismissed this objection by asserting that the only purpose of the divine law was to test human obedience: it is not that God commands what is good but what God commands is good.⁷² Al-Qarāfi rejects this strict voluntarism without endorsing, however, the Mu'tazilī view that actions are inherently good or evil and that God is obliged to command what is good and forbid what is evil. Seeking to steer a middle course, he appeals to the differences between the nations and their changing circumstances, which require different courses of action in order to uphold human good. Not only nations, but even the individuals themselves experience different circumstances in their lives, insists al-Qarāfi, offering as an example Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac: once they had given proof of their submission to God and acceptance of the divine decree, the protection of the human welfare (*ri'āyat al-maṣāliḥ*) demanded the abrogation of the command requesting Isaac's sacrifice.⁷³ Al-Qarāfi concludes this part of his response recalling that, although Muslims have disagreed as to whether God is obliged to protect the welfare of humankind, the truth is with those who do not consider it an obligation, that is, those who consider it an act of God's favor.⁷⁴ The rest of the reply consists in a series of biblical and parabiblical examples selected with the twofold intention of proving that, contrary to what the above objection alleges, the Jews do admit the possibility of abrogation, and they are, moreover, the ones who ascribe change of mind and regret to God.⁷⁵

71 *Ajwiba*, 325 (201). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 134. Al-Ja'farī adopts a similar line of reasoning in *Takhjīl*, 541–543.

72 For example, al-Juwaynī (*Kitāb al-irshād*, 342; trans. *Conclusive Proofs*, 186) writes: "According [to] our doctrine, obligation does not derive from an attribute belonging to the obligatory thing. Instead, the meaning of a thing's being obligatory is that someone has said in reference to it: 'Do it.' If God, the Exalted, proclaims something obligatory, it means that He announces that He has commanded that it be done. If He forbids it, He declares that He has [forbidden] it." This is also the view of al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153). See Abrahamov, "Some Notes on the Notion of *Naskh*," 15–17.

73 *Ajwiba*, 332 (207). Note that for al-Qarāfi there is no doubt that Isaac, not Ishmael, was Abraham's intended sacrifice. See 'Abd al-Khālīq, *al-Qarāfi wa-juhūduhu*, 360, n. 1.

74 *Ajwiba*, 326–331 (201–206). Compare with *Takhjīl*, 544–550.

75 Examples of abrogation mentioned by al-Qarāfi are, for instance, the prohibition of a man marrying his non-twin sister, which God had commanded to Adam (that is, to marry

3.2 *The Falsification of the Torah*

By noting that the Jews, not the Muslims, were those who ascribed to God unacceptable anthropomorphisms, al-Qarāfi was implying that the scriptures now in their possession could not be the Torah originally revealed to Moses. This polemical motif is taken up explicitly in a later section of chapter two devoted to substantiating the accusation of *tahrīf* in response to Jewish objections. The Jews quoted by al-Qarāfi complain that the Muslims only base themselves on *sūrat al-nisā'* (4):46, "Among the Jews there are those who shift words out of their contexts."⁷⁶ Yet, it is argued, copies of the Torah can be found in all corners of the world, all identical to each other, which proves that no such tampering has ever taken place.⁷⁷

Al-Qarāfi starts his long reply with a summary of al-Samaw'al al-Maghribī's explanation of how and why the Torah was falsified.⁷⁸ The basic narrative runs as follows: Moses delivered the written Torah only to the sons of Aaron, on whom he had bestowed the priesthood (Deut 31:9). The rest of the Israelites were given only one chapter of the Torah (Deut 31:32). These Aaronid priests were massacred by Nebuchadnezzar at the conquest of Jerusalem. The

Abel to Cain's twin sister and Cain to Abel's twin sister); and the prohibition of a man marrying a free woman and a slave girl at the same time, which was allowed in Abraham's time. The prohibition of any manner of work on the Sabbath, which previously had been lawful, is yet another example of abrogation. As for cases of God changing his mind, al-Qarāfi refers, for instance, to the episode of Hezekiah's recovery after God had sent Isaiah to announce his imminent death (2 Kg 20:1–6). See other examples in the section "Forcing them to admit abrogation" in *Ifhām al-Yahūd*, 33–36 (English), 6–12 (Arabic). See also al-Qarāfi's discussion in *Sharḥ tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl*, 110–112.

76 See also Q 2:75; 5:13, 41. I take this translation of the Qur'anic phrase *yuharrifūna l-kalima 'an mawāḍi'ihī* from Gabriel Said Reynolds, "On the Qur'anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (*tahrīf*) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130 (2010), 189, 193–194.

77 *Ajwiba*, 388 (238). In fact, not only Q 4:46 but a total of twenty-five verses of the Qur'ān are associated with the doctrine of the corruption of previous scriptures by the People of the Book. The most recent important study on the question is Gordon Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). According to Nickel, while later polemicists made the case that the tampering referred to in the Qur'ān was a deliberate falsification of the text, this possibility was rarely envisioned by early exegetes. See also Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "The Qur'anic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), 141–148, and Reynolds, "On the Qur'anic Accusation," 192–195.

78 Compare *Ifhām al-Yahūd*, 53–57 (English), 48–58 (Arabic) with *Ajwiba*, 389–399 (239–45) and 631–632 (374). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 59–60, and 'Abd al-Khālīq, *al-Qarāfi wa-juhūduhu*, 293–298.

temple was destroyed, the books lost, and the people scattered.⁷⁹ Seventy years later, Ezra the scribe put together the Torah which exists today from his own remembrances and from what he was able to collect. Ezra, however, was a man ignorant of the divine attributes and so ascribed to God human characteristics. Moreover, as a matter of history, the Jews were ruled by different nations and empires, all of which sought to harm them and obliterate their past. Even worse than that, their own kings were rebellious: they slew their prophets, worshiped idols, and abandoned the precepts of the Torah. The result of these vicissitudes is that the Torah now in their possession lacks the guarantee of reliable transmission. Al-Qarāfi's conclusion parallels his earlier verdict on the Gospels: nothing in the current Torah can be said with certainty to come from God.

Also derived from al-Samaw'al al-Maghribi is al-Qarāfi's explanation of the indecent stories that the Jewish scripture attributes to the prophets, like the episode in which Lot's two daughters became pregnant from their father after getting him drunk (Gen 19:31–38). On this explanation, Ezra, who was an Aaronid, purposely introduced this story in order to discredit the rival Davidic dynasty. Thus he made Moab, David's ancestor through Ruth, the son conceived by Lot's elder daughter from her incestuous relationship with her father.⁸⁰

Having thus established the possibility and the motives for the falsification of the Torah, the remainder of al-Qarāfi's response consists in a long list of biblical passages intended to prove that the falsification did take place, and extensively so. Although at a first glance it may appear that al-Qarāfi has carefully researched the Pentateuch, in fact all the material he quotes has been gathered from al-Qurtubī's *I'lām* and from al-Ja'fari's *Takhjil*.⁸¹ Some passages attribute deficiencies to God that impinge upon divine perfection, such as

79 Although al-Qarāfi is clearly drawing on *Ifhām al-Yahūd*, he adds some details of his own. For instance, he explains that Nebuchadnezzar massacred 70,000 Israelites to avenge the death of John the Baptist (Yahya ibn Zakariyyā), who had rebuked their king for marrying his step-daughter. As Rippin explains, the source of this chronological confusion, common in many Muslim accounts of John's death, is likely to be a conflation of the prophet Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24:22 (who was killed by King Joash) and Zakariyyā, the father of John. See "John the Baptist," in *EQ*, s.v. (Andrew Rippin).

80 Compare *Ifhām al-Yahūd*, 58–60 (English), 58–62 (Arabic) with *Ajwiba*, 400–404 (245–247). A more detailed study of these questions is found in Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 43–47. On the motif of Ezra as the deliberate forger of the Torah, see Martin Whittingham, "Ezra as the Corrupter of the Torah? Re-Assessing Ibn Ḥazm's Role in the Long History of an Idea," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 1 (2013): 253–271.

81 Compare *Ajwiba*, 404–424 (246–262) with *Takhjil*, 463, 546, 563, 565, 567–569, 584, 624–626; and *I'lām*, 188–189, 190–192, 199–200.

that God needed to confirm for himself the angels' report about the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20–21), or that God regretted the creation of the human race after seeing their wickedness and decided to exterminate them, a decision of which he also repented later (Gen 6:5–7; 8:21). Other passages describe the prophets as engaging in undignified behavior that contradicts the Muslim dogma of prophetic impeccability. Further evidence of Jewish tampering adduced by al-Qarāfi include the fact that the present Torah recounts Moses' death and events that happened after it, and that the versions of the Pentateuch used by Jews, Samaritans, and Christians (the Septuagint) contain discrepancies in biblical chronology and in the ages allotted to some biblical characters. Al-Qarāfi remarks in conclusion that although more examples could be given, what has been said is enough to show that the Jews are liars in claiming that the Torah enjoys the utmost of precision and verification and that there is no lie or falsification in it.⁸²

Before we proceed to the remaining arguments from chapter two, it is important to ask why al-Qarāfi dedicates such a large space to the falsification of the Torah in a work whose primary purpose is to polemicize against Christianity and in which the Jews are, at most, secondary targets. Part of the answer may lie in the paramount significance that acknowledging Muḥammad's prophethood has in al-Qarāfi's eyes, a decision on which hinges the acceptance of God's offer of salvific guidance. We shall see later in more detail that al-Qarāfi devotes a chapter of his book to presenting the predictions of Muḥammad in the Hebrew Bible and in the Gospels. It is that final chapter that explains, I think, the need for this section on the falsification of the Jewish scripture, to explain why most Jews failed to acknowledge Muḥammad's prophetic claims. In other words, if the Jews tampered with those passages which they had no particular reason to alter, then it should come as no surprise that they manipulated those passages that they had a vested interest in hiding. This much is what al-Qarāfi himself suggests, when at a certain point of his exposé on the *tahrīf* of the Torah he writes:

If such is their falsification, alteration, and neglect with regard to matters such as the ages of the prophets and the indecencies of their ancestors and the most important messengers for which they lack a reason [to tamper with the scriptures], what will be the case with regard to their lying about the Messenger of God, Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh (may God grant

82 The same arguments and the same conclusion are repeated in *Ajwiba*, 630–633 (272–374). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 61–63.

him peace and salvation) and about those matters for which they *do* have a reason?⁸³

4 **Miscellanea**

Three unconnected arguments will be considered in this last section. They deal with a Muslim tradition relating to Muḥammad's deathbed instructions, the carnality of the Islamic vision of paradise, and Islam's alleged expansion by the sword. While the last two are recurrent themes in Muslim-Christian controversy, the first appears to be an objection that al-Qarāfi might have picked up from a Christian (or a Jewish) opponent more interested in scoring debating points than in discussing theological views that separate the two religious communities.

4.1 ***The Ḥadīth of the Pen and Paper***

The argument claims that a prophetic tradition that Muslims consider authentic contains an explicit textual indication (*naṣṣ*) that Muslims have gone astray in their religion. The dying Muḥammad is said to have called for writing material, saying: "Bring that I may write for you a document after which you will never go astray." However, 'Umar, who was to become the second caliph after Abū Bakr, stopped them, saying: "The Book of God is enough for us."⁸⁴ If the document that was to prevent the Muslims from being led into error was not written, the argument goes, it follows that they went astray. For al-Qarāfi, whoever adduces this argument has not understood the language of the Arabs. Muḥammad's words "after which you will never go astray" do not require that the straying should be in what pertains to the fundamental principles of religion, but it could be in a minor secondary aspect. Moreover, it does not follow from the document not being written that the Muslims necessarily went astray, for they could have been guided by God's providence. It is like saying to a person travelling, 'If you take this guide you will not go astray.' Even if the person did not take the guide, he could still be guided by divine inspiration or

83 *Ajwiba*, 415 (256).

84 *Ajwiba*, 452 (277). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 101–102. This *ḥadīth*, which al-Bukhārī (*Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-marḍā*) reports on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687) in his collection of authentic traditions, has often been the subject of controversy between Sunnīs and Shī'īs, the latter claiming that Muḥammad's intention was to appoint 'Alī as his successor. See Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 23–24.

by other means. At any event, the Muslim scholars have transmitted that the document in question had to do with Muḥammad's succession in leadership, which is not among the fundamental principles of religion, nor a condition for the correctness of faith.⁸⁵

4.2 *The Physical Pleasures of Paradise*

The carnality of the qur'ānic description of heaven is a classical topos of anti-Muslim polemics and is also at the center of one of the arguments discussed in chapter two.⁸⁶ Al-Qarāfī presents it as an objection advanced by both the Christians and the Jews, according to whom eating, drinking, and copulation are incompatible with the perfection of paradise, insofar as they require deficiencies such as bodily needs, the exposure of private parts, and the emission of impurities. Moreover, ingesting food and drink and engaging in sexual intercourse are said to bring human beings closer to irrational animals, with which they share the sensual appetite, than to angels, with whom they share rationality. The Toledo priest quoted by al-Khazrajī formulates the same objection more succinctly:

You say that in paradise there is eating and drinking and sexual relations, and all these things are recorded in the book which the author of your law brought. We deny all this, which is not possible in any way, according to us. When we are gathered together on the Day of Resurrection we will come together with our bodies and souls, but we will not eat or drink.⁸⁷

85 Al-Qarāfī is again somewhat downplaying the importance of the issue. The question of the imāmate or the supreme leadership of the Muslim community became an early cause of division and the subject of considerable theological and juridical discussion. The earlier creeds elaborated by the different doctrinal schools often include statements on this regard. Al-Qarāfī's comments, however, reflect the prevailing position among later Sunnī scholars, who, following al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī, "often emphasized that the imāmate properly belonged to the derived legal matters (*furū'*), not to the fundamentals of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*), even though traditionally it was discussed in the *uṣūl* works rather than the expositions of the law. This consideration, originally meant to counter the Shī'ī view placing the imāmate at the core of religion, now served to mitigate the impact of the realization that the imāmate in fact no longer existed" (Wilferd Madelung, "Imāma," *EI*2, 3:1168).

86 *Ajwiba*, 366–368 (227–228). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 137–138. A panoramic view of the development of this polemical motif in Christian-Muslim controversy is furnished in Roggema, *Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 121–128.

87 *Maqāmi'* § 9; trans. Burman, 184, modified. More derisively, al-Kindī suggested that the qur'ānic paradise was meant to encourage "the rudest of the Arabs, who used to eat lizards and chameleons," to fight for Muḥammad's cause: "The hot wind beat on them and

Al-Qarāfi's answer proceeds in three stages. The first is a long clarification of the Muslim belief under attack. The bliss bestowed upon the dwellers of paradise will be not only sensual but also spiritual. Moreover, the sensual rewards awaiting the righteous are not of the same order as the pleasures experienced in this world. Unlike the earthly dwellers, who feel bodily needs, the inhabitants of paradise will live in a state of permanent satisfaction. Also, the pleasures of paradise do not require any limitation that results from our earthly condition such as bodily discharges or the shame of nakedness.⁸⁸

After offering these clarifications, al-Qarāfi follows the example of previous apologists who responded to Christian and Jewish criticisms with biblical passages that, in their eyes, corroborated the qur'ānic depiction of paradise.⁸⁹ The Christians are reminded, for instance, that Jesus said to his disciples, "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Mt 26:29), and exhorted them to work "not for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life" (Jn 6:21). As for copulation in heaven, al-Qarāfi sees a pledge of it in Jesus' promise that everyone who left wife or children or farms for his sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life (Mt 19:29; Lk 18:29). The

the desert blasts. They were in the extreme of hunger, thirst and nakedness. Sometimes a great longing seized them when they heard of rivers of wine and milk and all kinds of fruits, supplies of flesh and other dainties, of couches of satin, silk and brocade, free intercourse with women whose eyes gleamed like pearls, while boys and girls served them and they drank spring water and sheltered beneath trees" (see text in Newman, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 464). Ibn Ḥazm devotes a section of his *Fiṣal* to defend the qur'ānic paradise against the Christians and the philosophers (see Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, 2:58–61; trans. *Abenházam*, 3:152–156). Ljamai (*Ibn Ḥazm*, 159–168) has shown that Ibn Ḥazm's ideas influenced al-Qarāfi's treatment of the subject through the intermediaries of al-Khazraji and al-Qurṭubī. Interestingly, the latter's remark that the Christians and the philosophers follow the same doctrine concerning the purely spiritual nature of the punishments and rewards in the hereafter (*I'lām*, 433) is ignored by al-Qarāfi, who follows instead al-Ja'farī (*Takhjīl*, 211) in ascribing the objection to the Christians and the Jews. The conflict between the philosophers and more traditionalist-minded Muslim theologians on the nature of the afterlife is discussed in Sarah Stroumsa, "True Felicity: Paradise in the Thought of Avicenna and Maimonides," *Medieval Encounters* 4 (1998): 51–77. For a polemical use of this conflict in the writings of thirteenth-century Christian controversialists, see John Tolan, "Saracen Philosophers Secretly Deride Islam," *Medieval Encounters* 8 (2002): 184–208.

88 *Ajwiba*, 368–375 (228–231). See also 'Abd al-Khāliq, *al-Qarāfi wa-juhūdhu*, 299–401.

89 Although al-Khazraji and al-Qurṭubī also quote some of the scriptural proofs adduced by al-Qarāfi, a comparison of the texts makes it clear that the latter has borrowed his quotations from al-Ja'farī. Compare *Ajwiba*, 375–380 (231–234) with *Takhjīl*, 212–215.

Jews, for their part, are reminded that, according to the Book of Genesis, Adam ate in paradise and had a wife.⁹⁰ Al-Qarāfi also quotes to them Isaiah's words: "Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost" (Isa 55:1). These and other passages are said to agree with the picture of the Garden promised to the pious in the Qur'an: "rivers of water forever pure, rivers of milk forever fresh, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, rivers of honey clarified and pure, [all] flow in it; there they will find fruit of every kind" (Q 47:15).

The last and most polemical section of the reply elaborates on the fact that the Qur'an contains more information about the hereafter than the Torah and the Gospel. Al-Qarāfi notes that not only is the eschatological resurrection of the dead the most recurrent theme in the Muslim scripture, but also the subject matter of numerous sayings of Muḥammad. Why then has God bestowed this information on the Muslims which was not granted to previous communities? Al-Khazraji and al-Qurṭubī had also addressed this question. The former explained that the Torah did not mention the resurrection of the dead because Moses was afraid that the Israelites, already ill-disposed toward him, would stone him if they heard about this. Yet, like all the prophets before him, Moses did not fail to inform them that God had created everything from nothing, thus intimating that God could create them again after their lives had come to an end.⁹¹ Less assertive, al-Qurṭubī had suggested several reasons why the resurrection of the dead is absent from the Torah and was careful to note that "God and his messenger [i.e., Moses] know best." The same explanations are mentioned by al-Qarāfi, who is clearly following al-Qurṭubī's views on this point.⁹² According to al-Qarāfi, the Israelites were of 'thick' nature and, like the animals, could not be intimidated with threats of future pains or enticed with promises of future rewards. Because of this, God only promised them that they will inhabit a land, their lives be protected, and their sustenance and descendants increased. By contrast, the Muslims, who are "the best nation ever brought forth to men" (Q 3:110), were given information about the resurrection, to better prepare themselves to meet their God. Another reason is that the Israelites were insolent and rebellious and could only be handled with immediate restrictions and punishments. Also, the time in which the Israelites lived was still very distant from the eschaton and none of the signs and portents that announce the

90 See also *Ajwiba*, 639 (379).

91 See *Maqāmi'* § 157.

92 Compare *I'lām*, 436–437 with *Ajwiba*, 381–388 (235–238). See also 'Abd al-Khāliq, *al-Qarāfi wa-juhūduhu*, 393–396.

final judgment had yet appeared to them. However, Muḥammad is himself the first of these signs, which makes his community more entitled to information concerning the Hour. Finally, God knew in advance that Muḥammad will be the last prophet and hence he put off this information in order to distinguish him from his predecessors. Just as Muḥammad will enjoy a greater share of bliss in paradise than the other prophets, so will the Muslims compared with the members of other prophetic religions, and they will be the majority among the dwellers of paradise. Therefore, it is only fitting, concludes al-Qarāfi, that Muslims should have more information about the hereafter than anybody else.

4.3 *Fighting for God's Cause: Virtue or Vice?*

It remains to be discussed what is arguably the most popular complaint raised against Islam in the controversial literature even to this day, namely, that it spread through military conquest. Al-Qarāfi ascribes this argument to both “accursed” groups, the Jews and the Christians, for whom the religion of the Muslims, given its utmost weakness, could only triumph by “fighting, coercion, conquest, treachery, and the plundering of children and wealth.”⁹³ Christian polemicists had voiced this critique with varying degrees of bluntness, according to the social and political contexts. For instance, writing from Christian-controlled Toledo, the Mozarabic priest to whom al-Khazrajī replied did not mince words when comparing “the religion of the cross which spread throughout the earth without the sword and without coercion,” with “your religion, which triumphed by the sword and coercion.” This was expected, given the contrasting behavior of their respective founders, for while the Messiah “came humbly and in weakness, did not fight anyone, and was crucified in propitiation for us,” “the author of your law fought the nations and conquered them.” It is said in his book: ‘They are unbelievers who say, ‘God is the Messiah, Mary’s son’ (Q 5:17). As a result, “the Arabs entered our cities, uprooted our abodes, and brought us to shame.”⁹⁴ By contrast, Christians who lived under Muslim rule were generally less forthright, even though their target was easy to identify. The Melkite Theodore Abū Qurra seems to have been the first to develop an apologetic strategy that became popular among writers of the different ecclesiastical traditions. Part of it consisted in examining the worldly motives that might lead a person to choose a religion other than the true one. Yet, as Swanson remarks, “each item in Theodore’s list of humanly comprehensible reasons for accepting a religion—coercion by the sword, worldly gain, license

93 *Ajwiba*, 425 (263).

94 *Maqāmi* § 10.

with regard to fleshly appetites, simplified doctrine—corresponds to well-known Christian charges against Islam.”⁹⁵

We saw earlier that the focus of al-Qarāfi’s concern is not denying that the Muslims had resorted to violence following Muḥammad’s lead, but rather establishing that God had sanctioned this course of action, once it became manifest that mere proclamation of the truth would not suffice to win over the most recalcitrant opponents.⁹⁶ The same line of argumentation is pursued here. For al-Qarāfi, 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. His first point is a reminder to the Christians that their Gospel requires them to be peaceful, humble, and meek, and to avoid fighting and strife until the coming of the Hour. He invokes in this respect Jesus’ instructions to his disciples to turn the other cheek, love their enemies, and bless those who curse them (Mt 5:38–48; Lk 6:27–28).⁹⁷ And yet, al-Qarāfi decries, the Christians are the people most eager to fight, to kill, and to cause harm everywhere in the world, seizing by force people and wealth. They deem it permissible and even consider it among the best offerings in the sight of God and a cause of eternal happiness, although the Gospel obliges them to surrender to their enemies.⁹⁸ This is not the case, however, with the Muslims, says al-Qarāfi, since “our Book made fighting binding on us and explicitly declared it to be the greatest act bringing us near to God and the greatest occasion to obtain happiness.”⁹⁹

Al-Qarāfi’s next point seeks to elucidate the reasons that led Christians to contravene Jesus’ command and thus “innovate” their religion. He finds an explanation in what Eutychius of Alexandria¹⁰⁰ and other historians have reported about the fighting that took place between the Christians and the Jews. Al-Qarāfi’s words are somewhat opaque here, but he seems to be referring to the time of the last Byzantine-Sasanian war (ca. 610–628), when the Jews of Palestine are said to have allied themselves with the invading Persians.¹⁰¹

95 Swanson, “Apology or its Evasion?,” 392.

96 See above, chapter 3, section 2.1. See also al-Qurṭubī’s remarks in *I’lām*, 450.

97 *Ajwiba*, 425 (263–264). The source of the biblical material quoted by al-Qarāfi is al-Ja’farī (*Takhjīl*, 252), who uses this and other passages for a different purpose, namely, to show that Jesus did not consider himself to be a son of God more than he thought his disciples to be also sons of God: “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48).

98 Al-Qarāfi repeats this accusation in *Ajwiba*, 584–586 (344–345).

99 *Ajwiba*, 427 (264). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 149.

100 Referred to as al-Masīhī, ‘the Christian.’ On this Melkite historian, see note 4 to chapter 3.

101 Eutychius reports that the Jews joined the Persians in destroying churches and killing Christians during their capture and sack of Jerusalem in 614. He also recounts how the

According to al-Qarāfi, the Jews were intent on exterminating the Christians, to the point that if the latter had practiced the pacifism they had been enjoined none would have survived. So they took upon themselves the duty of fighting and caused great harm to the Jews. In spite of that, al-Qarāfi says, their religion did not prosper until they added ruses and subterfuges in order to deceive common folk and kings.

Finally, al-Qarāfi reminds the Christians and the Jews that their own scriptures witness to the fact that prophets like David and Solomon fought against tyrants, and yet they do not declare this behavior unacceptable.¹⁰² This means, therefore, that fighting belongs to God's *sunna*, that is, to God's customary way of dealing with rebellious humanity, and it is an established practice of the partisans of the truth against the partisans of error. If such is the case, concludes al-Qarāfi reversing the terms of the initial objection, fighting in God's cause is to be accounted as "one of our virtues and good qualities, and not one of our vices."¹⁰³

Jews of Tyre, taking advantage of the Byzantine setback, invited their co-religionists from the surrounding regions to undertake a surprise attack against Tyre on Easter night, for which an army of 20,000 men assembled. However, aware of their plans, the Christians used the Jews of their city as hostages, killing 2,000 of them to avenge the churches destroyed by the Jews in the vicinity. When some years later a victorious Heraclius was on his way to Jerusalem, the Jews sent a delegation with gifts and obtained a pledge of security from him. On his arrival in Jerusalem, however, the Christians requested revenge for the Jews' collaboration with the Persians. Heraclius is said to have sanctioned an indiscriminate slaughter of Jews and ultimately their expulsion from the city after the church authorities vowed that a strict fast would henceforth be observed during the week before Lent to atone for the emperor's breaking his word. This is the so-called 'Fast of Heraclius' which, according to Eutychius (*Gli Annali*, 306–325), the Copts still observed in his day, unlike other Christians who gave it up after the emperor died. See also Wadi Awad, "Abū al-Barakāt Ibn Kabar, Miṣbāḥ al-Ẓulmah (cap. 18: il digiuno e la settimana santa)," *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea* 34 (2001), 247–249; trans. Villecourt, "Les observances liturgiques et la discipline du jeûne dans l'église copte," *Le Muséon* 38 (1925), 262; and the account of these events by the Muslim historian al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) in *A Short History of the Copts and of their Church*, trans. Solomon C. Malan (London: D. Nutt, 1873), 67–71. For a critical assessment of these accounts, see Averil Cameron, "The Jews in Seventh-Century Palestine," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 13 (1994), 78–79, 84–85.

102 See a similar argument in *Maqāmi'* § 163, where al-Khazrajī argues that if the use of the sword for the sake of religion deserves blame, then Moses, Joshua, and other prophets are at fault.

103 *Ajwiba*, 430 (267).

5 Concluding Remarks

It is noteworthy that a significant number of the arguments against Islam that al-Qarāfi attributes to the Christians and the Jews in the second chapter of the *Ajwiba* concern issues that had been the object of considerable intra-Muslim debate. Al-Qarāfi sometimes acknowledges this much in passing remarks, when he admits, for instance, that Muslims have differing views concerning the manner of Moses' audition of God's word, or whether God is obliged to command what is beneficial for human welfare, or that Muḥammad's companions disagreed at times over the meaning of the Qur'ān. However, these sporadic admissions only occur when al-Qarāfi is confident that it will not be detrimental to the point he is trying to make. Thus, for example, he can admit that Muslims have quarreled over Moses' audition of God's word because even those who think that Moses heard a real voice do not consider it God's actual speech but only an indication of the divine word subsisting in God's essence without letters or sounds. The episode therefore cannot be invoked to justify the possibility of the union of the Creator and the created. In most cases, however, al-Qarāfi is quite unwilling to admit any type of dissension among his co-religionists and is content with presenting his own Ash'arī views as equal to Islamic orthodoxy. One senses at times some discomfort in the way in which he deals, for instance, with the objections touching upon the variant readings of the Qur'ān, or the issue of Muḥammad's succession in the leadership of the community. His strategy in these cases consists in downplaying the importance of the issue at hand and switching as soon as possible to polemical attack.

However, beyond al-Qarāfi's apologetic strategies, the fact that arguments which were debated by Muslims are here presented as objections raised by rival religious groups or projected onto them leads us back to the remarks earlier expressed about how Islam developed its self-understanding. This was undoubtedly based on the qur'ānic revelations and on the experience of the early community, but this self-understanding was also articulated in interaction with other religious groups. This is not to rob Islam of its originality and uniqueness, or to suggest that this interaction has to be conceived in terms of simply borrowing. Referring to Muslim theological debates on the ontological status of the Qur'ān in light of early Muslim-Christian controversy on the word of God, Michael Ipgrave concludes that the *Kalām*, the classical Islamic discipline of theological speculation, "developed not by the straightforward adoption of Christian ideas, but rather through Muslims taking into their own debates over the Qur'ān the same concerns as exercised Christians over the Word of God."¹⁰⁴ The same can be said, I think, of other issues that occupied

104 Ipgrave, *Trinity*, 215.

the minds of theologically-inclined Muslims as they explored what has been aptly called the “inbuilt paradoxes” of monotheism, which is “never as simple as most of its advocates would wish.”¹⁰⁵ This is not just to say that given its monotheistic character, Islam was bound to face the same questions that had confronted other monotheisms. The fact that the Qurʾān portrays the Christians and the Jews (and other groups) as recipients of revelations that were in accord with its own message made it natural for early Muslim thinkers to pay attention to the teachings of these two groups, and criticize them alongside the views of Muslim opponents, when they found them contrary to what they thought was the true import of the qurʾānic revelations.¹⁰⁶ According to David Thomas, we can even speak of a certain “educational” purpose in the initial critiques that Muslim theologians offered of non-Islamic religions, including Christianity. The same scholar notes, however, how this educational purpose in refuting the mistaken doctrines of fellow monotheists was so closely allied with a sense of being right oneself that it led over time to a lack of interest on what the others actually believed. By the beginning of the tenth century, in contrast to earlier Muslim writings, presentations of Christianity, for instance, tend to be stereotyped and often derived from Muslim literary sources rather than from the Christians themselves. Al-Qarāfi appears to come at the end of the process that Thomas describes in detail.¹⁰⁷ By this time, Sunnism had at its disposal fully-developed doctrines of revelation, its transmission, prophetic inerrancy and impeccability, the evidentiary power of miracles, abrogation, eschatology, etc. Many of these doctrines, which had been developed through intra- and inter-religious debate, now became the yardstick of prophetic religion and were brought to bear with full force upon the evaluation of deviant Christianity and Judaism.

105 Tim Winter, Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. T. Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6. According to Winter, the main theological questions that engaged Muslim theologians seemed to be generated by a tension implicit in the Qurʾān itself, namely, the tension between divine transcendence and immanence: “Some verses spoke of a God who seemed utterly transcendent, so that ‘nothing is like him’ (Qurʾān 42:11). Such a deity ‘is not asked about what he does’ (21:23), and appears to expect only the unquestioning submission (*islām*) which seemed implicit in the very name of the new religion. But there were many other passages which implied a God who is indeed, in some sense that urgently needed definition, analogous to ourselves: a God who is ethically coherent, and whose qualities are immanent in his creation, so that ‘Whosoever you turn, there is God’s face’ (2:115)” (ibid.)

106 A point made by David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 6–7.

107 Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 5–14.

Christianity and the Innovation of A Wretched God

Whereas the first two chapters of the *Ajwiba* are essentially devoted to answering the arguments of opponents, in the third chapter al-Qarāfi goes on the offensive. This chapter contains, in his own words, “the counter-objection to their questions with another hundred questions which I have presented to both groups, and to which they found it difficult to respond.”¹ We should take this statement with a grain of salt as an examination of the text reveals that al-Qarāfi has culled the bulk of the material from his written sources. Still, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that he put some of these arguments to the test in real encounters with Christians and Jews.

Chapter three is by far the longest of the *Ajwiba*’s four chapters, containing a total of one hundred and seven questions. There are no subdivisions and the questions are simply listed one after another. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish several thematic blocks within the chapter resulting from the fact that al-Qarāfi follows the *Takhjil* closely, itself divided into thematic chapters.² Al-Qarāfi selects from al-Ja’farī’s book the arguments and objections that he finds most convincing, including the quotations, if any, from the Bible or other Christian sources. Most often, he summarizes or paraphrases his source, but always closely enough to reveal the origin of the text. On occasion, al-Qarāfi adds his own comments to reinforce a point only alluded to by al-Ja’farī or to give a particular twist to the argument (see below in regard to Jesus’ description as Lamb of God). After the *Takhjil*, the second most important source used in composing this chapter is al-Qurṭubī’s *I’lām*, from which al-Qarāfi has taken several passages of text, dealing mainly with Christian liturgical and devotional practices. It will be recalled that al-Qurṭubī devoted the fourth chapter of his treatise to examining a series of positive legal rulings of the Christians and to explaining that these rulings have no basis in scripture but are based on pure whim and arbitrariness.³ This is essentially the same accusation that al-Qarāfi repeats, as will be seen below. It should be noted that al-Qarāfi frequently leaves out nuances and precisions originally contained in his sources,

¹ *Ajwiba*, 130 (49).

² See above, chapter 2, section 5.2. One must allow, however, for digressions, sometimes already present in al-Ja’farī’s text and other times due to al-Qarāfi’s interpolations.

³ See above, chapter 2, section 5.3.

showing that his main interest is the polemical point, not the historical information.⁴ Finally, in some of the questions addressed specifically to the Jews, al-Qarāfi summarizes information already provided in the previous chapter of the *Ajwiba* concerning the abrogation and falsification of the Torah, for which, as it will be remembered, he draws on al-Samaw'al al-Maghribi's anti-Jewish polemical tract, *Ifhām al-Yahūd*.

In my analysis, I focus on the main thematic blocks in chapter three and on certain other issues that I have selected because of their recurrence in anti-Christian Muslim polemical literature and their relevance for the wider investigation on the prospects and possibilities of Muslim-Christian theological dialogue. These issues include the paramount question of the salvific meaning that Christians have attached to Jesus' passion and death and the related doctrine of sin. We shall see how, for al-Qarāfi, Christian talk in this respect is tantamount to foolishness, for it implies worshiping a wretched god and glorying in things that should rather be kept hidden, such as suffering and humiliation. I also give considerable attention to what al-Qarāfi has to say about the corruption of Christianity and his account of Paul of Tarsus's role in this process, given the perdurance of this motif in modern Muslim anti-Christian polemic.⁵

4 For instance, al-Ja'fari (*Takhjīl*, 594) notes that the Byzantines do not practice *istinjā'* before praying, that is, the washing after defecation that most Sunnī Muslims consider mandatory for ritual purity. When al-Qarāfi takes up this information, however, it is no longer the Byzantines, but Christians in general who pray without first washing themselves (*Ajwiba*, 560 [332]). At a certain point, al-Qurṭubī describes the rites of Christian initiation as they were performed in al-Andalus in former times, remarking that some things might have changed since then (*I'lām*, 402). This remark is left out by al-Qarāfi, who is simply interested in the polemical point that, even supposing that Baptism was prescribed to them, the Christians have introduced things which were not commanded, such as the triple immersion, the laying on of hands, and the rite of exsufflation (*Ajwiba*, 666 [399]; see also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 143).

5 See Davide Tacchini, "Paul the Forgerer [sic]: Classical and Modern Radical Muslim Views of the Apostle of Tarsus," *Islamochristiana* 34 (2008): 129–147; Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 67–71. For an example of a contemporary Muslim polemicist who relies heavily on al-Qarāfi for his presentation of Paul's corruption of Christianity, see Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, *Aqānīm al-Naṣārā: Kitāb yataḥaddath 'an aṣl al-diyāna al-Naṣraniyya wa-taṭawwuruhā wa-naqduhā bi-adilla min asfār al-Tawrāt wa-l-Injīl wa-kutub al-ta'rikh* (Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār, 1977), 127–139. See also 'Abd al-Khāliq's comments in *al-Qarāfi wa-juhūdhu*, 423–442, 523–524.

1 The Christian Creed: Viler than Treachery

Perhaps the most conspicuous thematic block in chapter three is a long series of questions (nos. 20–42) concerning the Christian creed.⁶ According to al-Qarāfi, the Christians refer to their creed as *sharīʿat al-īmān*, the Rule of Faith, and as *al-tasbīḥa*, the Acclamation, and do not consider their celebrations and Eucharists complete without it.⁷ Yet, this creed appears to him as “viler than treachery” (*aqbah min al-khiyāna*).⁸ Al-Qarāfi begins by recalling that it was composed by the Patriarch of Alexandria, Alexander, and his supporters in refutation of Arius at the Council of Nicaea. They agreed upon the text after many discussions and multiple changes. Subsequently the Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians adopted it. However, al-Qarāfi hastens to denounce it: the creed is based neither on the revealed Gospel nor on the words of Jesus or the Apostles, but is made up of opinions of people who were lax in their religion.⁹ He then quotes the text of the creed entirely, allegedly established at Nicaea. The creed reproduced in the *Ajwiba* is not, however, the creedal formula promulgated in 325 at Nicaea, as al-Jaʿfarī and al-Qarāfi mistakenly assume, nor the formula technically known as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

6 The obvious source of this material is chapter 8 of the *Takhjīl*, entitled *Fī l-ibāna fī tanāquḍ al-īmāna* (‘On the Elucidation of the Contradictions of the Creed’), which al-Jaʿfarī devotes entirely to deconstructing the creed, almost sentence by sentence. Compare *Ajwiba*, 511–533 (308–319) with *Takhjīl*, 499–523.

7 On these and other expressions used by Arabic-speaking Christians to refer to the creed, see Pierre Mašrī, “Tafāsīr ‘qānūn al-īmān’ al-‘arabiyya al-qadīma,” *Al-Machriq* 74 (2000), 457, n. 14, and, by the same author, “Ṣiḡha ‘arabiyya qadīma li-qānūn al-īmān yatanāqulu-hā al-muʿallifūn al-muslimūn bayna l-qarn al-tāsiʿ wa-l-thālith ‘ashar al-mīlādī,” *Islamochristiana* 20 (1994), 3, n. 1.

8 *Ajwiba*, 511 (308).

9 Recall al-Qarāfi’s earlier criticism (see above, chapter 3, section 1), where he mentions among the examples of the state of religious negligence in which Christians live the fact that their notables gathered ten times in Constantinople and Alexandria to determine the content of their faith. Al-Qarāfi’s charge is not new. Writing in the mid-tenth century, Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. after 987), the first known major Coptic figure to write in Arabic, already dedicates chapter 6 of his *Kitāb tafsīr al-amāna* (‘Commentary on the Creed’) to counter the Islamic polemical assertion that the bishops gathered at Nicaea were responsible for inventing and spreading the doctrine of the Trinity in contradiction to Jesus’ professed monotheism. On this work, see Mašrī, “Tafāsīr ‘qānūn al-īmān,’” 458–463; Arabic text and French trans. Lucien Leroy, “Sévère ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, évêque d’Aschmounaïn: Histoire des conciles (second livre),” *Patrologia Orientalis* 6, fasc. 4, i (1911), 465–600.

composed in 381 at the First Council of Constantinople.¹⁰ 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).¹¹ 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”).¹²

The origin of this creed, which is quoted with minor variants by several medieval Muslim writers, is in all likelihood the aforementioned ninth-century Nestorian convert to Islam, ‘Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī, who quotes it in his refutation of Christianity and then exposes what he considers its internal contradictions and inconsistencies.¹³ The same or very similar contradictions are mentioned in the *Takhjīl* and in the *Ajwiba*, which further pursue ‘Alī l-Ṭabarī’s line of critique. Al-Qarāfi wonders, for instance, how the Father and the Son can be both creators of everything, as the creed appears to say, or, even more bafflingly, how the Son can be the creator of his own mother, who gave birth to him, something that only “the people of a madhouse” can say.¹⁴ In addition to these internal contradictions, al-Qarāfi finds that the creed also opposes the Christian scriptures, wondering, for instance, how he “by whose hands all things were created” can be at the same time “son of David,” as the Gospel proclaims (Mt 1:1), or how the Messiah can be “of one substance with the Father,” when he confessed that only the Father knew the Day of Resurrection (Mt 24:36; Mk 13:32). For al-Qarāfi, this lack of knowledge proves rather that

10 See texts in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: David McKay, 1972), 215–216 and 297–298.

11 Theodore’s baptismal creed is expounded in his catechetical lectures, which have only survived in Syriac. See *Theodore of Mopsuestia, Commentary on the Nicene Creed*, ed. and trans. Alphonse Mingana (Cambridge: Heffer, 1932). See also Kelly, *Christian Creeds*, 187–188.

12 See Kelly, *Christian Creeds*, 193–201.

13 ‘Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī, *Radd ‘alā l-Naṣārā*, ed. Ignace-Abdo Khalifé and Wilhem Kutsch, *Mélanges de l’Université Saint Joseph* 36 (1959), 136–138; trans. Jean-Marie Gaudeul, *Riposte aux chrétiens par ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistica, 1995), 33–38. On the transmission of this Nestorian creed among Muslim authors, see Maṣrī, “Ṣiḡha ‘arabiyya qadima.” See also ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique*, 5–7.

14 *Ajwiba*, 520 (312). See also 131 (54).

Jesus was of one substance with David and with the rest of the prophets, who likewise did not know the Day or Hour.

Moreover, the creed's description of the Son as "the firstborn of all the creatures, who was born from his Father" indicates that the Messiah was a contingent being originating in time, which goes against the Christians' belief in the eternity of the Son. However, explains al-Qarāfi, they have not understood the difference between eternity and origination in time and, hence, they fail to realize the contradictions in which they are entangled. Furthermore, the creed singles out the Son as having descended for the salvation of human beings, which for al-Qarāfi contradicts the equality between the three divine persons that Christians proclaim.

Yet another contradiction between the creed and the Gospel is the former's declaration that the Son of God "was incarnate from the Holy Spirit," which for al-Qarāfi contradicts Matthew's report that John the Baptist saw the Spirit descending like a dove upon Jesus at the time of his baptism, that is, when he was already thirty years old (Mt 3:13–16). According to him, this patent contradiction completely discredits the creed and shows that the Christians have betrayed God's rights with their infidelity, betrayed God's messengers with their lies (that is, by contradicting the testimony of John), betrayed God's prophetic messages with their tampering, and betrayed all creatures by seeking to lead them astray.¹⁵

As for the creed's statement that Jesus "ascended to heaven and is seated on the right hand of God," al-Qarāfi considers it an obscene lie and a pure invention, wondering sarcastically who among the Christians has come down from heaven with this information.¹⁶ Furthermore, to affirm that the Son sits on the right hand of the Father implies that both of them are bodies, for only bodies can be said to possess 'sides,' which is something that Christians deny of God.¹⁷ Finally, al-Qarāfi asks how they can be so confident that the Son, unable to save himself from a small band of enemies the first time he came, will be triumphant when "he comes again to judge the living and the dead."¹⁸

In addition to the above criticisms, all of which are taken from the *Takhjil*, al-Qarāfi brings up some arguments against the rational soundness of the Christian creed, which come from his own critique of the Trinity in chapter one of the *Ajwiba*. Thus, for instance, he insists again that the Son's incarnation from the Holy Spirit would require an overturning of the ontological order,

15 *Ajwiba*, 523 (314).

16 *Ajwiba*, 526 (315).

17 *Ajwiba*, 526 (315).

18 *Ajwiba*, 528 (316).

because the Spirit, which according to the Christians is God's attribute of life, is an entitative property (*ma'nā*) that cannot leave its subject of attribution and be transferred to something other than the divine essence.¹⁹ Finally, al-Qarāfi rebukes those who composed the creed to declare themselves holy, saying: "we believe . . . in one holy community." Now, how can someone be holy who concocted a document that blatantly contradicts itself and contradicts the Gospel? "He is rather a donkey or a billy goat," declares al-Qarāfi scornfully.²⁰

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.²¹ This critique (purposely?²²) 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.²³ For Eutyches,

19 *Ajwiba*, 525 (315). As mentioned earlier, this objection is based on Ash'arī ontology. See above, chapter 3, section 4.1.

20 *Ajwiba*, 529 (317).

21 See John A. McGuckin, "Monophysitism (including Miaphysitism)," in *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, ed. J.A. McGuckin (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 2:400–402.

22 Commenting on ʿAlī l-Ṭabarī's critique of the creed, Thomas ("ʿAlī Ibn Rabban Al-Ṭabarī," 147) notes that "this former Christian appears to show no awareness at all of the beliefs that underlie the doctrinal formulas he scrutinises, and rather treats them as uncontextualised propositions that stand or fall by their own logical coherence."

23 Thus, Paul of Antioch, who is a Chalcedonian, writes in his *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, in reference to Jesus: "He worked miracles in His divinity and manifested weakness in His humanity, and both actions belong to the one Lord Christ. It is just as it is said, in his soul, Zayd is abiding, immortal, and incorruptible, while in his body, Zayd is perishing, mortal, and corruptible. Both statements apply to the one and the same Zayd. According to this same analogy we say that Christ was crucified, meaning that He was crucified in His humanity, but He was not crucified in His divinity. [. . .] We see the blacksmith taking a piece of iron and heating it in the fire until it too becomes fire. He hammers it and cuts it up and the fire is still united with it. The breaking and cutting impinge upon the nature

however, there was no longer a question of an exchange of properties, but of a simple ascription of both divine and human properties to the mingled nature of God-manhood. This appears to be the position targeted by ‘Alī l-Ṭabarī’s critique, pursued and amplified by both al-Ja’farī and al-Qarāfi. Still, one can easily understand that Muslims who read the Christian creed without the catechetical instruction that was provided to Christian neophytes—the baptismal catechesis of Theodore of Mopsuestia being a good example of this—would be puzzled by some of its statements, over which the Christians themselves had quarreled, divided, and excommunicated one another.²⁴

2 Christian Innovated Practice and Behavior

Another evident thematic block in chapter three is a series of questions (nos. 44–58) primarily concerned with Christian practice and behavior.²⁵ Al-Qarāfi’s essential accusation in this respect is the same already formulated by al-Qurṭubī and al-Ja’farī before him, and indeed by the majority of Muslim polemicists, namely, the commonplace motif that Christians have “innovated” their religion. Innovation (*bid’a*; pl. *bida’*) is the technical term in Islam for any belief or practice for which no precedent can be found from the time of Muḥammad and the early Muslim community. Although some scholars defended the possibility of a “good innovation” (*bid’a ḥasana*), the prevailing view among Muslims has

of the iron, while the fire is free of it. Rather, [the fire] provides what is in accord with its nature, i.e., burning and light. The single piece comprises both natures. In this sense, the two natures of the Lord Christ are united in His one person” (§§ 37–40).

- 24 It is probably the awareness of this difficulty that prompted an anonymous Nestorian author active in Baghdad in the 1160s to write an apologetic commentary on the creed known as *Sharḥ amānat ābā’ majma’ Niqīyya al-thalāthami’a wa-l-thamāniyyata ‘ashara* (‘Commentary on the Creed of the 318 Fathers of the Council of Nicaea’). One of its striking features is precisely the care with which the author defines Christian Trinitarian terminology and the attempt to find vocabulary accessible to Muslim readers. On this work, see Maṣrī, “Tafāsīr ‘qānūn al-īmān,’” 468–474; and Pierre Maṣrī and Mark N. Swanson, “Apologetic Commentary on the Creed,” in *CMR* 3, 671–674. Also the aforementioned *Kitāb tafsīr al-amāna* by Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffa’ includes a defense of the creed’s phrase “begotten, not created” that specifically addresses Muslim concerns on this respect (see Leroy, *Histoire*, 534–546).
- 25 *Ajwiba*, 533–588 (319–347). The source of this material is chapter 9 of the *Takhjīl*, devoted to exposing the “ignominies” of the Christians and the Jews (*Takhjīl*, 527–648). Only the question dealing with the abandonment of circumcision by Christians (no. 45) has been supplemented with material derived from al-Qurṭubī’s *I’lām*, as we shall see below in more detail.

been that of rejecting any innovation as an erroneous novelty leading to the corruption of Islam.²⁶ Like many others before him, al-Qarāfi simply assumes that the same standard of normativity applies to all prophetic religions, including the religion of Jesus. As a result, historical Christianity appears to him as a religion profoundly distorted by the adoption of unwarranted practices which Jesus had not expressly sanctioned by word and deed. The basic accusation of innovation is further supplemented with the related charges that Christians have turned their religion into a frivolous amusement by disregarding clear texts and replacing them with their own whims and inventions, and that most of these innovated practices are, moreover, simply irrational and scandalous. Thus, for instance, al-Qarāfi begins this section by noting that the Christians tear apart during their public rites what they claim to be the body of their Lord and drink his blood. In this, they are worse than the Jews, who only wanted to kill the Messiah! In fact, remarks al-Qarāfi, it was to escape from such infamies that Christians converted to Islam even before being exposed to the goodness of Muḥammad's religion.²⁷

After this first polemical salvo against the Eucharist, al-Qarāfi proceeds to criticize the Christians severely for their abandonment of circumcision, the orientation to the east during their liturgies, their neglect of ritual purity, the practice of confessing their sins to the priests and sometimes even publicly, their addition of days of fasting that Christ did not prescribe, the innovation of celebrations such as the feast of Michael the Archangel or the Exaltation of the Cross, their prostration in front of images, which al-Qarāfi equates with

26 On the meaning of *bid'a*, see Norman Calder, "The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy," in *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, ed. F. Daftary (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 66–86; Vardit Rispler-Chaim, "Toward a New Understanding of the Term *Bid'a*," *Der Islam* 68 (1991): 320–328; Maribel Fierro, "The Treatises against Innovations (*kutub al-bid'a*)," *Der Islam* 69 (1992): 204–246; and Jonathan P. Berkey, "Tradition, Innovation and the Social Construction of Knowledge in the Medieval Islamic Middle East," *Past and Present* 146 (1995): 38–65. In Muslim theological parlance, heretics and innovators are often referred to as *ahl al-ahwā'*, that is, those who follow their own inclinations and whims as opposed to prescribed religion, an accusation that al-Qarāfi unrelentingly imputes to Christians throughout this section. For al-Qarāfi's position on the juristic debate over the permissibility of devotional innovations, see Raquel Uqueles, "Innovation or Deviation: Exploring the Boundaries of Islamic Devotional Law" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2006), 104–105, 116, 129–130, 186–187. Although al-Qarāfi abandoned the Mālikī universal rejection of *bida'*, a position for which he was criticized by members of his legal school, he nonetheless regarded all innovations in the ritual sphere of the law (*ibādāt*) as reprehensible or prohibited, applying the positive types of *bid'a* only to civil innovations.

27 *Ajwiba*, 534–535 (319–320); *Takhjil*, 585–586. See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 140.

idol worship, their consumption of pork, and celibacy, which they impose on monks and nuns thinking erroneously that it is something that brings them closer to God. Al-Qarāfi also brings up in this section devoted to Christian practice and behavior several issues already mentioned in the previous chapters, such as their warlike conduct in clear disregard of Christ's commandment to be humble and meek, their judicial practice not based on the revealed books, and the legends and frauds invented by the clergy to perpetuate their hold over a gullible people.

A second set of questions (nos. 101–107) dealing likewise with Christian liturgical and devotional practices seems to have been added at the end of chapter three as an afterthought.²⁸ Here, al-Qarāfi draws not on the *Takhjīl* but on the *I'lām*. The reasons for adding this final section may well include not only the fact that al-Qurṭubī refers to practices not mentioned by al-Ja'farī (such as the number of days of precept, the blessing of houses with salt, or the custom of crossing themselves), but also, as noted above, that al-Qurṭubī included several quotes from Ḥafṣ ibn Albar's *responsa* in the *Kitāb al-masā'il al-saba' wa-l-khamsīn*, material which al-Qarāfi reproduces as inculpatory evidence for the Christians' corruption of their religion.²⁹

I cannot describe here in detail each one of al-Qarāfi's numerous criticisms of Christian practices. Nonetheless, in order to illustrate the tenor of the critique and the arguments employed, I will present three particular reproaches, namely, the abandonment of circumcision, the consumption of pork, and the offering of bread and wine at the Eucharist.

2.1 *Christians and Circumcision*

Al-Qarāfi complains that the majority of Christians have abandoned the practice of circumcision following their whims, not the command of their Lord.³⁰ They even maintain that a long foreskin is a religious duty, when in fact engaging in sexual intercourse with an uncircumcised penis is a most revolting thing. In any case, by abandoning this observance, the Christians have deserted the Torah, the Gospel, and the Prophets. He substantiates this accusation by referring to the passage in the Torah where God commands Abraham to circumcise

28 *Ajwiba*, 655–687 (390–412). It should be remembered that al-Qarāfi had announced in the introduction to his book that the third chapter would comprise a hundred questions.

29 See above, chapter 2, section 5.3.

30 *Ajwiba*, 536 (320). Al-Ja'farī (*Takhjīl*, 588) speaks instead of certain groups among the Christians, mentioning in particular the Byzantines and the Franks. The Christian non-practice of circumcision, which intrigued Muslims since early times, is the first question that Abū Qurra is asked to explain when summoned to al-Ma'mūn's court. See Bertaina, *Abū Qurra in Debate*, 388–391 (English), 434–437 (Arabic).

every male of his house, including the servants, as a sign in their own flesh of God's everlasting covenant with Abraham's descendants (Gen 17:1–27). Al-Qarāfi, who takes this passage as a textual indication that circumcision will never be abrogated until the end of time, apparently does not see any conflict with his earlier statement that the Mosaic dispensation, of which circumcision was to be a covenantal sign and obligation, has been superseded with the arrival of Islam. Furthermore, following al-Ja'farī, he takes Gen 17:14 to mean that the uncircumcised male is to be put to death, which proves that forsaking circumcision is not just a blamable innovation but an act of infidelity (*kufṛ*), punishable by death.³¹ As for the New Testament, al-Qarāfi limits himself to pointing out that both the Messiah and his disciples were circumcised. He then shows astonishment at the fact that there are Christians who castrate themselves or who shave their beards, practices which, unlike circumcision, have never been prescribed in any revealed book.

According to al-Qarāfi, after the elevation of Jesus, the Christians continued to practice circumcision until the time of Paul, who is said to have been more disastrous for the Christians than Satan: "He removed them from religion as a hair out of dough (i.e., without difficulty³²) and made them plunge into the darkness of error."³³ At this point, al-Qarāfi introduces a long digression explaining who this Paul was, why he was so intent in leading Christians astray, and how the abandonment of circumcision was later confirmed by Constantine. (I will come back to this in detail later.) After this historical aside, al-Qarāfi goes on to criticize the interpretation of circumcision that Christians offer in their books of jurisprudence.³⁴ They claim that the real meaning of this practice in the Torah was the purity of heart and intention. Thus, the Israelites were enjoined to circumcise the heart and to be stiff-necked no longer (Deut 10:16).³⁵ Accordingly, it is not the foreskin of the flesh

31 *Ajwiba*, 537 (320); *Takhjīl*, 588. Strictly speaking, Gen 17:14 establishes only that the uncircumcised male is to be cut off from his people for having broken God's covenant.

32 For a different interpretation of this expression, see Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 144.

33 *Ajwiba*, 539 (321). Al-Ja'farī, whose text al-Qarāfi has been following up to here, likewise says that Paul was the worst calamity ever to befall the Christians: "He freed them from [the obligation] of religion with subtle deceptions and so he freed them from the *sunna* of circumcision when he saw that their intellects were ready to accept whatever he told them" (*Takhjīl*, 589).

34 *Ajwiba*, 553 (328). Al-Qarāfi paraphrases here a text that al-Qurtubī claims to have taken from the legal books of the Christians (*I'lām*, 420).

35 On the meaning and development of the biblical metaphor of the "(un)circumcised heart" see, for instance, Werner E. Lemke, "Circumcision of the Heart: The Journey of a Biblical Metaphor," in *A God so Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. B.A. Strawn and N.R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 299–319.

that is harmful, but the foreskin of the heart. In fact, the Christian scholars say, it is preferable not to circumcise the flesh, but to leave the body as God created it. For al-Qarāfi, this interpretation attributes to God and to his messengers several hideous things. First, it ascribes a lie to God since, if he really meant the foreskin of the heart, Moses would have explained it to the people. Moreover, not only Moses, but all the prophets including John the Baptist and Jesus were circumcised in compliance with the Torah and never stopped commanding this practice. Second, by saying that there is no benefit to circumcision, the Christians take God's prescriptions as something futile or foolish.³⁶ The benefits of circumcision are in fact manifold, explains al-Qarāfi: it carries recompense in the hereafter, it eases genital hygiene, it causes greater pleasure during copulation, it eases the ejaculation thus increasing the possibility that a child be conceived, which is the highest purpose of engaging in coitus, and it alone among God's commands leaves a trace after its accomplishment, since it remains in the body until death. The Torah, al-Qarāfi remarks, refers precisely to this last benefit, where it says: "Thus shall my covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant" (Gen 17:13).³⁷

Another hideous aspect of Christian behavior in relation to circumcision is that they abandon God's ruling for their own conjectures, following their whims and assuming the power of legislating for themselves. They interpret away the plain meaning of the Torah where there is no need for such interpretation, which amounts to the falsification (*tahrīf*) of the revealed text.³⁸ Finally, they are not satisfied with substituting their own whims for what God has prescribed, but they even dare to say that it is preferable to leave the bodies as they were created. In short, concludes al-Qarāfi, the Christians are innovators who aggrandize themselves but who deserve in fact to be ridiculed. As

The trope of the circumcision of the heart is also found in the Qur'an, in which the statement "Our hearts are uncircumcised" is ascribed to the Jews (Q 4:155; 2:88). On the interpretation of this passage by Muslim exegetes, see Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, 147–155.

36 *Ajwiba*, 554 (329). For al-Qurṭubī (*I'lām*, 421), to say that there is no benefit to a religious prescription, whether in this world or in the next, is the worst possible calumny against God and against the prophets. It implies that religion is a frivolous game, and that the sending of messengers, the descent of heavenly books, and the promulgation of religious laws are superfluous.

37 Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 144.

38 *Ajwiba*, 556 (330); *I'lām*, 421–422. While elsewhere al-Qarāfi clearly accuses Christians of textual distortion of the scriptures, here he is suggesting a different type of tampering, namely, by means of unwarranted interpretation.

sūrat Hūd (11):22 proclaims: “They without doubt will be the greatest losers in the world to come.”

2.2 *Consumption of Pork*

Christians are also blamed for eating the flesh of the pig, which they have declared lawful even though it was forbidden at the time of Jesus. In so doing, al-Qarāfi asserts, they have separated themselves from the Torah and the Gospel and opposed God’s messengers.³⁹ It is clearly written in the Torah that pig flesh is forbidden, a text that admits no other interpretation (Lev 11:7–8). As for the Gospel, Mark reports that Jesus caused the destruction of a large number of swine which were drowned in the sea (Mk 5:1–14). Jesus is also said to have compared the swine with the dogs when he said to his disciples: “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine” (Mt 7:6), thereby showing his abhorrence of this animal. Therefore, concludes al-Qarāfi, whoever declares pig’s flesh permissible commits infidelity towards Moses and Jesus.

Al-Qarāfi is aware that Christians justify the abrogation of the Mosaic food prohibitions by appealing to Peter’s dream, when he saw a sheet coming down from heaven with all sorts of animals and was told to eat of anything on it (Acts 10:9–16). However, al-Qarāfi argues in reply that religious prescriptions cannot be discarded on the basis of dreams, nor can the prophets be discredited because of a vision, not to mention that such report about Peter is not to be taken for granted, since the Christians lack a reliable transmission of their scriptures.

2.3 *The Offering of Bread and Wine*

One of the last questions of chapter three is consecrated to the sacrificial offering of the Eucharist (*qurbān*).⁴⁰ Al-Qarāfi begins by quoting the words of “their priest Ḥafṣ ibn Albar,” taken from the *Iʿlām*, explaining the reason Christians offer up a sacrifice of bread and wine, instead of slaughtered animals:

What I would like you to know concerning the Eucharist is that, according to the Torah, the Prophets and the Israelites used to present calves, sheep, and lambs as offerings. The first to present an offering of bread and wine was Melchizedek. He was a priest of God in the beginning and

39 *Ajwiba*, 579–580 (314). Al-Qarāfi’s source here is the *Takhjil* (609–610), which he appropriates verbatim. See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 145.

40 *Ajwiba*, 678–682 (405–409).

Abraham paid him the required tithes.⁴¹ David mentioned Melchizedek in the Psalms, when he announced the good news of the Messiah, Our Lord. He placed him in the order of Melchizedek and made him a priest forever. David said: “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (Ps 110:4). The Apostles and their followers prescribed this offering of bread and wine, which the bishops and priests consecrate on the altar, following the example of Melchizedek. Christ said in the Gospel: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (Jn 6:56), and, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die” (Jn 6:48).⁴²

Thus, comments al-Qarāfi, the Christians openly admit that the Torah prescribed the offering of livestock, which they replaced with bread and wine following their own whims. The reason for this is that they found it burdensome to sacrifice animals due to its high cost, and also because of the pleasure they found in drinking wine.⁴³ Then, they justify their rejection of the Torah and their ignoring that the prophets acted upon it until the time of Jesus by adducing the actions of Melchizedek and the Apostles, in spite of the fact that Jesus did not abrogate one iota of the Law (Mt 5:18) and that Melchizedek was not a prophet who should be followed. If they claim so, al-Qarāfi asks, they should produce the proof confirming his prophethood and establishing that he prescribed a law for them, something they will never be able to do. In short,

41 See Gen 14:17–20. “In the beginning” here is probably an allusion to the fact that Melchizedek is the first priest mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, centuries before the Aaronid priesthood was established.

42 *I’lām*, 427; *Ajwiba*, 678–679 (405–406). The idea of Melchizedek’s offering of bread and wine as a type or prefiguration of the Eucharist goes back to Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. 215) and Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258). See references in Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 225–226. As a matter of fact, according to biblical scholars, Melchizedek’s priestly act was not the offering of bread and wine but the blessing of Abraham.

43 *Ajwiba*, 680 (407). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 141. Al-Qarāfi is summarizing here the views of al-Qurtūbī, according to whom Jesus did not abrogate the sacrifices prescribed in the Torah, nor replace them with anything else. The Christians, however, detested to act according to the Torah and preferred to innovate their own laws, since the legal rulings contained in the Gospels were very few. They dispensed with whatever did not agree with their objectives and so, for instance, they replaced livestock with bread and wine because it was cheaper and because they found wine pleasurable (*I’lām*, 427–428).

no matter how they try to justify it, the truth is that the Christians have abandoned the Torah on the whims of pure conjecture.⁴⁴

As for Jesus' words: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me" and similar sayings, al-Qarāfi censures the Christians for taking them too literally, to the point of becoming worse enemies of Jesus than the Jews. Whereas the latter only wanted to kill him, the former claim to eat his flesh and drink his blood! Christians should first confirm that these are truly Jesus' words and then interpret them in a sense that befits his dignity. If Jesus said that, then he was expressing an abstract idea with a material example, that is, he was comparing the food for the soul with the food for the body.⁴⁵ In effect, Jesus explained and revived the rulings of the Torah, which had become a dead thing among his contemporaries. He satiated the souls of those who followed him with knowledge and instruction. As a result, their infidelity died and their happiness was revived. Thus, when Jesus says: "I am the bread that came down out of heaven," he does not mean that he is to be literally eaten like bread, and when he says: "He who drinks my blood abides in me," he does not mean that one should drink his real blood. For al-Qarāfi, this interpretation suits the dignity of Jesus better and, although he admits that Jesus' words admit other interpretations, none of them in any case require the invalidation of the Torah.

Finally, as regards their invoking the Apostles to justify the Eucharist, al-Qarāfi 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

44 Al-Qurṭubī (*I'lām*, 428) adds that even supposing Melchizedek was a prophet who prescribed the offering of bread and wine, this law was later abrogated by Moses, who did not follow his example.

45 This explanation comes from al-Qurṭubī (*I'lām*, 428–429) for whom the saying "I am the bread that came down out from heaven" is a metaphor meaning that Jesus considers his message to be spiritual food. See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 140.

46 On the question of abrogation of divine laws see above, chapter 4, section 3.1. It was already noted that, contrary to al-Qarāfi's claim, the Christians did uphold the possibility of abrogation, claiming in fact the abrogation of the legal statutes of the Torah and their replacement with the Gospel.

47 *Ajwiba*, 682 (409).

In short, concludes al-Qarāfi, it is undeniable that the Christians have abandoned the Torah, appropriating for themselves the power to legislate.

3 An Islamic Theologoumenon: The Corruption of Early Christianity

As noted above, al-Qarāfi blames Paul for abolishing the obligation of circumcision, which had been practiced by Jesus and his followers until the time of Paul. The latter's nefarious influence on early Christianity was, however, much worse than simply abrogating this particular Mosaic prescription. In al-Qarāfi's words:

This accursed Paul is the corruptor of the religion of the Christians after [their initial] monotheism. He is the one who changed the requirements of the laws prescribed to them, and freed them from the obligation of circumcision and other things. With his abominable teaching, he is also the originator of the doctrine of tritheism. In spite of this, they accord him the greatest honor, and give all their attention to his teachings and doctrines.⁴⁸

The first mention of Paul in the *Ajwiba* prompts al-Qarāfi to provide his readers with information about this character and his role in the history of Christianity. To this purpose, he incorporates two different narratives of Paul's corruption of early Christianity, the first accounting for the loss of the original monotheistic faith, and the second explaining the innovation of religious practices never commanded by Jesus. Both narratives further explain the division of Christians into opposing factions.⁴⁹

48 *Ajwiba*, 552 (328). See also 'Abd al-Jabbār's remark on the undue reverence that Christians pay to Paul of Tarsus: "This Paul, according to them, is more exalted than Moses, Aaron, David and all of the prophets. When his letters and discourse are read in the church, they stand, venerating and exalting him and his discourse. They do not do this for the Tawrāt" (*Critique*, 90).

49 The idea that the Christians are and will remain divided into factions differing among themselves is present in *sūrat al-mā'ida* (5):14, in which God declares: "We also took a pledge from those who say, 'We are Christians,' but they too forgot some of what they were told to remember, so We stirred up enmity and hatred among them until the Day of Resurrection, when God will tell them what they have done." See also Q 3:19, 19:34–37 and 43:65.

3.1 *Paul's Self-Immolation and the Ploy to Divide the Christians*

In the first account, Paul is presented as a Jew who, seeking to kill the Christians, devised a stratagem against them.⁵⁰ After memorizing the Gospel in secret, he entered into the service of a prominent monk, showing great devoutness for a long time. One day, he claimed that Jesus had appeared to him in a dream, after which he was able to recite—miraculously in the eyes of his master—the Gospel. Paul's fame spread among the Christians so that even kings visited him each year on a fixed day. During one of these visits, Paul revealed to them that Jesus had asked him to offer himself up as a sacrifice. He then confided to each of three kings a different secret, namely, that Jesus was the son of God, that Mary was God's consort, and that God was the third of three.⁵¹ The next day he sacrificed himself. After dividing Paul's remains, each king eventually returned to his country and revealed the secret that had been confided to him. When they saw that these teachings differed, they accused each other of infidelity and declared war on each other. Many Christians died as a result, which was Paul's objective.

I have not been able to locate al-Qarāfi's source for this account. However, a closely related narrative also including Paul's self-immolation as part of a ploy to cause dissension among the Christians is introduced by al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035) in his commentary on *sūrat al-tawba* (9):30 to explain how the belief in the divinity of Jesus came about.⁵² In al-Tha'labī's account, however, it is not three kings who are separately instructed by Paul, but three individuals named Naṣṭūr, Ya'qūb, and Mālik, in whom one can recognize the imagined

50 *Ajwiba*, 537–543 (321–323). See English translation in Appendix C. See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 49–50, and 'Abd al-Khāliq, *al-Qarāfi wa-juhūduhu*, 427–428.

51 These teachings correspond to three qur'ānic accusations against Christianity: "...and the Christians said, 'The Messiah is the son of God'" (Q 9:30); "...the Creator of the heaven and earth! How could He have children when He has no spouse...?" (Q 6:101); "Those people who say that God is the third of three are defying [the truth]: there is only One God" (Q 5:73).

52 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tha'labī, *Al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, ed. Abū Muḥammad ibn 'Āshūr (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2002), 5:33. Note that this edition has, mistakenly, Yūnus (Jonas) instead of Būlus (Paul). An English translation of this narrative is provided in Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 164–165. In reference to Paul committing suicide for the sake of Jesus, Reynolds calls attention to passages in the New Testament where Paul speaks of filling up in his flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ (Col 1:23) and where he speaks of himself as "being poured out as a libation" (2 Tim 4:6). The same narrative is given by al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), whose qur'ānic commentary is highly dependent on al-Tha'labī's. See al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas'ūd al-Baghawī, *Ma'ālim al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2002), 552–553.

eponyms of the three chief Christian sects known to the Muslims: Nestorians, Jacobites, and Melkites. Just as in al-Qarāfi's first account, Paul's intervention is limited to introducing different doctrines about Jesus: to Naṣṭūr he teaches that Jesus, Mary, and God are three gods; to Ya'qūb that Jesus was the son of God; and to Mālik that Jesus is God. Exactly the same narrative is reported by al-Tha'labī's student, the Nishapurian commentator al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076), who became in turn the acknowledged source of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and al-Nisābūrī (d. 728/1327).⁵³ The same story is also recounted by the Andalusī exegete, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 971/1272), in connection with *sūrat al-nisā'* (4):171.⁵⁴ Finally, al-Tha'labī's narrative can also be found in non-exegetical works such as al-Isfarā'īnī's (d. 471/1078) heresiography and al-Damīrī's (d. 808/1405) encyclopedia of animals (in connection with Paul's horse).⁵⁵ Al-Damīrī attributes the narrative to the early exegete Muḥammad ibn al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763), who also was in all likelihood al-Tha'labī's source.⁵⁶

The same basic story circulated with various permutations among Muslim writers. In a version quoted by al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983), Paul does not impart his different teachings to three individuals, but to three groups of Christians. However, unlike the account transmitted from al-Kalbī, which restricts Paul's role to the corruption of monotheism by introducing the doctrine of Jesus' divinity, in al-Samarqandī's narrative Paul is also held responsible for allowing

53 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī, *al-Taḥsīn al-basīṭ*, ed. Ibrāhīm ibn 'Alī l-Ḥasan (Riyadh: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyya, 2010), 10:375–377; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-kabīr wa-mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 16:35–36; al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad al-Nisābūrī, *Tafsīr gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa-raghā'ib al-furqān*, ed. Zakariyā 'Umayrāt (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 3:455–456.

54 Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, ed. Hishām Samīr al-Bukhārī (Riyadh: Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub, 2003), 6:24–25.

55 Abū l-Muẓaffar Shāhfur ibn Ṭāhir al-Isfarā'īnī, *al-Tabṣīr fī l-dīn wa-tamyīz al-firqa al-nājiya 'an al-firaq al-hālikīn*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt (Beirut: Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1983), 151–152; Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Damīrī, *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ (Damascus: Dār al-Bashā'ir, 2005), 3:390–391. On al-Isfarā'īnī's text see Max Horten, *Die philosophischen Systeme der spekulativen Theologen im Islam* (Bonn: Cohen, 1912), 103–105. An English translation of al-Damīrī's narrative (including some details preserved by al-Isfarā'īnī) is provided in Samuel M. Stern, "Abd al-Jabbār's Account of How Christ's Religion Was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs," *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968), 178.

56 al-Kalbī was one of al-Tha'labī's recognized sources. See Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qur'ān Commentary of al-Tha'labī* (d. 427/1035) (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 70.

the consumption of pork and wine and for changing the direction of prayer.⁵⁷ Al-Būshanjī, an eleventh-century author active in Nīsābūr, quotes yet another version in which, in addition to changing the direction of prayer and making the flesh of the pig lawful, Paul imparts different teachings about Jesus to three chief Christian doctors named Naṣṭūr, Mār Ya'qūb,⁵⁸ and Malkā before he kills himself.⁵⁹

3.2 *The Cunning Jewish King*

Al-Qarāfi's second account of Paul's influence on early Christianity has been lifted verbatim, with a few omissions, from al-Qurṭubī's *I'lām*.⁶⁰ Unlike the narratives mentioned above, this account does not include the motif of Paul's self-immolation, but shares with al-Kalbī's report the mention of the three eponyms of the main Christian sects, to whom has been added a fourth character called Mu'min (i.e., the Believer). Paul is said to be a Jewish king who had vanquished the Christians and expelled them from the region of Syria. Realizing, however, that their message was appealing and that they would eventually outnumber the Jews, he devised a ruse. He went to the Christians wearing their clothes and told them that Jesus had healed him after taking his hearing, sight, and reason.⁶¹ He also told them that he had made an oath to God that he would join the Christians and teach them the Torah and its laws. They believed him and at his request built a house where Paul devoted himself to the worship of

57 Naṣr ibn Muḥammad Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-Samarqandī al-musammā Baḥr al-'ulūm*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwaḍ et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1993), 1:423–424.

58 Mār, literally 'lord,' is the Syriac equivalent to 'saint.'

59 Al-Hayṣam ibn Muḥammad al-Būshanjī, *Qīṣaṣ al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abduḥ Ḥatāmīla and Muḥammad Jāsim al-Mashhadānī ('Ammān: [s.n.], 2006), 667–669. An English translation of this account (from the Persian version of al-Būshanjī's book) is provided in Edward G. Browne, "A Parallel to the Story in the *Mathnawī* of Jalālu 'd-Dīn Rūmī, of the Jewish King who Persecuted the Christians," *Islamica: Zeitschrift für die Erforschung der Sprachen und der Kulturen der islamischen Völker* 2 (1926), 132–134. Browne thinks that this account might be a source of the story recounted by Rūmī (d. 672/1273) in which the vizier of a Jewish king feigns his conversion and infiltrates the Christians with the aim of perverting their religion and causing discord. The story also includes the vizier's suicide after having summoned twelve Christian leaders and told them separately that Christ had chosen them to lead the community. See Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *The Masnavi*, trans. Jawid Mojaddedi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004–2007), 1:23–47.

60 *Ajwiba*, 543–549 (323–326). See English translation in Appendix C. Compare with *I'lām*, 241–244. See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 50, and 'Abd al-Khāliq, *al-Qarāfi wa-juhūduhu*, 428–431.

61 Compare with the account of Paul's conversion in Acts 9:1–19.

God and to instructing them. One day, after a time of seclusion, he asked them to pray facing the east instead of facing the Temple of Jerusalem. Then, after a second time of seclusion, he announced that all types of food were lawful, “anything between the beetle and the elephant.”⁶² Finally, he explained to four individuals—Ya‘qūb, Naṣṭūr, Malkūn (or Malkūt), and Mu‘min—that God had manifested himself in Jesus and then veiled himself again. One of them said that the Messiah was God himself incarnate. Another said that it was God and his son. Yet another said that they were three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁶³ On his part, the Believer protested that, unlike them, Paul was not a companion of Jesus and that the latter never claimed to be more than God’s servant and his messenger.⁶⁴ Thus, the Christians divided themselves into four sects: the Jacobites, the Nestorians, the Melkites, and the followers of the Believer. Paul urged the first three to fight the Believer and his companions, who fled to Syria, where the Jews allowed them to live in caves and hermitages and to wander about, separated from the world. In this way, the report goes on to explain, they invented monasticism for themselves, which some of those who had

62 The same remark appears in the *Tōlēdōth Yēshū‘* (Heb. ‘The Life of Jesus’), a medieval Jewish polemical work on the life of Jesus of which several versions are extant. See Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902), 48 (Hebrew), 61 (German); Hugh J. Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews: A New Translation of the Jewish life of Jesus (the Toldoth Jeshu)* (London: Duckworth, 1937), 57. It is also quoted in the first section (which describes a number of Jewish sects and sectarian thinkers) of the *Kitāb al-anwār wa-l-marāqib*, written in 937 by the Karaite polymath Ya‘qūb al-Qirqisānī. See Leon Nemoy, “Al-Qirqisānī’s Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 7 (1930), 365. On this author, see “Qirqisānī, Jacob al-,” in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, s.v. (Fred Astren). Al-Qirqisānī tells us that his main source on Christianity was the aforementioned ninth-century Jewish philosopher al-Muqammiṣ (see note 26 to chapter 3).

63 Al-Qurṭubī’s report, followed by al-Qarāfī, is most likely corrupted here. I have changed the order of these sayings to make logical sense of the narrative.

64 This corresponds to the qur’ānic doctrine about Jesus: “The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger” (Q 5:75); “[Jesus] said: ‘I am a servant of God’” (Q 19:30). The introduction of the figure of ‘the Believer’ who upholds the Islamic view of Jesus in these accounts of the corruption of early Christianity seems to have been a motif particularly diffused in the Muslim West. See Koningsveld and Wiegers, “The Polemical Works of Muḥammad al-Qaysī,” 168–169; and Consuelo López-Morillas, “The Moriscos and Christian Doctrine,” in *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Change*, ed. M.D. Meyerson and E.D. English (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 290–305.

committed infidelity also imitated.⁶⁵ Thirty monks who were among the Believer's companions eventually recognized the prophet Muḥammad, followed him, and died Muslims. The Believer and his companions are the ones about whom God declares in *sūrat al-ṣaff* (61):14, "We supported the believers against their enemy and they are the ones who came out on top."⁶⁶

A close parallel to al-Qarāfi's second account is found in the *Kitāb al-riḍḍa wa-l-futūḥ* ('The Book of the Wars of Apostasy and Conquests') of the 'Abbāsīd historiographer Sayf ibn 'Umar al-Tamīmī (d. ca. 180/796), in which Paul feigns his conversion and is presented as both the corruptor of the original Christian monotheism and the innovator of religious practices.⁶⁷ Sayf's account also introduces the figure of the Believer next to Naṣṭūr, Ya'qūb, and Malkūn. Curiously, in addition to the usual charges of having changed the direction of prayer and abolished the dietary laws, Sayf also holds Paul responsible for abolishing the obligation to fight in God's cause. In effect, after a period of seclusion, Paul tells the Christians:

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- 65 Again, this corresponds to the qur'ānic view: "We gave [Jesus] the Gospel and put compassion and mercy into the hearts of his followers. But monasticism was something they invented—We did not ordain it for them—only to seek God's pleasure, and even so, they did not observe it properly" (Q 57:27).
- 66 On the theme of Muḥammad's attestation by Christian figures, see Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 89–92, and, more broadly, Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995), 21–55. The idea of a remnant of 'authentic' Christian believers who eventually recognized in Muḥammad the expected prophet is paralleled in Muslim traditions about the Lost Tribes of Israel. See Uri Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'ān: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1999), 46–48.
- 67 Interestingly, Sayf brings up this story in connection with the dissensions that afflicted the early Muslim community. Paul is presented as a parallel to 'Abd Allāh ibn Saba', a Yemeni Jew who is said to have converted to Islam to lead Muslims astray. Just as Paul had laid down the basis for the discord between Jacobites, Nestorians, and Melkites, Ibn Saba' is said to be the originator of the doctrines over which Shī'ī and Sunnī Islam will separate. Sayf's account has attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent years. The Arabic text is reproduced in P.S. van Koningsveld, "The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996), 222–224. An English translation is provided in Sean W. Anthony, "The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account of King Paul and His Corruption of Ancient Christianity," *Der Islam* 85 (2008), 174–180. In addition to these two articles, see also Claude Gilliot, "Christians and Christianity in Islamic Exegesis," in *CMRI*, 45–48, and Abbas Barzegar, "The Persistence of Heresy: Paul of Tarsus, Ibn Saba', and Historical Narrative in Sunni Identity Formation," *Numen* 58 (2011): 207–231. On the parallelism between the actions of Paul and Ibn Saba', see also Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, 1:325–326; trans. *Abenḥázam*, 2:386–388.

'I think that no one ought to be harmed and no one repaid in kind [for an injury], so whoever does evil to you, do not give him what he deserves. If one slaps his cheek, let him turn to him the other, and if he takes some of his clothing, let him give him the rest of it.' They accepted this and abandoned warfare (*jihād*).⁶⁸

We do not know if al-Qarāfi was familiar with Sayf's account. At any event, it is understandable why he did not present Paul as the originator of the command to turn the other cheek. As we saw above, it better served his polemical purpose to accuse the Christians of disobeying Jesus' commandment to be meek, than of disobeying Paul, the forger of Christianity.

It should be noted that al-Qarāfi simply juxtaposes the two accounts. He does not attempt to harmonize them, nor does he comment on their historical verisimilitude. This is somewhat surprising, given the fact that elsewhere in the *Ajwiba* he boasts about the reliability of the reports of Muslim authors by comparison with their Christian counterparts. Yet, one should not be surprised by the legendary content of these narratives which were never meant as historical truth in the first place, but rather, to borrow a technical term from biblical exegesis, as *theologoumena*, that is, "the historicizing of what was originally a theological statement."⁶⁹ In other words, we are dealing here with religious conviction expressed in the form of historical narrative. The theological statement is that the monotheistic message of the Qur'an is the universal message of all the prophets, including Jesus. This is the essential affirmation of faith at the core of all these narratives about Paul, which have been progressively expanded to provide explanations for certain qur'ānic statements about the Christians (e.g., their saying that God is the third of three) and etiological explanations for the current state of affairs (e.g., that Christians are divided

68 Anthony, "Sayf b. 'Umar's Account of King Paul," 177 (modified).

69 Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 505. Note, however, that in itself, the word *theologoumenon* "need not necessarily mean that the affirmation of faith presented as a historical narrative lacks all historical basis; a *theologoumenon* could be an historical event loaded with a heavy amount of theological symbolism and interpretations" (John P. Maier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* [New York: Doubleday, 1991], 237, n. 41). To my knowledge, the first to refer to these narratives as "a genuinely Islamic *theologoumenon*" was Koningsveld in "The Islamic Image of Paul," 209. The particular character of these narratives stands out when compared with other portrayals of Paul in the writings of Muslim authors who provide less theologically-laden accounts of early Christian history. See examples in Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 170–171.

into three main sects). Thus, although Islam accepts in principle, as noted above, that laws promulgated in an earlier dispensation might be abrogated at a later time, there was still the need to account for the fact that historical Christianity had dispensed with stipulations of the Torah that Muḥammad had not abrogated, such as circumcision and the prohibition against eating pork.⁷⁰ With the passage of time, the number of innovations ascribed to Paul was progressively expanded to include any Christian practice found incompatible with the Islamic image of Jesus. For instance, in al-Dimashqī's reply to the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, Paul's innovations include the institution of the communion of bread and wine and the veneration of images in churches. He is also said to have buried a crossbeam pretending that it was the crossbeam of the crucifixion. This was later discovered by Helen, the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, thus leading to Christian worship of the cross.⁷¹

70 That non-Mosaic regulations (e.g., the Sunday observance) were introduced by Jews who pretended to have become Christians in an attempt to further the Jewish interests by effecting a final separation from Judaism and end the unrest caused by the emergence of Christianity is a motif known in the *Tōlēdōth Yēshū*, in which this cunning action is alternatively attributed to Simon-Peter and Paul among others. See Julius H. Greenstone, "Jewish Legends about Simon-Peter," *Historia Judaica* 12 (1950): 89–104; Simon Légasse, "La légende juive des Apôtres et les rapports judéo-chrétiens dans le haut Moyen Age," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 75 (1974): 99–132; idem, "La légende juive des Apôtres et les rapports judéo-chrétiens dans le Moyen Age occidental," *Yearbook—Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Theological Studies* (1974/1975): 121–139; Wout van Bekkum, "The Poetical Qualities of the Apostle Peter in Jewish Folktales," *Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture* 3 (2003): 16–25; idem, "The Rock on Which the Church is Founded': Simon Peter in Jewish Folktales," in *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 289–310; John Gager, "Simon Peter, Founder of Christianity or Saviour of Israel," in *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. P. Schäfer et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 221–245. On the connection between this Jewish polemical tradition and the Islamic narratives about Paul, see Ernst Bammel, "Christian Origins in Jewish Tradition," *New Testament Studies* 13 (1967), 330–334; idem, "Eine übersehene Angabe zu den Toledoth Jeschu," *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 479–480; Stern, "How Christ's Religion Was Falsified," 181–182; Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," 75–76, 83–95; and Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 233–236. There are also Jewish polemical accounts of how Muḥammad had been instructed by Jewish scholars who hypocritically converted to Islam in order to protect Israel. See Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1997), 505–508.

71 Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic*, 400–401. We should recall that in addition to the narratives in which Paul's conversion is presented as a trick to deceive the Christians, there is another strain in the Islamic polemical tradition which presents a

3.3 State-Manufactured Christianity

Al-Qarāfi completes his account of the corruption of Christianity with a report about Constantine, likewise taken from al-Qurṭubī, who in turn derived it from al-Khazrajī.⁷² The main objective of this narrative is to explain how Paul's initial corruption of Christianity was further expanded and consolidated by Constantine, who adopted Christianity merely for reasons of political expediency (*li-iṣlāḥ ra'yyatihi*). His enemies had multiplied in his vast empire and he sought to unite his subjects under one religious law. He learned from the reports of the Jews that a certain man had appeared among them declaring that the Torah was abrogated. Constantine sought those who claimed to follow the religion proclaimed by that man and found them divided, holding to different doctrines. He then looked for what was left of the Gospel. With the help of his advisors, he selected whatever was fitting for his purpose, such as the alleged crucifixion of Jesus (for he had been advised that a religion "that seeks revenge" would create a stronger bond among him and his subjects)⁷³ and the abandonment of circumcision, since his own people did not practice it. The emperor then corroborated all this with a dream, ascribing his victory in battle to the power of the cross.⁷⁴ After that, Constantine explained to the people most of the laws which they practice now. Not only their laws, but even most of what is in the Gospel today comes from Constantine. Al-Qarāfi concludes the account with the remark that Christians do not disapprove this account of the facts, even if they contest certain details.

different image of Paul. He is still the corruptor of Christianity, but for different reasons: Paul introduces Roman (and hence pagan) customs in the religion of Jesus in order to gain prominence among the Romans and seek revenge against his former co-religionists, the Jews. A very detailed elaboration of this tradition is found in 'Abd al-Jabbār's *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubūwa*. See Arabic text and English translation in 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique*, 98–105. See also Stern, "How Christ's Religion Was Falsified."

72 *Ajwiba*, 549–552 (326–328). See English translation in Appendix C. Compare with *I'lām*, 244–446, and with *Maqāmi*' §§ 46–50. A French translation of al-Khazrajī's text is provided in Khoury, *Matériaux*, 540–542. See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 49, 69–70, 140.

73 Al-Khazrajī writes: "an yata'abbada al-qawm bi-ṭalab dam" (*Maqāmi*' § 46), which Khoury translates, perhaps too literally, as: "que les gens se vouent au culte par la recherche de sang" (*Matériaux*, 540). Some paragraphs earlier, al-Khazrajī censures the Christians for saying that God was humiliated and crucified, and adds: "With this, you make the sin of the Jews hideous in order to inflame the hearts of your people with hatred against them" (*Maqāmi*' § 27).

74 This is a reference to Constantine's famous vision on the eve of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312, which delivered into his control the City of Rome. See Oliver Nicholson, "Constantine's Vision of the Cross," *Vigiliae Christianae* 54 (2000): 309–323.

Much of what has been said about the Islamic stories of Paul applies likewise to Constantine. Although one can find Muslim narratives in which the emperor's life and accomplishments are depicted in a non-controversial and scientific tone, there are also highly polemical accounts of his conversion and his role in the history of Christianity.⁷⁵ To this second group belongs, obviously, the narrative quoted by al-Qarāfi, whose purpose is to present Constantine as the second main culprit (after Paul) for the Christians' departure from the religion of Jesus and to explain how corrupted Christianity became the dominant religion in the Roman Empire.

4 Christian Liturgical Prayers

A further noticeable thematic block in chapter three is constituted by a number of questions (nos. 63–74) in which al-Qarāfi comments on several excerpts from Christian liturgical texts.⁷⁶ This material has been culled from the chapter that al-Ja'fari dedicates to exposing the ignominies of the Christians, among which he includes “the absurdities and babbles which they recite in their eight prayers.”⁷⁷ Indeed, al-Ja'fari seems to have considered the creed of the Christians and their liturgical prayers as the two most important pieces of evidence for their corrupted beliefs.⁷⁸ We saw earlier that his critical assessment of the creed was probably inspired by 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī, one of his acknowledged sources. It is likewise possible to find a precedent for his critique of Christian prayers. Discussing the doctrine of redemption, al-Ja'fari quotes and criticizes four liturgical acclamations of Christ's victory over sin,

75 See examples of both types of narratives in Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 171–174, and Nadia Maria El-Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 113–118. See also 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique*, 106–111; Stern, “How Christ's Religion Was Falsified,” 142–145. Unlike 'Abd al-Jabbār, for whom Constantine's conversion was a political maneuver, Ibn Taymiyya thought that Constantine's visions were demonic in origin: “The cross which Constantine saw among the stars and the cross which he saw another time are what the demons fashion and show to lead people astray” (*Jawāb*, 2:323; trans. *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 202; see also *Jawāb*, 4:379; trans. *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 326). See also al-Dimashqī's references to Constantine in Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic*, 182–184, 210–213, 258–267.

76 *Ajwiba*, 594–610 (351–358).

77 *Takhjil*, 106. See note 65 to chapter 2.

78 He is most likely putting his own ideas into the mouth of al-Kāmil when he says that the Sultan specifically commissioned him “to expound the manifest unbelief contained in their prayer and the repulsive monstrosity in their creed” (*Bayān*, 103–104).

death, and the power of Satan.⁷⁹ The third of these acclamations, for instance, that Christians are said to recite after communion, reads: “O our Lord Jesus, who conquered the tyrant, death, by your suffering,” in which one can recognize the opening lines of a well-known hymn attributed to Ephraem the Syrian (d. 373).⁸⁰ As it happens, three of these acclamations are mentioned verbatim, and for the same polemical purpose, in the work that al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, a tenth-century Christian convert to Islam, addressed to his brother explaining his conversion.⁸¹ For al-Jaʿfarī, who asks how he who was himself defeated and died can defeat death and how he who was himself conquered and crucified can conquer Satan, these prayers are a matter of laughter for the obvious reason that humans continue to die and Satan continues to lead people astray. Al-Qarāfi, who takes the same line of argumentation, writes in relation to the above prayer of Ephraem:

They do not realize that Jesus was the first to die according to them, and then his mother, and his companions, and indeed all the Christians until the coming of the Hour. But their lack of intellect excuses them. I wish I knew how suffering can destroy death when suffering is the first symptom of death. A thing can only be destroyed by what is contrary to it. But who [among them] can differentiate between what is in harmony with death and what is contrary to it?⁸²

Beneath the caustic tone of these remarks lies, however, an important divergence between Christian and Muslim understandings of sin and salvation that I shall explore in more detail later, when I look at al-Qarāfi’s treatment of these concepts.

The mention of these four acclamations provides a natural transition for al-Jaʿfarī to bring in other liturgical material that he has derived from the

79 *Takhjīl*, 628; reproduced in *Ajwiba*, 594–597 (351–352).

80 See an English translation of this hymn in Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, eds., *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 163.

81 Very little is known about this author. See David Thomas, “Al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb,” in *CMR*2, 510–513. His work has survived only partially. Ibn Taymiyya quotes long excerpts of it in *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*. For the liturgical texts in question, see Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb*, 1999 ed., 4:117–118; trans. Khoury, *Matériaux*, 518. See also ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s references to Christian liturgical prayers in *Critique*, 4–5 (§§ 39–40), 32 (§§ 26–27), and 84 (§§ 514–519).

82 *Ajwiba*, 597 (352). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 129.

Coptic Horologion.⁸³ Al-Qarāfi follows suit, even if the polemical points he raises are sometimes his own. For instance, whereas the following text from the Introductory Prayers (recited before each office): “Come, let us worship! Come, let us beseech Christ our Lord! O Lord, Lamb of God, have mercy on us! You alone are the Holy One, the Most High,” constitutes for al-Jaʿfarī a glaring example of unbelief because it openly proclaims Christ to be God, al-Qarāfi focuses instead on Jesus’ description as both Lord and ‘Lamb of God.’ What is the connection, he wonders, between this animal and divine lordship that the Most High should be called a lamb and how can this Lamb of God *alone* be the Holy One? Is not its owner more entitled to this title?⁸⁴ Al-Qarāfi also takes issue with another passage from the Morning Prayer or Office of Prime which describes Christ as both divine and long-suffering, since suffering and patience are human attributes unbecoming of the divinity.⁸⁵ Moreover, in al-Qarāfi’s view, the fact that Christ alone is addressed as savior in the same office either invalidates the doctrine of the Trinity (since the three persons are not equal), or shows the discourtesy of the Christians to the Father and the Holy Spirit.⁸⁶

In the Office of Terce, Christians ask the Mother of God to have pity on their souls and open to them the doors of her mercy, which in the eyes of al-Qarāfi implies that they worship Mary.⁸⁷ Yet, they do not claim that God’s word was united with Mary, but consider her to be like the rest of Adam’s daughters. This

83 To my knowledge, even though previous polemicists had also paid attention to Christian liturgical texts, as noted with regard to al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb and ‘Abd al-Jabbār, this particular material is peculiar to al-Jaʿfarī. Although he refers to these prayers elsewhere to illustrate a polemical point (*Takhjīl*, 121, 139, 169, 363, 365, 702), his main critique of the canonical office is concentrated in *Takhjīl*, 629–643. Coptic and Arabic parallels to the texts quoted by al-Jaʿfarī can be found in Oswald H.E. Burmester, *The Horologion of the Egyptian Church: Coptic and Arabic Text from a Mediaeval Manuscript* (Cairo: Centro Francescano di Studi Orientali Cristiani, 1973).

84 *Ajwiba*, 598 (352–353).

85 *Ajwiba*, 599 (353); Burmester, *Horologion*, 155 (English), 14–15 (Arabic). Long-suffering, literally, “long in spirit” (*ṭawīl al-rūḥ*) is an Aramaic idiom indicating forbearance. The Hebrew Bible often attributes this moral attribute to God (Exod 34:6; Ps 86:15, 145:8; Neh 9:17; and *passim*) and does not see it as contradicting God’s power (Num 14:17–18).

86 *Ajwiba*, 599 (353).

87 *Ajwiba*, 600 (353). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 142. Al-Qarāfi mistakenly has “the *second* hour” (see, however, *Takhjīl*, 633: “the *third* hour,” i.e., the Office of Terce). Also, the text quoted here seems slightly corrupted. Compare with the parallel passage in Burmester, which reads: “O God-bearer, thou art the true vine, which hath borne the cluster of life. Thee it is whom we beseech, O thou who art full of grace, and the holy Apostles, on account of the salvation of our souls. . . . O God-bearer, thou art the heavenly gate: open to us the door of mercy,” *Horologion*, 164–165 (English), 22 (Arabic).

means, therefore, that the Christians worship a human being and their trinity (*thālūth*) has become a quaternity (*rābūʿ*).⁸⁸ Also in connection with Mary, al-Qarāfi wonders why Christians should request her intercession in the Office of None when they believe that Jesus' death on the cross has already saved them from their sins.⁸⁹

After quoting the following text from the Office of Sext: "O You, whose hands were nailed to the Cross for the sin which Adam dared to commit, take the handwriting of our sins, O Christ our God, and deliver us," and recalling that Christians consider Jesus to be God, al-Qarāfi asks with bewilderment what kind of sin Adam committed that required God to be crucified in order to blot out his servant's sin instead of simply forgiving him.⁹⁰

According to al-Qarāfi, the number of gods worshiped by the Christians becomes six in their Office of Vespers: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, Mary, the Messiah, and a certain John whom they declare to be the creator (*ṣāniʿ*) of Christ. He remarks that if you give Christians enough time, their gods will be countless.⁹¹ Al-Qarāfi, however, is misreading the text quoted in the *Takhjīl*, which reads: "Baptizer (*ṣābiḡh*) of Christ, John, remember our congregations, that we may be delivered from our iniquities." For al-Jaʿfarī, this prayer is nonetheless unacceptable because it attributes to John the power to forgive sins. However, the next sentence in the prayer, not quoted in the *Takhjīl*, makes it clear that it is only John's intercession that is being requested here.⁹²

Al-Qarāfi further rebukes the Christians for associating the angels with their own infidelity in reference to a passage from the Office of Compline in which the angels are mentioned as magnifying the Trinity. This same passage, moreover, refers to the Father as "existing before everything else," which requires that there was a time when the Son was not and, therefore, that the Son is begotten. This shows once again, comments al-Qarāfi, the contradictions that the Christians continuously incur.⁹³ In the same vein, he criticizes a text said to be taken from the Office of Midnight Prayer, in which God is exalted "above the Messiah," thus contradicting what the Christians say in the office of Compline about the Son being equal to the Father. The text in question is, however, a corrupted quote from the Hymn of the Three Youths in the Furnace (Dan 3:52–88), which is part of the Psalmidia of the Night, a choral

88 *Ajwiba*, 603 (355).

89 *Ajwiba*, 605 (356). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 142.

90 *Ajwiba*, 604 (355).

91 *Ajwiba*, 607 (357).

92 *Takhjīl*, 639–640. Compare with Burmester, *Horologion*, 194–195 (English), 43 (Arabic).

93 *Ajwiba*, 608 (357).

service sung between the canonical Offices of Midnight Prayer and Morning Prayer.⁹⁴

To conclude, al-Qarāfi's comments on these excerpts from Christian liturgical texts constitute perhaps the clearest illustration in the *Ajwiba* of what may be described as inter-religious polemical reading. This type of reading, which does not seek to understand the views of the other but to justify an already-held and distorted opinion about them, is often literalist and not interested in context, nuance, and traditions of interpretation. Yet, passages such as these, in which the polemical intent is intensified, are important for our purpose because they reveal the major fracture lines of theological discord, such as the Christian interpretation of Jesus' death as a redemptive event and the related notion of human sinfulness, to which I now turn.

5 Sin, Repentance, and Salvation

It is possible to discern beneath many a remark throughout the *Ajwiba* a strong theological opposition to Christian notions of redemption and sin. Fortunately, these topics become also the explicit subject matter of several questions in chapter three, affording us a better grasp of the nature of the disagreement.⁹⁵ Since the discussion is connected with humanity's first turning away from God in the garden of paradise, we need first to recall briefly the qur'ānic account of the sin of the first couple, which al-Qarāfi takes as normative.⁹⁶ According to the Muslim scripture, Adam and his wife were allowed to eat

94 *Ajwiba*, 609 (358); *Takhjil*, 642. On this Coptic service, which is not part of the canonical hours as such, see Oswald H.E. Burmester, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church: A Detailed Description of Her Liturgical Services and the Rites and Ceremonies Observed in the Administration of Her Sacraments* (Cairo: [s.n.], 1967), 108–111; and Robert Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and its Meaning for Today* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), 253–256.

95 Not surprisingly, a large amount of al-Qarāfi's arguments in this regard proceed from the chapter that al-Jāfari devotes to the alleged crucifixion and death of Jesus. See *Takhjil*, 331–388.

96 References to the story of the first human couple are distributed over a number of passages in the Qur'an and are often employed to support particular teachings on beliefs and conduct (Q 2:30–39; 5:27–31; 7:11–27; 15:27–48; 17:61–64; 18:50; 20:116–126; 38:71–85). A comparative study of the biblical and qur'ānic narratives can be found in Muhammad Abdel Haleem, "Adam and Eve in the Bible and the Qur'an," *Islamic Quarterly* 41 (1997): 255–269. On the complex relationship between the qur'ānic account and earlier biblical literature, see Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, 39–71.

from everything in the garden except from one tree (Q 2:35; 7:19). Despite God's warning that Satan would try to deceive them (Q 20:117), they succumbed to his enticements (Q 7:20; 20:120) and ate from the tree, for which they were rebuked (Q 7:22). They asked God's forgiveness, saying: "Our Lord, we have wronged our souls: if You do not forgive us and have mercy, we shall be lost" (Q 7:23). The Qur'ān states explicitly that God accepted Adam's repentance (Q 2:37; 20:122). They were then ejected from the garden and warned that they and their progeny would live in mutual enmity with Satan, who was also expelled (Q 2:36; 7:24; 20:123).⁹⁷ Human beings, however, were not left to themselves. God promised to send them guidance, on the acceptance of which salvation would depend: "When guidance comes from Me, as it certainly will, there will be no fear for those who follow My guidance, nor will they grieve—those who disbelieve and deny Our messages shall be the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain" (Q 2:38). Elsewhere the Qur'ān exhorts human beings to avoid the mistake of their first parents—"Do not let Satan seduce you, as he did your parents, causing them to leave the garden" (Q 7:27)—and insists that acceptance or rejection of divine guidance is ultimately an individual affair: "Whoever accepts guidance does so for his own good; whoever strays does so at his own peril. No soul will bear another's burden" (Q 17:15).⁹⁸ Although evil deeds are said to have consequences in this world and in the next, the Qur'ān also promises that "those who repent, believe, and do good deeds, God will change the evil deeds of such people into good ones. He is most forgiving, most merciful. People who repent and do good deeds truly return to God" (Q 25:70).

This brief account provides the keys to understanding al-Qarāfi's theological opposition to the Christian doctrine of redemption. His principal objections revolve around the role of repentance in procuring divine forgiveness, the utterly personal character of sin, the purification of sins by good deeds, and the nature of the salvation supposedly obtained through Jesus' death.⁹⁹

97 It bears noting that their expulsion from the garden as such it is not a punishment since, from the beginning, human beings were meant to live on earth. Thus, God announces the creation of man to the angels, saying: "I am putting a successor (*khalīfa*) on earth" (Q 2:30). This had led some Muslim thinkers to emphatically reject that Islam has any concept of salvation, as we shall see below.

98 See also Q 6:164.

99 For an early Arabic defense of the Christian redemption narrative which stands in continuity with patristic tradition but which appears to have written in awareness of qur'ānic views on the matter, see Theodore Abū Qurra's *On the Necessity of Redemption*, Arabic text in *Mayāmir Thāwḍūrus Abī Qurra Usquf Ḥarrān: aqdam ta'līf 'Arabī Naṣrānī*, ed. Quṣṭanṭīn al-Bāshā (Beirut: Maṭba'at al-Fawā'id, 1904), 83–91; trans. John C. Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 129–135.

5.1 *Repentance and the Obliteration of Sins*

Al-Qarāfi presents his imagined Christian opponents with the following disjunctive question: Did Adam repent and turn back to God or not?¹⁰⁰ If they respond affirmatively, they invalidate their own doctrine of the crucifixion, whose mysterious effect (*sirr*) is said to be the obliteration of Adam's sin. Not taking for granted that all his Muslim readers will be familiar with their doctrines, al-Qarāfi explains that, according to the Christians, just as the ram, slain, ransomed Isaac (Gen 22:13), so also God's son, slain, ransomed human beings, and that his sufferings, humiliation, and death were in exchange for the punishment due to Adam.¹⁰¹ However, if Adam repented and his repentance was accepted by God, there was no need for ransom. If, on the other hand, the Christians respond that Adam did not repent, their own scriptures disavow them. Although al-Qarāfi does not really produce a biblical proof for Adam's repentance,¹⁰² he nonetheless sees a confirmation of the Islamic view that repentance blots out sin in the words of Jesus: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15), concluding that there is no meaning in God punishing his own son for Adam's sin.¹⁰³

Moreover, al-Qarāfi goes on to say, supposing that Adam needed to be redeemed with the sacrifice of an innocent victim, the death of Abel, unjustly killed by his brother Cain, would have been more appropriate as ransom, since Abel was Adam's offspring and a human being like him, unlike Jesus, who is both human and divine, according to the Christians. He further wonders why

100 *Ajwiba*, 491 (299); *Takhjil*, 371.

101 Interestingly, al-Qarāfi includes here (*Ajwiba*, 492 [299]; *Takhjil*, 371–372) some lines from what appears to be a Christian hymn on the crucifixion which elaborates on the antithetic parallelism between Jesus on the cross and Adam in the Garden of Eden, a motif particularly found in the writings of the aforementioned Ephraem the Syrian. See Pierre Yousif, "La croix de Jésus et le paradis d'Éden dans la typologie biblique de Saint Ephrem," *Parole de l'Orient* 6–7 (1975–1976): 29–48. However, this is only one among the varied ways in which early Christianity conceived the relationship between Adam and Christ. See Marcel Simon, "Adam et la rédemption dans la perspective de l'église ancienne," in *Types of Redemption*, ed. R.J.Z. Werblowsky and C.J. Bleeker (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 62–71.

102 Adam's repentance is, however, a common motif in the apocryphal literature. See, for instance, Gary A. Anderson, "The Penitence Narrative in the Life of Adam and Eve," in *Literature on Adam and Eve: Collected Essays*, ed. G.A. Anderson et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 3–42.

103 On the qur'ānic teaching on repentance and divine forgiveness see, more in detail, James W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology: A Study of the Interpretation of Theological Ideas in the Two Religions*, 1–2 (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2002), 49–56, and Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1989), 17–36.

Adam, like Isaac, could not be ransomed with a ram. In any case, the most fitting thing for God would have been to redeem Adam and his progeny by punishing the unbelievers with hellfire, rather than with the sacrifice of innocent blood.

5.2 *The Individual Nature of Sin*

Al-Qarāfi further takes issue with the Christian belief that Adam's sin embraced all his descendants and that they were not purified from this sin until Jesus died on the cross.¹⁰⁴ In his view, this belief simply contradicts the consensus of the revealed books that sin is a personal affair and that moral guilt cannot be transferred to someone else. He quotes in support the words that God addresses to Cain in the Book of Genesis after his offering was rejected: "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door" (Gen 4:7). For al-Qarāfi, the clearest corroboration of the qur'ānic doctrine that "no burdened soul will bear the burden of another" (Q 35:18) is to be found, however, in the Book of Ezekiel, where it is said: "The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself" (Ezek 18:20). Also the Psalms indicate that the only thing expected from the sinner is repentance and trust in God.¹⁰⁵ Now, if sin and guilt are personal, there is no need for Jesus' self-sacrificial death, for no person can take upon himself the sin of another.

Moreover, al-Qarāfi adds, for the sake of polemical argument, even supposing that Adam's fault could be transmitted to his descendants, the best interests of humanity would have required God to act immediately and redeem Adam with Abel's innocent death, thus sparing those who lived during the five thousand years that separate Adam from Jesus from the torments of Hell.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, if those who lived between Adam and Jesus were believers, there was no need for the cross, for, as Jesus himself said, it is not those who are

104 *Ajwiba*, 495–498 (301–302); *Takhjil*, 380–382.

105 Al-Qarāfi is referring here to Ps 4:2–5: "O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach? How long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception? . . . Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the Lord."

106 *Ajwiba*, 497 (302); *Takhjil*, 375–376. Al-Ja'farī explicitly ascribes to the Christians the fundamental principle that God is obliged to protect the best interests of his servants. It will be remembered that in al-Qarāfi's view, while upholding that God's rulings depend on the interests of the particular times and the diversity of the nations, God is not *obliged* to protect the welfare of humanity. See above, chapter 1, section 5.1.

healthy who need the remedy (Mt 9:12 and *passim*). If they were unbelievers, why did Jesus proclaim that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt 15:24)?¹⁰⁷ In other words, if Jesus came only for the sinners among the Israelites, then either his salvific death excluded many of Adam's descendants, or else those people were in fact not in need of redemption, which contradicts the Christian belief that Adam's sin embraced the whole human race.

5.3 *Purification by Good Deeds*

In a later passage al-Qarāfi again discusses the claim that the suffering, humiliation, and death of Jesus were on account of the purification of sins.¹⁰⁸ Although the parallel passage in the *Takhjil* indicates that the Christian belief is that Jesus *offered himself up* for the purification of sins, a detail absent in the *Ajwiba*, this self-sacrificial dimension of the cross is significantly ignored by both al-Ja'fari and al-Qarāfi, who instead focus their objections on the evil action of Jesus' alleged killers. Thus, al-Qarāfi asks whether the sins purified by Jesus' death were the sins of those who believed in him or the sins of those who did not believe in him. If the latter, he wonders how can the sins of those who did not believe in him be purified by an action which is even more repugnant, namely, their humiliation and crucifixion of their Lord and Creator. Al-Ja'fari puts it more graphically by saying that this would be like using feces to remove a urine stain.¹⁰⁹ If the sins purified are, however, the sins of those who believed in Jesus, the Christians ought to explain how the evil action of a group of unbelievers (i.e., those who killed Jesus) can purify the sins of those who were devout. In other words, whichever way you look at it, the claim that Jesus' death obtains the purification of the sins of others is problematic, according to al-Qarāfi. On the contrary, he insists, the sins of a human being can be purified only by his good deeds, adding, however, that faith suffices for the purification of sins, for otherwise people would not be admonished to believe.¹¹⁰ Al-Qarāfi

107 *Ajwiba*, 498 (302); *Takhjil*, 382.

108 *Ajwiba*, 593 (350); *Takhjil*, 626–628.

109 *Takhjil*, 626.

110 *Ajwiba*, 593–594 (351). Here al-Qarāfi is summarizing, much too hastily, al-Ja'fari's remarks that a human being is only purified by his good deeds and his sincere repentance with the exclusion of unbelief, and that, in the case of those who believed in Jesus, their faith purified them (*Takhjil*, 627). We should keep in mind that neither of the two polemicists intends to give a full exposé of the Islamic doctrine of sin and repentance, which was itself the subject of much debate among Muslim theologians. For a typical Ash'ari view of this matter, see al-Juwayni, *Kitāb al-irshād*, 385–393; trans. *Conclusive Proofs*, 211–215, 220–224, and Martin S. Stern, "Notes on the Theology of al-Ghazzali's Concept of Repentance," *Islamic Quarterly* 23 (1979): 82–98. See also Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*,

ends this question by further wondering what moral corruption Jesus' death has eradicated from the world, given the fact that people continue to do the same good and evil things, which proves that the world was not in need for the purification that Christians proclaim was obtained through the humiliation of their lord.¹¹¹

5.4 *What Salvation?*

Also in connection with Jesus' death, al-Qarāfī elsewhere in the chapter demands that his Christian opponents be more precise about the salvation the obtaining of which was supposedly the only reason for the crucifixion of the God of the universe. He draws here on al-Ja'fari's comments on the passage from the creed that says, "for us men and for our salvation (*khalāṣ*) came down from heaven."¹¹² The salvation that Christians claim for themselves is obviously not from worldly trials and tribulations, in which the Christians share in equal measure with the rest of human beings, observes al-Qarāfī. It is neither from the strict observance of religious obligations such as prayer and fasting, which are still part of their religion and to whose observance they encourage one another. Finally, this salvation cannot be from "the terrors of the Day of Resurrection," since Jesus declared that all the nations will be judged according to their deeds: "I will say to those on my right: 'You have done good. Come to the delight of paradise,' and to those on my left: 'You have done evil. Go away into hell.'"¹¹³ However, if everybody will be judged and saved or condemned exclusively on account of their deeds, concludes al-Qarāfī, the crucifixion is useless in either case.¹¹⁴

To sum up: Christian thinking about the atoning value of Jesus' death makes no theological sense to al-Qarāfī, who approaches the matter from the qur'ānic perspective on sin and repentance and from a view of religious history in which prophets—including Jesus—are not savior figures but purely

194–213; Louis Gardet, *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme* (Paris: Vrin, 1967), 291–324; and Mokdad Arfa Mensia, "Théories du repentir chez les théologiens musulmans classiques," in *Rituals and Ethics: Patterns of Repentance: Judaism, Christianity, Islam*, ed. A. Destro and M. Pesce (Paris: Peeters, 2004), 107–123.

111 The same is argued by al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, *al-Jawāb*, 4:117–418; trans. Khoury, *Matériaux*, 518.

112 *Ajwiba*, 500 (304). Compare with *Takhjil*, 508–509. Al-Qarāfī has preferred, however, to bring up this point in connection with his critique of the doctrine of redemption, rather than in his treatment of the creed.

113 Paraphrase of Mt 25:31–46.

114 *Ajwiba*, 501 (304). See also al-Ḥasan ibn Ayyūb, *al-Jawāb*, 4:118–119; trans. Khoury, *Matériaux*, 519; and Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 130.

conveyors of divine guidance. Whether wittingly or unwittingly, the self-sacrificial dimension of Jesus' death as a selfless act of love is glossed over, if not omitted altogether, in al-Qarāfi's consideration. It is as if what mattered was the death itself, devoid of any meaning, of God the Son. Thus, if the latter consented to his own crucifixion while he was able to protect himself, the Christians should praise, not blame, the Jews for their action, since they helped the Son to accomplish his purpose. However, if the crucifixion took place against his will, the Christians should better address their prayers to a more powerful god, "for what benefit can be hoped or what protection can be expected from him who was unable to keep his last breath from passing?"¹¹⁵

6 The Christian God: A Philosophical and Theological Non-starter

The remark just quoted illustrates at the same time another major stumbling-block to understanding the Christian doctrine of salvation: a powerless God hanging on a cross appears to al-Qarāfi as a philosophical and theological impossibility. Indeed, a significant number of pages in chapter three of the *Ajwiba* are devoted to expounding the irrationality of Christian thinking on God, which al-Qarāfi contrasts negatively with the Islamic doctrine of God. Thus, for instance, he censures the Christians for claiming that the Messiah was God 'descended' to earth to save the world from sin, arguing that it is more in accord with God's sublime glory and unapproachable highness to employ prophets and angels as intermediaries.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, more fundamentally for al-Qarāfi, a well-balanced intellect can simply not accept that a human being who was conceived in his mother's womb, was born, became an adult, was betrayed and suffered at the hands of the Jews, was crucified and killed is God. Such a wretched god (*ilāh miskīn*) is simply ludicrous.¹¹⁷ This cannot be compared with what Muslims say about God, whom they exalt above the attributes of bodies and beyond any misfortune or suffering.¹¹⁸ Lest it should be thought that his position is simply the result of religious rivalry, al-Qarāfi adds that even someone who had grown up on an island without contact with

115 *Ajwiba*, 500 (303). See also 596 (352). This has been a standard Muslim challenge to Christians since at least the time of Theodore Abū Qurra. See Sidney H. Griffith, "Some Unpublished Arabic Sayings Attributed to Theodore Abū Qurrah," *Le Muséon* 42 (1979): 29–35.

116 *Ajwiba*, 478–479 (293).

117 *Ajwiba*, 480 (293); *Takhjīl*, 276.

118 *Ajwiba*, 483 (294).

other human beings and without knowledge of religions would feel revulsion if he were told that the God who created him was a human being like him who eats, drinks, sleeps, urinates, defecates, etc.¹¹⁹ For al-Qarāfi, the question boils down to a simple syllogism: God does not have a body of flesh and blood; the four Gospels attest to the fact that Jesus was not different from other human beings in this respect; hence, it is impossible for him to be God. To affirm the contrary is to deny God's transcendence and dissimilarity from anything else in heaven or earth, something that the Jewish and Christian scriptures also uphold.¹²⁰

By making Jesus God, Christians not only jeopardize the divine transcendence and impassibility, but also God's omnipotence. Al-Qarāfi asks his opponents how it is possible for God to be crucified and overpowered. If they reply that this is not possible, they contradict their own prayers, for they recite in the Office of Sext: "O Jesus Christ our God, who was nailed to the Cross at the sixth hour."¹²¹ Now, if they respond affirmatively, they oppose the witness of the Torah, according to which God destroyed all the powerful of the earth with the flood and defeated Pharaoh's army. Moreover, since the creed states that the ages were framed and all things were created by Jesus' hand, and hence that it is he who governs the world and the actions of people therein, the Christians should be asked who was in charge during the three days when Jesus laid on the tomb.¹²² They should also be asked who brought him back to life. If they respond that it was Jesus himself, then they should further be questioned whether he was dead or alive, so that they incur a contradiction, whatever the reply. Moreover, if they respond that it was someone else who brought him back to life, it follows that Jesus was a servant, not God.¹²³

In short, for al-Qarāfi, the Christian discourse on God is nothing but a string of contradictions and absurdities. Thus, it is hardly a surprise that their attempts to explain their doctrines with philosophical categories fail to present a unified and coherent account. When it comes to explaining the union (*ittihād*) of divinity and humanity in Christ, they are divided into three main sects, holding mutually irreconcilable views.¹²⁴ As for proclaiming their Lord

119 *Ajwiba*, 483–484 (294–295). See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 120.

120 *Ajwiba*, 488–489 (296–297).

121 *Ajwiba*, 489–490 (297). Burmester, *Horologion*, 174 (English), 28–29 (Arabic).

122 *Ajwiba*, 497–500 (303); *Takhjil*, 396–397.

123 *Ajwiba*, 498–499 (303); *Takhjil*, 384.

124 *Ajwiba*, 502 (304–305); *Takhjil*, 475. Ibn Taymiyya writes in this respect not without a dose of irony: "They have divided into sects and groups on this issue, each sect declaring the others unbelievers. [...] It has been said that if you gather together ten Christians, they

to be a Trinity (*thālūth*), their agreement on this matter is deceptive, for while they all concur that the Father is a substance (*jawhar*), they disagree about the Son and the Holy Spirit. For some they are two attributes (*ṣifa*) of the Father; for others they are two self-subsistent essences (*dhāt qā'ima bi-nafsihā*); and still for others they are two special properties (*khāṣṣiyya*) of the substance that is the Father.¹²⁵ At the end, rather than trying to understand what Christians mean by hypostasis, they should be asked directly. If they agree that God is one and the rest—knowledge, life, will, speech, power, hearing, and sight—are all attributes, they hold the same view as the Muslims. However, if they insist on maintaining that each one of the three—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is God and that the three together are also God, they should be challenged to form in their own minds a mental representation of their concept of divinity (*mafhūm al-ilāh*), which they will never be able to do, thinks al-Qarāfi, still less offering a rational proof for the truth of their doctrine.¹²⁶

7 Concluding Remarks

The foregoing examination is far from exhausting all the arguments and objections against Christianity put forward in chapter three of the *Ajwiba*. The issues I have selected for presentation are nevertheless illustrative of the general tone and style of al-Qarāfi's argumentation throughout the chapter. More importantly, they afford us a very clear notion of what he thought were the main points of theological conflict between Christians and Muslims. In this chapter, we see at work the same dynamic already noted in respect of the first two chapters, namely, al-Qarāfi's evaluation of Christianity according to his own standards of true religion and with categories developed within his faith tradition. Thus, for instance, he repeatedly objects to the fact that Christians consider their creed as a pillar of their religion when this text is the obvious composition of a group of individuals who, unlike the prophets, were not protected from error. Also al-Qarāfi's critique of Christian practice and behavior is pervasively dominated by the Islamic category of innovation. From this perspective, even the criterion of apostolicity, i.e., the notion that a particular teaching or practice has been handed down from the Apostles through his successors the bishops, which was arguably the most important guarantee of orthodoxy

would split into eleven positions" (*Jawāb*, 4:76; trans. *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 308–309).

125 *Ajwiba*, 508 (306); *Takhjīl*, 493–494.

126 *Ajwiba*, 510–511 (307–308). See also above, chapter 1, section 4.

in early Christianity, fails to satisfy al-Qarāfi's requirements. Accordingly, he writes in connection with the Eucharist that, even supposing that the Apostles instituted the offering of bread and wine, not being prophets themselves, they were not entitled to innovate in religion.

It was said above that chapter three contains some of the clearest examples of polemical reading to be found in the *Ajwiba*, where al-Qarāfi criticizes Christian liturgical texts quoted out of context and interpreted in a literalist fashion. I argued that these intensively polemical passages are nonetheless helpful because they highlight the major theological points of divergence. In this respect, one key issue that surfaces from al-Qarāfi's critique of Christianity is the belief that Jesus' death was a redemptive sacrifice for the sins of others, which he sees as contradicting the straightforward teaching in *sūrat al-isrā'* (17):15 that "no soul will bear another's burden." In this particular matter, al-Qarāfi represents a consistent position in the history of Muslim views of Christianity. In fact, as noted by a contemporary Muslim scholar, it is not just the salvific value of the cross, but the entire Christian notion of salvation as requiring the intervention of a savior figure that poses a problem to Islam, precisely because the qur'ānic account of the sin of the first couple is not the account of an ontological fall of humanity, but only a paradigm of human weakness:

In the Islamic view, human beings are no more 'fallen' than they are 'saved.' Because they are not 'fallen,' they have no need of a savior. But because they are not 'saved' either, they need to do good works—and do them ethically—which alone will earn them the desired 'salvation.' Indeed, *salvation* is an improper term, since, to need 'salvation,' one must be in a predicament beyond the hope of ever escaping it. But men and women are not in that predicament. Humans are not ethically powerless. They are not helpless puppets capable of neither good nor evil. They are capable of *both*. To 'save' themselves by deeds and works is their pride and glory. To miss the chance and pass all the opportunities by is pitiable neglect; to miss the calling deliberately and to do evil is to earn punishment, to deserve damnation.¹²⁷

127 Isma'il R. Al-Faruqi, *Islam* (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1979), 9, quoted in Muzammil H. Siddiqi, "Salvation in Islamic Perspective," *Islamic Studies* 32 (1993), 41. See also M.H. Siddiqi, "The Doctrine of Redemption: A Critical Study," in *Islamic Perspectives*, ed. K. Ahmad and Z.I. Ansari (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, 1979), 91–102; and James Robson, "Aspects of the Qur'anic Doctrine of Salvation," in *Man and His Salvation*, ed. E.J. Sharpe and J.R. Hinnells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), 205–219.

For the future prospects of Muslim-Christian dialogue it will be important to keep in mind that a difference must be made between the *doctrine* of atonement, which remains normative for mainstream Christianity, and particular *theories* of atonement.¹²⁸ The former is “the claim that the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ effects a reconciliation between God and human beings, who had been—and apart from Christ’s gracious action would have remained—estranged on account of human sin.”¹²⁹ Theories of atonement, for their part, try to explain the *how* of this process. Various theories of atonement have been put forward in the history of Christian theology, but none of them should be regarded as normative.¹³⁰ Still, no matter how Christians seek to explain it, the conviction that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor 5:19) will remain a point of division between Christians and Muslims.

This is not the place to rehearse the complex debates that resulted in the Christological definitions of the first ecumenical councils. Suffice it to note that the bedrock conviction that Jesus Christ died for everyone’s sins was invoked by Athanasius to argue that the Son was fully divine, for salvation could only be God’s work. Paradoxically, the same conviction that Jesus Christ was savior led Gregory Nazianzen to uphold his full humanity, for “what has not been assumed has not been healed.” In other words, it was soteriology or the doctrine of salvation (what Jesus has accomplished) that ultimately determined Christology (who Jesus is) and not vice versa. Much effort has been made by Muslim polemicists to refute the divinity of Jesus and al-Qarāfi is no exception in this regard. However, it is important to note that, even before any discussion of Christians’ claims about Jesus, their exaltation of the cross already appears to him as something deeply reprehensible, if not altogether irrational. Al-Qarāfi wonders how a servant can be content with the humiliations received by his lord, adding that if Christians were intelligent, they would efface the traces of those humiliations instead of making the cross an emblem of their faith.¹³¹ According to him, rather than exalting the instrument on which Jesus hung in humiliation, the Christians should exalt the donkey that Jesus rode when he

128 A point made (in a different context) by Thomas Williams, “Sin, Grace, and Redemption,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard*, ed. J.E. Brower and K. Guilfooy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 258.

129 Williams, “Sin, Grace, and Redemption,” 258.

130 The classic study on this matter remains that of Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (New York: Macmillan, 1969). See also the very helpful survey by Trevor Hart, “Redemption and Fall,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 189–206.

131 *Ajwiba*, 576 (339).

entered Jerusalem and the crowds shouted, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Mt 21:9).¹³² If anything, al-Qarāfi's remarks should serve as a reminder to Christians engaged in Muslim-Christian dialogue of the singularity of their own talk about salvation.

¹³² *Ajwiba*, 577 (339–340); *Takhjīl*, 601. See also Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum*, 139.

The Prophet Foretold

As is well known, John of Damascus dedicates the last chapter of his *De Haeresibus*, written in the 730s, to the “still-prevailing deceptive superstition of the Ishmaelites.” According to him, the latter had been idolaters until a false prophet appeared among them, who proclaimed that a scripture was brought down to him from heaven. After summarizing the account of Jesus in the Qur’ān, which John considers one of the many absurdities contained therein, he writes:

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.¹

We have here the first recorded challenge issued by a Christian asking Muslims to validate their claims about Muḥammad with testimonies from the previous scriptures.² We know that Muslims were quick to take up the gauntlet, as attested by the presence of several biblical predictions of Muḥammad in the oldest extant anti-Christian polemical work, the letter which the courtier Muḥammad ibn al-Layth wrote in the 790s to the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VI on behalf of the ‘Abbāsid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.³ Also in Patriarch Timothy’s record of a two-day conversation on religion which he held with the ‘Abbāsid Caliph al-Mahdī in Baghdad around the year 782, we

¹ Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 135.

² Christians were aware that Muslims regarded Muḥammad as a prophet and messenger of God since at least the late seventh century. See Robert G. Hoyland, “The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: An Appraisal,” in *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources*, ed. H. Motzki (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 285–286.

³ See Hadi Eid, *Lettre du calife Hārūn Al-Rašīd à l'empereur Constantin VI* (Paris: Cariscript, 1992), 74–76 (French), 175–178 (Arabic). The passages mentioned by Ibn al-Layth are: Jn 16:7,13; Isa 21:6–9; Ps 9:20; Hab 3:3–12 (abridged); Ps 149:1–8; Isa 42:10–11; Isa 42:1–11 (abridged); Ps 45:2–5; Deut 33:2; and Deut 18:18.

find the caliph quoting the Bible in support of Muḥammad's prophethood.⁴ If authentic, however, the earliest instance of a biblical passage (Isa 21:7) adduced as a prediction of Muḥammad in a work addressed to Christians is found in the correspondence that the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar II (r. 717–720) supposedly had with the Byzantine Emperor Leo III.⁵ Whatever the case might be, none of these or later attempts seem to have satisfied the Christian author of the *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya* (the tract that prompted al-Qurṭubī to write the *I'lām*), who, four centuries and a half after John of Damascus, continued to ask Muslims to prove their claims from the Bible. And this is exactly what al-Qarāfi sets out to do in the last chapter of the *Ajwiba*, where he presents no less than fifty-one biblical predictions of the advent of Muḥammad and the triumph of his community.

In the second part of this chapter I offer an extended analysis of the main exegetical themes that al-Qarāfi derives from his reading of these passages and what this reveals about his understanding of Islam's place in world religious history vis-à-vis prophetic heritage. Before that, however, I discuss briefly other types of material contained in the *Ajwiba* that Islamic tradition generally groups together with the biblical annunciation of Muḥammad into a theological genre known as the "proofs of prophecy." Then I situate al-Qarāfi within the tradition of Muslim biblical scholarship in order to make sense of the paradox of his simultaneously upholding an extreme view of the corruption of the Jewish and Christian scriptures and invoking them in support of Muḥammad's prophetic claims. To anticipate the answer, it will be shown that al-Qarāfi's recourse to the Bible is entirely for polemical purposes, with the sole aim of providing his readers with arguments for interreligious dispute. Although he finds much confirmation of his own theological views in the Bible, al-Qarāfi never turns to it as a source for new religious insights. In fact, we cannot even be sure that he had first-hand knowledge of the biblical text itself. Finally, I offer a close reading of a section from the *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya*, which, I will suggest, explains al-Qarāfi's decision to include in the *Ajwiba* a whole chapter

4 On this colloquy, which has survived in different Syriac and Arabic recensions, see Martin Heimgartner, "Timothy I," in *CMRI*, 522–526. An English trans. by Alphonse Mingana is reprinted in Newman, *Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 169–267. Like Ibn al-Layth, the caliph identifies the Johannine Paraclete with Muḥammad (p. 191) and sees references to him in Isa 21:6–9 (p. 195) and in Deut 18:18 (p. 208). The patriarch replies with a Christian exegesis of these passages, explaining that they do not refer to the prophet of Islam, who is not mentioned in the Bible.

5 For the debate on the authenticity of this exchange, see Tim Greenwood, "The Letter of Leo III in Ghewond," in *CMRI*, 203–206, and, by the same author, "A Reassessment of the History of Lewond," *Le Muséon* 125 (2012), 154–164.

on the annunciation of Muḥammad in the Bible, and which may also be partly responsible for his animosity towards the Christians and their scriptures.

1 The Proofs of Prophecy

In the succeeding centuries, the citation of biblical annunciations of Muḥammad, together with discussions of the miraculous inimitability of the Qurʾān and other evidentiary miracles worked by the prophet of Islam, came to be associated with a distinctive genre of Islamic theological writing known as the “proofs [or signs] of prophecy” (*dalāʾil* [or *aʿlām*] *al-nubūwa*). This type of theological literature, which eventually produced its Christian and Jewish counterparts, usually entailed “an attempt to prove the human need for a prophet, and a list of arguments meant to support the claim of one particular prophet, and his superiority over other prophets.”⁶ A related sub-genre were those works dedicated to exposing the ‘merits’ (*shamāʾil*) and ‘special characteristics’ (*khaṣāʾiṣ*) of the prophet Muḥammad, whom the Qurʾān commends as “an excellent model for those of you who put your hope in God and the Last Day and remember Him often” (Q 33:21). In fact, for scholars like Ibn Ḥazm, the exemplary character of Muḥammad’s life compelled one to acknowledge the veracity of his mission, so much so that even in the absence of other miracles his conduct would suffice as proof of his prophethood.⁷

By the time al-Qarāfī set out to write his reply to Paul of Antioch’s apology for Christianity, the *dalāʾil* and *shamāʾil* works had become well established literary genres in the Islamic world.⁸ Muslim writers engaged in polemic with Christians made ample use of this material. Al-Qurṭubī, for instance, devotes the second part of the third chapter of the *Iʿlām* to establishing the

6 Stroumsa, “The Signs of Prophecy,” 22. In a later contribution, in addition to the interreligious debate triggered by Muslim attempts to authenticate Muḥammad’s prophecy, Stroumsa emphasizes the connection between this theological genre and the development of what she labels “freethinking” in medieval Islamic thought, that is, the rejection of prophecy and revealed religion on the grounds that the intellect provides all that human beings need to know about God and to live a good life. See Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rawāndī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 21–36. Also, it bears noting that not all *dalāʾil* works necessarily include biblical references. See in this respect the comments of David Thomas in “Muslim Regard for Christians and Christianity, 900–1200,” in *CMR2*, 22–25.

7 See Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, 2:231–232; trans. *Abenházam*, 3:144–146.

8 See Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 24–55.

prophethood of Muḥammad on a fourfold basis: first, the information about him conveyed by the prophets who came before; second, circumstantial considerations (*qarā'in al-aḥwāl*), such as the extraordinary events that accompanied Muḥammad's birth, the attestation of Christian and Jewish figures who recognized in him the signs of prophethood, and Muḥammad's physical and moral perfection; third, the miraculous inimitability of the Qur'ān, which is the greatest and clearest miracle confirming his mission; and fourth, other preternatural occurrences manifested at his hands.⁹ Also, in the last chapter of the *Takhjīl*, al-Ja'farī deals extensively with the prediction of Muḥammad in the Bible and the signs and miracles manifested through him, the first and foremost of which is the Qur'ān.¹⁰

On the question of Muḥammad's miracles, al-Qarāfī focuses on what he considers his miracle par excellence, the inimitable Qur'ān, the only prophetic miracle which endures throughout time.¹¹ He also mentions, almost in passing, other miraculous events that Islamic tradition attributes to Muḥammad, such as the splitting of the moon, the water flowing from his fingers, and trees, stones, and animals speaking to him, but nothing comparable with al-Qurṭubī's and al-Ja'farī's extended treatments.¹² As for the lofty qualities of the prophet of Islam, al-Qarāfī also avoids the lengthy discussions of the topic found in his two sources. Instead, he states quite matter-of-factly that the various communities, believers and infidels alike, agree that Muḥammad was among the most perfect beings regarding his physical and moral disposition, his intellect and opinions, all of which are perceptible things, and that the dispute about him concerns only his divine mandate.¹³ In a later passage, however, al-Qarāfī argues that such a conjunction of human qualities as unanimously attested by all those who met Muḥammad during his lifetime—friends and enemies alike—can only occur in the case of the prophets, so that whosoever denies his prophethood should also refuse it to Moses and the rest of the prophets.¹⁴

The relatively little attention al-Qarāfī gives to the miracles (except for the Qur'ān) and lofty qualities of Muḥammad contrasts strikingly with the

9 Al-Qurṭubī, *Ithbāt nubūwat Muḥammad* [= third part of the *I'lām*] (ed. Bil'ayd 2004), 31.

10 See note 66 to chapter 2.

11 Compare al-Qarāfī's treatment of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān in *Ajwiba*, 279–281 (164–166), 616–620 (363–366), and 625 (369) with 'Iyād ibn Mūsā, *al-Shifā' bi-ta'rīf huqūq al-Muṣṭafā*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Amīn, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2002), 1:161–175.

12 *Ajwiba*, 621 (366–367).

13 *Ajwiba*, 163 (82).

14 *Ajwiba*, 624 (368).

importance he attaches to validating his prophethood with texts from the Jewish and Christian scriptures. As will become clearer below, this interest does not stem from any particular reverence for the Bible, but rather from the stated aim in the introduction to the *Ajwiba* of exposing “what in their scriptures points to the truth of our religion and confirms the prophethood of our Prophet, so that their false inference [of the truth of their religion from the Qur’ān] be countered with our correct inference from what you [the reader] will find.”¹⁵ In other words, chapter four of the *Ajwiba* is intended as a polemical rejoinder to Paul of Antioch’s argumentation in support of Christian doctrine from the Qur’ān, even if the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* had avoided the issue of the biblical annunciation of Muḥammad. Not so, however, the author of the *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya*, who explicitly challenged the Muslims to substantiate their claims concerning the foretelling of Muḥammad in the previous scriptures, as we shall see below.

2 Muslims and the Bible: An Abiding Tension

As scholars have noted, Muslim interest in the Bible throughout the formative centuries of Islam is marked by an abiding tension—already present in the Qur’ān—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.¹⁶ This complex undertaking was not, however, an exercise

¹⁵ The introduction to the *Ajwiba* is quoted in full and discussed above, chapter 2, section 2.

¹⁶ Sidney H. Griffith, “Arguing from Scripture: The Bible in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in the Middle Ages,” in *Scripture and Pluralism: Reading the Bible in the Religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. T.J. Heffernan and T.E. Burman (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 29–45; idem, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the “People of the Book” in the Language of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 176–182; Andrew Rippin, “Interpreting the Bible through the Qur’ān,” in *Approaches to the Qur’ān*, ed. G.R. Hawting and A.A. Shareef, 249–259. Accad points out that the archetypal example of the Islamicization of a biblical text is found in al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm al-Rassī’s (d. 246/860) *al-Radd ‘alā l-Naṣārā*, “where the first eight chapters of Matthew’s Gospel are retranslated almost in full, but with additions, subtractions and alterations to make them more compatible with the Islamic world-view” (Martin Accad, “The Gospels in the Muslim Discourse of the Ninth to the Fourteenth Centuries: An Exegetical Inventorial Table,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 14 [2003], 72). See especially the analysis of

of abstract scholarship, but one fully embedded in the profound changes taking place in the wider Mediterranean world beginning in the late seventh century. The Arab conquests and the establishment of the Islamic empire provided the impetus for the construction of “a universalized historical perception of the origins of Islam . . . a divine global scheme in which Islam had played the pivotal role since the very beginning of human history.”¹⁷ Muslim religious writers legitimized the earthly success of the new empire by presenting Muḥammad’s religion as the renewal of the covenant established by God with Adam’s progeny before the unfolding of human history (Q 7:172–173), which made his followers the righteous servants who shall inherit the earth (Q 21:105). As one scholar has aptly put it, “Islam is more profoundly a religion of restoration than a new dispensation.”¹⁸

It is important to note, however, that recent scholarship dealing with Muslim appropriation of biblical motifs, while emphasizing the connection between this process and the wider socio-political context, has abandoned for the most part the language of ‘borrowing’ for that of ‘intertextuality,’ in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims are seen as tapping into the rich reservoirs of biblical tradition, each group for the sake of its own theological constructs and religious needs.¹⁹

al-Rassī’s approach in David Thomas, “The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), 32–36. Another interesting example of the Islamicization of a biblical text, this time for homiletic purposes within the Muslim community itself, is studied in Richard M. Frank, “A ‘Citation’ from the Prophet Jeremias in Ibn Qutaiba and Tabari,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 17 (1955): 379–402. Frank comments: “Generally, the whole atmosphere of the piece, albeit made up for the most part of recognizable pieces from the prophet Jer, is purely Arabic and Muslim. Indeed, it is remarkable how well the feeling of the Israelite prophet has been carried over into another idiom without disturbing in any way the normal expression of the second” (pp. 382–383).

- 17 Uri Rubin, “Islamic Retellings of Biblical History,” in *Adaptations and Innovations: Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature from the Early Middle Ages to the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. Y.T. Langermann and J. Stern (Louvain: Peeters, 2008), 299.
- 18 Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “The Prediction and Prefiguration of Muḥammad,” in *Bible and Qur’ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, 109. See also, by the same author, “A Centuries-Long Conversation,” in *Mission in Dialogue: Essays in Honour of Michael L. Fitzgerald*, ed. C. Belo and J.-J. Pérennès (Louvain: Peeters, 2012), 182.
- 19 John C. Reeves, ed., *Bible and Qur’ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*. See, among others, the recently published M. Goodman, G.H. van Kooten, and J. van Ruiten, eds., *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); and Joseph Verheyden, ed., *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage, and Architect* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

3 The Arabicization of Biblical History

Uri Rubin and others have shown that a key component of the Islamicization of biblical narratives was the connection of local Arabian history to biblical history, both geographically and genealogically.²⁰ This process had been long achieved and absorbed into the Islamic collective memory by al-Qarāfi's time. Not surprisingly, we find traces of it in the *Ajwiba*. Thus, for instance, among the reasons for the superiority of Islam adduced at the end of the first chapter, al-Qarāfi states that Muslims follow the best prayer direction.²¹ He then argues the preeminence of the Ka'ba over the Temple of Jerusalem on the following three grounds: first, the Mecca sanctuary is forty years older; second, God forgave Adam at 'Arafa, in the vicinity of Mecca; and, third, beginning with Adam, all prophets made their pilgrimage to this city. This argumentation reflects precisely one major way in which Arabic history was geographically linked to biblical history, namely by associating the various stations of the pilgrimage to Mecca with various stages of biblical history, beginning with Adam and his wife, who became the first pilgrims to the Arabian sanctuary after their expulsion from the garden of paradise.²² Mount 'Arafa in particular was identified as the place in which God made the covenant with all their future descendants. In this way, the pilgrimage to Mecca came to be associated with "the fundamental monotheism that was inherent in humankind since its creation,"²³ and which Muḥammad came to restore to a world immersed in religious darkness. We shall see later on how these and related ideas are deployed in al-Qarāfi's exegesis, which includes many instances of 'Islamicization' and 'Arabicization' of biblical texts.

4 The Falsification of Previous Scriptures

Applied to scripture, the implication of Islam's being viewed as a religion of restoration is that the Qur'an is not simply the last in a cumulative series of

20 Rubin, "Islamic Retellings of Biblical History," 300–304; Wheeler, "Arab Prophets of the Qur'an and Bible," 31–41.

21 *Ajwiba* 286 (171–172).

22 On the traditions describing the pilgrimage of Adam, Moses, and other prophets to Mecca, see Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'an*, 38–44; idem, "Islamic Retellings of Biblical History," 300–302; and Jacob Lassner, "The Covenant of the Prophets: Muslim Texts, Jewish Subtexts," *AJS Review* 15 (1990), 215.

23 Rubin, "Islamic Retellings of Biblical History," 301.

prophetic revelations, each one adding to the preceding one. Rather, “[a]s God’s final act of revelation, the Qur’ān effectively abrogates all previous revelations or renders them otiose but does so by reclaiming, recovering, and restoring the primordial divine message.”²⁴ This perspective is reflected in the Qur’ān’s ambivalence towards the People of the Book and their scriptures. When in doubt about the revelations granted to him, Muḥammad is exhorted to ask “those who have been reading the scriptures before” (Q 10:94). Yet, he is warned that among the People of the Book there are some who “conceal the scripture that God sent down and sell it for a small price” (Q 2:174), who “twist the scripture with their tongues to make you think that what they say is part of the scripture when it is not” (Q 2:78), and who “shift words out of their contexts” (Q 4:46).²⁵

While this ambivalence, inherited from the Qur’ān, has been present since the beginning of Muslim interaction with the Bible, it is possible to trace, generally speaking, a gradual loss of interest in the biblical text familiar to Jews and Christians, except for polemical purposes. Unlike earlier Muslim scholars who used the Bible as a source of knowledge, particularly in the fields of history and qur’ānic exegesis, later scholars were more inclined to use fully Islamicized retellings of biblical stories than to quote the texts in possession of the Jews and the Christians of their time.²⁶ Concomitant with this shift is a hardening of the charge of *tahrīf*, with later authors making the case that the tampering referred to in the Qur’ān was a deliberate alteration of the text (*tahrīf al-laḥẓ*) instead of a misinterpretation of the meaning (*tahrīf al-ma’nā*), the possibility most often envisioned by early exegetes and polemicists.²⁷ The foremost exponent of this development is Ibn Ḥazm, who subjected the Bible to an unprecedented scrutiny in search of discrepancies, contradictions, and what he considered theological aberrations, such as anthropomorphic descriptions of God or the attribution of preposterous behavior to the prophets.²⁸ Yet, it

24 McAuliffe, “The Prediction and Prefiguration,” 109. See also, by the same author, “The Qur’ānic Context,” 143–144.

25 For a listing of the verses of the Qur’ān associated with the charge of *tahrīf*, see Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering*, 26–30.

26 Griffith, “Arguing from Scripture,” 31–33; idem, *The Bible in Arabic*, 198–202; McAuliffe, “A Centuries-Long Conversation,” 177–181.

27 The above-mentioned Ibn al-Layth, for instance, accuses Jews and Christians of distorting the interpretation of the words. See *Lettre du calife*, 74 (French), 175 (Arabic). On the distinction between these two understandings of *tahrīf*, see Reynolds’s cautionary note in “On the Qur’ānic Accusation,” 189.

28 See Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*; Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 237–248; Hanna E. Kassis, “Critique of Scriptures: Polemics of al-Jāhiz and Ibn Hazm against Christianity

should not be thought that Ibn Ḥazm single-handedly changed the trajectory of Muslim discourse on *tahrīf*. There were later polemicists like Ibn Taymiyya for whom the question of the textual corruption was ultimately secondary to that of misinterpretation.²⁹ There were also exegetes like Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Umar al-Biqā‘ī (d. 885/1480) who quoted extensively the Jewish and Christian scriptures to elucidate the meaning of certain verses in the Qur’ān, even if such practice, which was controversial in his time, remains “a radical departure from the customary medieval Islamic approach to the Bible.”³⁰ On the question of *tahrīf*, however, al-Qarāfī was much closer to Ibn Ḥazm than to Ibn Taymiyya or al-Biqā‘ī. As seen earlier, he thought that the textual alteration and defective transmission of the previous scriptures rendered them absolutely useless as a basis for religion, since one could no longer distinguish the text revealed to the prophet from the additions of later individuals not protected from error and sin.³¹

5 Whose Name Will Be Aḥmad

The mere fact that the Qur’ān states that Muḥammad is referred to in the Torah and in the Gospel was probably sufficient incentive, apart from explicit challenges from Christian and Jewish critics, for Muslims to search the Bible for references to their beloved prophet. In response to Moses’ plea for forgiveness of his people after the Golden Calf episode, *sūrat al-a‘rāf* (7):156–157 reports God as saying:

and Judaism,” in *Religious Apologetics—Philosophical Argumentation*, ed. Y. Schwartz and V. Krech (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 237–250; and Dominique Urvoy, “Le sens de la polémique anti-biblique chez Ibn Ḥazm,” in *Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba: The Life and Works of a Controversial Thinker*, ed. C. Adang, M. Fierro, and S. Schmidtke (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 485–496.

29 See Alfred Morabia, “Ibn Taymiyya, les Juifs et la Tora,” *Studia Islamica* 50 (1979), 82–85; Michel, *A Muslim Theologian’s Response*, 112–117.

30 Walid A. Saleh, “‘Sublime in its Style, Exquisite in its Tenderness’: The Hebrew Bible Quotations in al-Biqā‘ī’s Qur’ān Commentary,” in *Adaptations and Innovations*, 332. According to Saleh, al-Biqā‘ī understood the Bible to be “another Qur’ān, less authoritative, but all the same divine” (p. 338). See also, by the same author, “A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist: Al-Biqā‘ī and His Defense of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qur’ān,” *Speculum* 83 (2008): 629–654.

31 See above, chapter 4, sections 2.2 and 3.2.

I shall ordain My mercy for those who are conscious of God and pay the prescribed alms; who believe in Our Revelations; who follow the Messenger—the unlettered (*ummi*) prophet they find described (*maktūb*, lit. ‘written’) in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel.

Muslim exegetes have consistently seen in the above passage an indication of the biblical prediction of Muḥammad, the unlettered or gentile prophet, even if they disagreed on the precise meaning of the term *ummi*.³² Even more explicitly, *sūrat al-ṣaff* (61):6 has Jesus announcing a messenger to follow him whose name will be Aḥmad, literally ‘more praiseworthy,’ from the same lexical root as Muḥammad:

Jesus, son of Mary, said, ‘Children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Aḥmad.’

Together with Abraham’s and Ishmael’s supplication to God to make their descendants into a submissive community (*umma muslima*) and to raise up a messenger from among them to recite God’s revelations to them in *sūrat al-baqara* (2):127–129, these three passages constitute the main qur’ānic evidence for the biblical annunciation of Muḥammad.³³

It is precisely in connection with Q 61:6 that the early commentator, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), first identified Muḥammad with the promised Paraclete in the Gospel of John.³⁴ Although Muqātil was later maligned for his excessive reliance on the People of the Book for information, his identification of Muḥammad with the Paraclete was to have a lasting impact in Muslim literature, including the *Ajwiba*, as we shall see below. Yet, the popularity of this motif is likely to be due more to its inclusion in Ibn Ishāq’s (d. 150/767) celebrated biography of Muḥammad than to Muqātil’s exegetical efforts. Moreover, unlike Muqātil who did not cite the gospel text, Ibn Hishām’s

32 See “Illiteracy,” in *EQ*, s.v. (Sebastian Günther).

33 See the analysis of these three texts and their reception in classical exegetical tradition in McAuliffe, “The Qur’ānic Context,” 148–151, and idem, “The Prediction and Prefiguration,” 113–120. On Q 61:6, see also “Aḥmad, Name of the Prophet,” in *EI3*, s.v. (Uri Rubin). It has been argued (Gabriel S. Reynolds, “Remembering Muḥammad,” *Numen* 58 [2011]: 188–206) that in the Qur’ān both *muḥammad* and *aḥmad* are honorary epithets for its praise-worthy prophet, not the prophet’s historical names. This claim does not affect, however, the predictive function of Q 61:6.

34 See *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), 1:356.

(d. 218/833) recension of Ibn Ishāq's work included a corrected quote of Jn 15:23–16:1, a passage that has received much scholarly attention.³⁵

The segment on the Paraclete in Ibn Ishāq's biography of Muḥammad is followed by another interesting passage which identifies him as God's appointed climax of biblical prophetic history. Meant to serve as a commentary on *sūrat āl Imrān* (3):81 (given in italics below), the passage reads as follows:

When Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, reached the age of forty God sent him in compassion to mankind, as a bringer of good tidings to all men. Now God had made a covenant with every prophet whom He had sent before him that he should believe in Muḥammad, testify to his truth and help him against his adversaries. Moreover, God required of them that they should transmit this [i.e., the substance of the covenant] to everyone who believed in them and testified to their truth, and they carried out their obligations in that respect. [Concerning this] God said to Muḥammad: *When God made a covenant with the prophets (He said,) 'This is the scripture and wisdom which I have given you, afterwards a messenger will come confirming what you know that you may believe in him and help him.' He said, 'Do you accept this and take up my burden? i.e., the burden of my agreement which I have laid upon you.' They said, 'We accept it.' He answered: 'Then bear witness and I am a witness with you.'*³⁶

35 Ibn Ishāq, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, 1:262; Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, 104. See the analysis and bibliographical references in Griffith, "Arguing from Scripture," 36–45. See also the recent study of Jan M.F. van Reeth, "Who is the 'Other' Paraclete?," in *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom?: Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, ed. C.A. Segovia and B. Lourié (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2012), 423–452.

36 Ibn Ishāq, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, 1:263–264; trans. modified from Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, 104. Lassner ("The Covenant of the Prophets") offers an insightful analysis of this and the following passages recounting Muḥammad's first revelatory experiences, the comfort of his wife Khadija, and the confirmation of her learned cousin, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a Christian well versed in scripture. The entire section aims not only at providing Muḥammad with a biblical pedigree, but also at passing judgment on the Jews and the Christians of Ibn Ishāq's time who rejected his universal prophethood, thus opposing stubbornly their own prophets. The apparent 'anachronism' of the prophets having agreed to believe in Muḥammad is explained by 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the fourth caliph, as follows: "God did not send a prophet from Adam on, but that He made a covenant with him concerning Muḥammad, that if Muḥammad were to be sent while he lived, he must have faith in him and assist him. God also commanded every prophet to make this covenant with his own people" (quoted in Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, vol. 2, *The House of 'Imrān* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992], 240).

The text goes on to say that the ancient prophets complied with God's requirement, testifying to the truth of Muḥammad's mission and conveying this obligation to those who believed in them among the "people of these two books," i.e., the Torah and the Gospel.

Given this interpretation of the covenant exacted by God with the previous prophets and the qur'ānic evidence of Muḥammad's prediction in the Bible, in addition to the direct challenges from the People of the Book, it does not come as a surprise that Muslim writers compiled lists of biblical *testimonia* of their prophet. Besides the aforementioned letter of Ibn al-Layth on behalf of Hārūn al-Rashīd, the two earliest and arguably most influential collections are found in the *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* by 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī,³⁷ and in the no longer completely extant *A'lām al-nubūwa* by his younger contemporary, the Iraqi polymath, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889).³⁸ It should be added, however, that these two were not the only sources of biblical material for later Muslim authors, as shown by the existence of other lists of predictions of Muḥammad which draw on different biblical passages, as in

37 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla fī ithbāt nubūwat Muḥammad*, ed. 'Ādil Nuwayhid (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadida, 1973); trans. Alphonse Mingana, *The Book of Religion and Empire: A Semi-Official Defence and Exposition of Islam Written by Order at the Court and with the Assistance of the Caliph Mutawakkil (A.D. 847–861), by 'Alī Ṭabarī* (Manchester: University Press, 1922). See also Franz Taeschner, "Die alttestamentlichen Bibelzitate, vor allem aus dem Pentateuch, in aṭ-Ṭabarī's Kitāb ad-Dīn wad-Dawla und ihre Bedeutung für die Frage nach der Echtheit dieser Schrift," *Oriens Christianus* series 3, 9 (1934): 23–39; and Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 144–148. Interestingly, 'Alī l- Ṭabarī's earlier *Radd 'alā l-Naṣārā* does not contain biblical predictions of Muḥammad. The only reference to the Paraclete (ed. Khalifé and Kutsch, *Radd*, 125; Gaudeul, *Riposte*, 12) is used to prove that Jesus is not the eternal Creator, although Muḥammad's identification with the Paraclete may be implicit. All references hereafter to *al-Dīn wa-l-dawla* will be from Nuwayhid's edition and Mingana's translation.

38 On this text, see Sabine Schmidtke, "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials: Ibn Qutayba and his *A'lām al-nubuwwa*," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22 (2011): 249–274; Camilla Adang, "Some Hitherto Neglected Biblical Material in the Work of Ibn Ḥazm," *Al-Masāq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 5 (1992): 17–28; idem, *Muslim Writers*, 148–150, 267–277. On Ibn Qutayba's use of biblical material see, more generally, Albert Isteeero, "Abdullāh Muslim ibn Qutayba's Biblical Quotations and Their Source: An Inquiry into the Earliest Existing Arabic Bible Translations" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1990); and Said Karoui, "Die Rezeption der Bibel in der frühislamischen Literatur am Beispiel der Hauptwerke von Ibn Qutayba (gest. 276/889)" (PhD diss., Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, Heidelberg: Seminar für Sprachen, 1997). All references hereafter to Ibn Qutayba's *A'lām al-nubūwa* will be from Schmidtke's critical edition and Adang's translation in *Muslim Writers*, 267–277.

‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Māwardī’s (d. 450/1058) *ʿĀlām al-nubūwa*,³⁹ and in Quṭb al-Dīn Saʿīd ibn Hibat Allāh al-Rāwandī’s (d. 573/1178) *al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾih*.⁴⁰

6 Solutions to a Paradox

Of course, as long as the charge of *tahrīf* was understood as referring mainly to the interpretation of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, invoking biblical passages as predictions of Muḥammad was not problematic as such. On the contrary, it was an occasion for Muslims to explain the real meaning of these texts. This practice was more questionable, however, in the case of those who upheld the textual corruption of those scriptures and their utter unreliability. It is noteworthy in this regard that while Ibn Ḥazm adduces several biblical testimonies of Muḥammad in his *al-Uṣūl wa-l-furūʿ*, the number of such predictions is significantly reduced in the parallel section of his more important *Kitāb al-fiṣal*, a book which otherwise expands considerably the subjects discussed in *al-Uṣūl wa-l-furūʿ*.⁴¹ Adang thinks that this oddity could be explained by Ibn Ḥazm’s expressed concern that his coreligionists in al-Andalus were showing excessive respect for the extant Jewish and Christian scriptures, which they considered to be genuine revealed books, not subject to corruption or alteration.⁴² We may conjecture that Ibn Ḥazm was also trying not to undermine his own position on the issue of *tahrīf*, even if he argues that these passages

39 Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1986, 118–130 (no editor given). Among the biblical predictions of Muḥammad, al-Māwardī includes texts from Joel and Obadiah, not quoted by ‘Alī l-Ṭabarī or Ibn Qutayba. To my knowledge, his identification of Muḥammad with Zarubbabel is also unique. On this work of al-Māwardī, see Giuseppe Palummieri, “Le prove della veridicità della profezia secondo il teologo Al-Mawardi: L’autore, l’opera e il suo approccio teologico” (PhD diss., Université de Province Aix Marseille 1; Università degli Studi di Napoli ‘L’Orientale’, 2011), 151–154.

40 Ed. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Muwahḥid al-Abtaḥī (Qum: Mu’assasat al-Imām al-Mahdī, 1989), 173–82.

41 Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Uṣūl wa-l-furūʿ*, ed. Muḥammad ʿĀṭif al-ʿIrāqī et al. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Diniyya, 2004), 153–159. A partial English translation is provided in Adang, “Some Hitherto Neglected Biblical Material,” 19–21. The biblical predictions of Muḥammad in the *Fiṣal* (1:194–196; trans. *Abenházam*, 2:229–231) include Deut 18:18, Deut 33:2, a paraphrase of Dan 2:31–45, and a prayer attributed to Jesus “in the Gospel” asking God to send the Paraclete to teach the people that the Son of Man is a human being. On the dating and the relation between these two works of Ibn Ḥazm, see Ljamai, *Ibn Ḥazm*, 45–57.

42 Adang, “Some Hitherto Neglected Biblical Material,” 18. See also her discussion in *Muslim Writers*, 159–162. For Ibn Ḥazm’s concern, see *al-Fiṣal*, 1:317–318; trans. *Abenházam*, 2:377.

predicting Muḥammad's advent had been miraculously preserved by God so that they might serve as proof against the People of the Book.⁴³

Al-Qurṭubī, for his part, deftly avoids having to pronounce on the textual authenticity of these passages by declaring that he mentions them only as a compelling argument against the Christians and the Jews, who do believe that their scriptures are authentic and reliably transmitted, and hence expose their stubbornness and silence them. Thus, he is careful to add that he will quote these scriptures "as they have them and as translated [into Arabic] by their translators, without addition or subtraction."⁴⁴ In a similar vein, al-Ja'farī declares that Muslims are not allowed to study the Jewish and Christian scriptures as if they deserved reverence, especially not the inexperienced person who could be easily misled. However, examining these books with the aim of exposing the corrupt doctrines of the Christians and the Jews and uncovering the predictions of Muḥammad which lie hidden in them is a great act of devotion that brings the believer closer to God.⁴⁵ As for al-Qarāfi, although a passing remark (quoted later) indicates that he shared Ibn Ḥazm's providentialist solution that these passages have been preserved from distortion, the conclusion of chapter four shows that the question of textual authenticity was ultimately unimportant, since the Muslims themselves could perfectly dispense with these texts. As al-Qurṭubī and al-Ja'farī, al-Qarāfi was only interested in using the Bible as a polemical weapon against those who revered it, to force them to accept the veracity of Muḥammad's mission as Muslims understood it:

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 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

43 Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, 1:314–315; trans. *Abenházam*, 2:372–373.

44 *Ithbāt*, 32.

45 *Takhjīl*, 104–105. See above, chapter 2, section 6.

indications of Muḥammad contained therein, whose abundance is such that it leads to certitude?⁴⁶

Here we are far from the attitude of earlier Muslim scholars (and later exceptions like al-Biqā'ī) who turned to the Bible as a source of Islamic religious knowledge.

7 Imagine a Pagan Arriving in Our Land

One may well think that a factor contributing to the hardening of the charge of *taḥrīf* and the gradual loss of Muslim interest in the Bible except for polemical purposes was the impact of Christian anti-Muslim polemic. The *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya* contains a telling example of Christian attitudes toward the Qur'ān and the recorded traditions of Muḥammad that must have had a negative effect on Muslim readers, promoting in turn indifference towards the Christian scriptures. The section in question deserves our consideration because the *I'lām*, as will be recalled, was a direct source of al-Qarāfī.

After having attempted to prove rationally the triune nature of God and the possibility of the Incarnation, the last section of the *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya* seeks to demonstrate “from the words of the prophets” that the foretold Messiah had indeed come.⁴⁷ The argument is introduced with an imagined scenario in which a pagan arrives in a land inhabited by Jews, Christians, and Muslims.⁴⁸ Determined to relinquish paganism and wishing to ascertain the

46 *Ajwiba*, 774–775 (463).

47 *I'lām*, 163–165, 177, 181–185, 215–217. On this section see Burman, *Religious Polemic*, 73–75, and Tieszen, *Christian Identity amid Islam*, 209–211.

48 A similar story is told by Abū Qurra about a man growing up on a mountain who one day went down to the cities, where he discovered the diversity of religions and their competing truth claims (see George H. Khoury, “Theodore Abu Qurrah (c. 750–820): Translation and Critical Analysis of His ‘Treatise on the Existence of the Creator and on the True Religion,’” PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley 1990, 123–139). Also ‘Alī l-Ṭabarī envisions the scenario of “a man coming to this country from the regions of India and China with the intention of being rightly guided, of inquiring into the religions found in it, and of acquainting himself with the customs of its inhabitants” (see *al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, 207–208; *Religion and Empire*, 165–167). On the Jewish side, the Spanish physician, poet, and philosopher Judah Halevi (d. 1114) relates in the *Kuzari* the tale of a Khazar king who converts to Judaism after conferring with an Aristotelian philosopher, a Christian scholar, a Muslim scholar, and a Jewish scholar about their respective beliefs (see abridged trans. by Isaak Heinemann in “Kuzari: A Book of Proof and Argument:

superior religion, the pagan would be puzzled to find that each group equally claims to follow the true religion and that their belief has been established by signs and rational proofs. The Christian and the Muslim would concede to the Jew that his religion was first and his prophets are true. However, the Christian would claim that his scripture came afterwards and abrogated the observance of the Jewish religion. The Muslim in turn would claim that his scripture came afterwards abrogating the two previous religions. However, the pagan would also find that both the Jew and the Christian allege that no book came from God after their own respective scriptures. That being the case, the author of the *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya* concludes that to convince the pagan visitor, the Christian would have to produce evidence from the books admitted by the Jew showing that the awaited Messiah has come and hence the Jew has forfeited God's favor by refusing to recognize him. In the same way, the Muslim would have to bring forth evidence pointing to Muḥammad in the books admitted by the Christian, in which case the Christian would have forfeited God's favor by refusing to recognize him.

As one would expect, the Christian author proceeds to carry through the program he has just outlined by quoting several biblical passages traditionally invoked in anti-Jewish polemic as proof texts for Jesus' messiahship and the emergence of the church of the Apostles (*al-ḥawāriyyūn*) as the people of the new covenant announced by Jeremiah. He first makes the (disingenuous?) point that the dispute between Jews and Christians solely concerns the interpretation of these texts and not their wordings or readings.⁴⁹ Interestingly, most of the passages adduced are first quoted in Hebrew (in Arabic script) and then translated into Arabic. The author also includes an Aramaic quote (in Arabic script and then translated into Arabic) of Gen 49:10 from Targum Onqelos, the oldest complete Jewish Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch.⁵⁰

An Apology for a Despised Religion," in *Three Jewish Philosophers*, ed. H. Lewy, A. Altmann, and I. Heinemann [New York: Atheneum, 1969], 27–129).

- 49 *I'lām*, 177. On the charge of malicious false emendation of the scripture raised by some Christians against the Jews in both patristic and medieval times, see the informative study of Irven M. Resnick, "The Falsification of Scripture and Medieval Christian and Jewish Polemics," *Medieval Encounters* 2 (1996): 344–380; and William Adler, "The Jews as Falsifiers: Charges of Tendentious Emendation in Anti-Jewish Christian Polemic," in *Translation of Scripture: Proceedings of a Conference at the Annenberg Research Institute, May 15–16, 1989*, ed. D. Goldenberg (Philadelphia, PA: Annenberg Research Institute, 1990), 1–27.
- 50 On the passages put forward by the Toledo author (Hos 3:4; Gen 49:10; Jer 15:1–2; Lam 2:3; Jer 31:31–32; Jer 31:14–16; Prov 30:3–5; and Jer 31:27), see Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, "Siete citas hebreas, más una aramea, transcritas al árabe en el *I'lām* del Imām al-Qurṭubī,"

He concludes his list of proof texts by quoting 1 Jn 1:9: "Everyone who does abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God," after which he addresses his Muslim readers as follows:

Know that I have written down for you in Hebrew and Aramaic some testimonies from the prophets, speaking on the authority of God, taken from the books which the Jews have. The Jews are not able to deny a word of them when I advance them in Hebrew and Aramaic, just as the prophets pronounced them, as proofs establishing the coming of the Messiah and the faith of the Apostles and their followers, and the rejection of the accursed Jews, the deniers of our Lord.⁵¹

Having thus proved, to his own satisfaction, Christianity's supersession of Judaism on the basis of the Jewish scriptures, the author of the *Tathlith al-wahdāniyya* challenges the Muslims to substantiate their own claims on the basis of the Torah and the Gospel, which *sūrat āl Imrān* (3):4 declares to be "a guide for people." After quoting an Islamic legal maxim stating that the burden of the proof is on the claimant,⁵² he warns however that Christians would not accept as evidence sayings and reports from authoritative *ḥadīth* collections such as that of Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 261/874) because of their offensive character. He then quotes two traditions according to which Muḥammad did not allow a woman to come back to her first husband unless she first consummated her second marriage and then obtained a divorce. For the Christian author, this could not more blatantly contradict the teachings of Jesus, who declared that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.⁵³ Islamic law instead obliges her to commit adultery before her legitimate

Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos, Sección Árabe-Islam 48 (1999): 393–403. Note, however, that Monferrer Sala has apparently overlooked in his analysis the two citations from Proverbs and Jer 31:27. Compare the quote from Targum Onkelos in *I'lām*, 182 with Alexander Sperber, ed., *The Bible in Aramaic Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Text*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch according to Targum Onkelos* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 85. On Gen 49:10, which was an early proof text adduced by Christians as a prophecy about Jesus and the emergence of the Church for the salvation of all nations, see Grypeou and Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity*, 398–412.

51 *I'lām*, 185.

52 "The burden of the proof is on the claimant, whereas the oath is on him who denies [the claim]" (*I'lām*, 215). On this maxim, which is based on a prophetic *ḥadīth*, see Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari'ah Law: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 182.

53 See Mt 5:32.

husband can take her back, thus encouraging the “sin of the goat,” a metaphor for carnal lust.⁵⁴ Aware that his words are likely to offend Muslim veneration for their prophet, he justifies himself by quoting *sūrat al-zukhruf* (43):41, “there is no cause to act against anyone who defends himself after being wronged,” and pointing out that his Muslim correspondent has been the first to speak defamatorily about “our religion” and to lie about “our Messiah,” daring to blaspheme against he who will judge him on the Day of Resurrection. He warns that if the Muslim persists in sending abuse, he will publicize in every city what he knows about their law and their doctrines. Then, effectively foreclosing any Muslim attempt to prove their claims from the Jewish scriptures, he reminds his correspondent that, on God’s command, Ishmael was excluded from Abraham’s inheritance and cast out with his mother, the slave woman, in the wilderness,⁵⁵ and that Ishmael is the ancestor of the nation which the Qur’ān describes as “the most stubborn of all people in their disbelief and hypocrisy.”⁵⁶ He then ends with an exhortation to believe in the *sharī’a* of Christ which is the true faith.

It was important to delve into this section of the *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya* for two reasons. First, it illustrates the fact that medieval Christian-Muslim polemics was usually carried out in forceful terms on both sides of the aisle, and that Paul of Antioch’s politeness was more the exception than the rule. Second, and more important, it explains to a large extent al-Qarāfi’s decision to devote a chapter of the *Ajwiba* to the biblical prediction of Muḥammad, even though the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* did not raise such a challenge.

8 Structure and Sources of Chapter Four

All biblical passages quoted in the *Ajwiba* as predictions of Muḥammad are culled without acknowledgment from the *Takhjīl*, although al-Qarāfi

54 *I’lām*, 216.

55 The Christian author quotes Gen 21:9–14, but strategically leaving out God’s promise to Abraham to make a nation of Ishmael, “because he is your offspring” (v. 13), which is precisely one of al-Qarāfi’s key biblical proof texts predicting the Islamic *umma*, as will be seen below.

56 In its original context this verse refers to the Bedouin tribes who resisted the message of Muḥammad: “The desert Arabs (*al-A’rāb*) are the most stubborn of all people in their disbelief and hypocrisy. They are the least likely to recognize the limits that God has sent down to His Messenger” (Q 9:97–98). We shall see below that al-Qarāfi finds several biblical passages that exalt the Arabs as the ancient and mighty nation chosen by God for the manifestation of his final revelation.

occasionally shortens the texts or even gives an abbreviated paraphrase of them.⁵⁷ The published editions of the *Ajwiba* are unanimous in listing fifty-one such predictions. This is somewhat odd considering that al-Qarāfi refers thrice to “fifty,” first in the chapter’s introduction and then in its closing lines, immediately after quoting his last proof text.⁵⁸ This discrepancy might be explained if we assume that what was originally one single prediction was later split into two.⁵⁹ It is also possible that an extra prediction was added during a revision of the work, just as the last seven questions of chapter three appear to be a later addition, as noted above.⁶⁰

A comparison of the *Ajwiba* and the *Takhjil* reveals that al-Qarāfi has not only made a selection among al-Ja‘farī’s larger collection of *testimonia* (eighty-four in Qadaḥ’s edition), but also rearranged the order of their presentation. In effect, while the chapter does not contain any explicit subdivision, al-Qarāfi inserts two summary notes that divide it into three sections, as it were. The first note comes after the seventh prediction, stating that the texts quoted thus far are from the Torah.⁶¹ The second, longer note is placed after the eighteenth prediction, stating that the preceding texts—eleven from the Gospel and seven from the Torah—are “the remnant that was preserved from corruption and alteration at the hands of the enemies” and that, had it not been for this manipulation, the prediction of Muḥammad in the previous scriptures was something well-known and manifest, as attested in *sūrat al-baqara* (2):146 (“Those We gave the Scripture know it as well as they know their own sons, but some of them hide the truth that they know”) and confirmed by the Jewish and Christian scholars who converted to Islam.⁶² Having thus presented the proof texts from the Torah and the Gospel in the first two sections, the rest of

57 See the table of correspondences in Appendix D.

58 *Ajwiba*, 692 (417) and 774 (463). The last passage has been translated in section 6 of this chapter.

59 In fact, al-Qarāfi’s twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth predictions are listed in the *Takhjil* as one single annunciation of Muḥammad and the pilgrimage of the nations to Mecca. Compare *Ajwiba*, 731–734 (438–439) with *Takhjil*, 665–667.

60 See above, chapter 5, section 2.

61 *Ajwiba*, 700 (423).

62 *Ajwiba*, 724 (433). Al-Qarāfi does not provide any example of this, but Muslim tradition has kept the memory of several early converts who attested to the foretelling of Muḥammad in the previous scriptures and the deliberate attempts to conceal it. See Brannon M. Wheeler, “This Is the Torah That God Sent Down to Moses’: Some Early Islamic Views of the Qur’ān and Other Revealed Books,” *Graeco-Arabica* 7–8 (1999–2000), 583–584.

the chapter is taken up by predictions derived from the Psalms,⁶³ the Prophets (mostly Isaiah, but also Hosea, Micah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Daniel),⁶⁴ and, on one occasion, from the First Letter of John.

If the *Takhjil* constitutes the immediate source of al-Qarāfi's biblical announcements of Muḥammad, the question may still be asked about the more distant origin of this material. Part of the answer is the aforementioned *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* of 'Alī l-Ṭabarī, as a comparison of the texts rapidly reveals, even if 'Alī l-Ṭabarī's usually longer quotations have been sometimes shortened and/or slightly modified either by al-Ja'fari or by a previous transmitter.⁶⁵ In other cases, the passages quoted in the *Ajwiba* appear to derive ultimately, also with some modifications, from Ibn Qutayba's *A'lām al-nubūwa*.⁶⁶ These were not, however, the sole two sources tapped by al-Ja'fari, as the *Ajwiba* also quotes biblical texts in different Arabic translations from their parallels in both 'Alī l-Ṭabarī and Ibn Qutayba,⁶⁷ or even absent from their collections of *testimonia*.⁶⁸ On at least one occasion, the source appears to be al-Qurṭubī's *I'lām*.⁶⁹ After this brief examination of the structure and sources of chapter four of the *Ajwiba*, I now turn my attention to the biblical texts themselves and al-Qarāfi's exegesis of them.

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- 63 Including a passage from Isaiah wrongly attributed to David [no. 22]. The origin of this confusion is 'Alī l-Ṭabarī, who included Isa 42:11–13 in his chapter on the prophecies of David about Muḥammad, describing it as “a psalm attributed to Isaiah.” Mingana explains (*Religion and Empire*, 92, n. 1) that these Isaiah verses, together with Exod 15:1–21 and Deut 32:1–43, are incorporated with the Psalter in the Nestorian breviary.
- 64 One of the predictions attributed to Daniel [no. 48] is in fact from Habakkuk. The likely explanation for this mistake lies in Ibn Qutayba's remark that the latter “prophesied in the days of Daniel” (*A'lām al-nubūwa*, 254; *Muslim Writers*, 269). On Daniel's inclusion among the prophets of Israel in the Islamic tradition, see Hartmut Bobzin, “Bemerkungen zu Daniel in der islamischen Tradition,” in *Die Geschichte der Daniel-Auslegung in Judentum, Christentum und Islam: Studien zur Kommentierung des Danielbuches in Literatur und Kunst*, ed. K. Bracht and D.S. du Toit (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 167–178.
- 65 Compare, for instance, *Ajwiba*, 698 (422) [no. 6] and *Takhjil*, 654 [no. 3] with *al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, 132, or *Ajwiba*, 725–726 (434–345) [no. 20] and *Takhjil*, 661 [no. 10] with *al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, 139.
- 66 Compare, for instance, *Ajwiba*, 741–742 (444–445) [no. 30] and *Takhjil*, 669–670 [no. 22] with *A'lām al-nubūwa*, 255 [nos. 8 and 11], or *Ajwiba*, 748–749 (448–449) [no. 34] and *Takhjil*, 674 [no. 28] with *A'lām al-nubūwa*, 257 [no. 27].
- 67 Compare, for instance, *Ajwiba*, 698–699 (422) [no. 7] and *Takhjil*, 654 [no. 4] with *al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, 138, and with *A'lām al-nubūwa*, 254 [no. 3] and 257 [no. 23].
- 68 Such as, for instance, nos. 13–17, which are all predictions taken from the Gospels.
- 69 Compare *Ajwiba*, 724–725 (433) [no. 19] and *Takhjil*, 659 [no. 8] with *Ithbāt*, 35. The Arabic translation of this psalm is the same found in al-Māwardī, *A'lām al-nubūwa*, 126.

9 Exegetical Themes

Rather than examining these texts for the information they may provide for the history of the Arabic translation of the Bible,⁷⁰ my principal concern in this section is to identify the main exegetical themes that al-Qarāfi derives from his reading of them. It will be seen that the prediction of Muḥammad in the Bible, as discerned by al-Qarāfi, comprises much more than just the annunciation of a prophet who is to come. It also includes explicit mentions of his name, his physical and moral description, references to his homeland, leadership and victories in war, and other details that unmistakably point to the prophet of Islam and to the community of his followers. Focusing on exegetical themes rather than on interpretations of individual passages affords us better insight into al-Qarāfi's understanding of Islam's place in religious history and its relation to other religions. It should be noted in advance that there is considerable overlap across these themes, which explains why some passages are referred to under more than one heading in this analysis. While Paul of Antioch did not request Muslims to prove that Muḥammad had been foretold in the Bible, we shall see that al-Qarāfi found biblical support for his own position on what were arguably the main theological challenges raised by the Christian apologist, namely the questions of the scope and finality of Muḥammad's prophethood. Finally, on a different level, al-Qarāfi's handling of biblical material in this chapter of the *Ajwiba* confirms that his familiarity with the Bible was minimal and that he relied exclusively on the material transmitted by previous Muslim writers.

9.1 *Prediction of the Islamic umma*

Adhering to a well-established view among Muslim apologists, al-Qarāfi sees in the Islamic *umma* the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham to make of Ishmael a great nation, on the grounds that it is common knowledge that no prophet appeared among the descendants of Ishmael except Muḥammad.⁷¹

70 A recent survey of the field can be found in Ronny Vollandt, "Some Historiographical Remarks on Medieval and Early-Modern Scholarship of Biblical Versions in Arabic: A *Status Quo*," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 1 (2013): 25–42.

71 *Ajwiba*, 692–693 (417–418) [no. 1] and *Ajwiba*, 698 (422) [no. 6], referring to Gen 17:18–21 and Gen 21:13 respectively. On the popularity of Gen 17:20 ("As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation," NRSV) among Muslim writers, see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 107–108. On how this biblical passage came to be seen as the annunciation of an *ummi* prophet, see Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, 23–24. For Shīʿī use of it as biblical basis for the doctrine of the twelve imams, see Etan Kohlberg,

He sees a reference to the same promise in the opening verses of Isaiah 54, where the barren one is comforted with the news of an offspring more numerous than the children of her who is married. The barren one stands for Hagar, Ishmael's mother, who is told that her seed will be greater than Sarah's seed, and that her descendants will possess the earth and rule over the nations. Since such a thing only took place with the spread of Muḥammad's *umma*, explains al-Qarāfi, it follows that they are the promised nation.⁷² Similarly, God's promise in Isa 43:20–21 to give water to his chosen people in the wilderness is seen as a metaphorical allusion to the choosing of the Arabs and the quenching of the thirst of error with the water of prophetic guidance.⁷³ Most important from the viewpoint of al-Qarāfi's theology of religions is his joining the election of the Arabs with the unfaithfulness of the previous recipients of revelation. Hosea 11:12 predicts the advent of "God's nation, the holy and faithful nation" after the lies and treachery of the Children of Israel and Judah. This nation cannot be the Christians, explains al-Qarāfi, because they are included in the Children of Israel. It follows, therefore, that the Islamic *umma* is the one meant.⁷⁴ Similarly, God declared through Jeremiah that he will incite against the Children of Israel "a mighty nation, an ancient nation, a nation whose language is not understood, and whose men are skilled in warfare and mighty" (Jer 5:15–16).⁷⁵ Also Jesus, the last prophet sent to the Children of Israel, announced that God's kingdom will be taken away from them and given to another nation who will destroy whoever opposes them. The "stone" that crushes anyone on whom it falls in Mt 21:44 cannot refer to Jesus himself, who was unable to defeat his enemies, according to the Christians and the Jews.⁷⁶

Al-Qarāfi also finds an allusion to Muḥammad's companions in the "myriads of pure ones" mentioned in Deut 33:2 in connection with God's manifestation from Mount Paran (associated with Mecca, as we shall see below).⁷⁷ He further sees a reference to the "ten companions" to whom Muḥammad is said

"From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿashariyya," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39 (1976), 526–527.

72 *Ajwiba*, 741 (444) [no. 29]. Isa 54:1 is quoted again, in a different Arabic translation, in *Ajwiba*, 748–749 (448–449), where the "barren one" is taken to refer not to Hagar but to Mecca, which, unlike Jerusalem, had never given birth to a prophet before Muḥammad. On the interpretation of these Isaiah verses, see also Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 86–87.

73 *Ajwiba*, 751–752 (450–451) [no. 38].

74 *Ajwiba*, 753 (451) [no. 40].

75 *Ajwiba*, 772–773 (461–462) [no. 50].

76 *Ajwiba*, 723 (433) [no. 18].

77 *Ajwiba*, 701 (656).

to have promised paradise in the “ten horns” of the fourth beast in Daniel’s vision.⁷⁸ While this specific interpretation may seem far-fetched, al-Qarāfi’s general identification of the fourth beast with the Arabs had been first proposed by Christians and Jews at the time of the early Islamic conquests, which forced them to revise previous interpretations of Daniel’s vision that identified the fourth beast with the Byzantine Empire.⁷⁹

9.2 *Prediction of Muḥammad*

Most of the biblical prophecies listed in the *Ajwiba* focus not on the nation that God promised to make of Ishmael but on Muḥammad himself in his role as prophet and statesman. For instance, Jacob’s deathbed blessing to Judah in Gen 49:10, rendered into Arabic as: “An empowered ruler shall not be wanting from the tribe of Judah, nor a sent prophet from his thighs, until he comes to whom everybody belongs,” is taken as a prediction of Muḥammad on the grounds that no prophet came afterwards who was sent to all peoples except him.⁸⁰ As can be seen, al-Qarāfi’s inference is based on the assumed premise that Muḥammad was the only prophet sent with a universal mandate, another important exegetical theme running through the entire chapter (to which I will come back below). Also popular among Muslim writers was the passage in Deuteronomy where Moses announces to his people that “God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers,” a promise immediately corroborated by God. Al-Qarāfi takes the phrase “from among your brothers” (Deut 18:15; see also 18:18) as an allusion to the descendants of Ishmael, Isaac’s brother, and hence a prediction of Muḥammad, the only prophet to emerge

78 *Ajwiba*, 766 (458), referring to Dan 7:7.

79 See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 527, 534–535. On Jewish willingness to admit that Islam was referred to in the Book of Daniel as the last of the four kingdoms that subjugated Israel, while refusing Muḥammad’s claim to prophethood, see also Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 151–152, and Wout Jac. van Bakkum, “Four Kingdoms Will Rule: Echoes of Apocalypticism and Political Reality in Late Antiquity and Medieval Judaism,” in *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. W. Brandes and F. Schmieder (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 101–118, especially 108–115.

80 *Ajwiba*, 694 (419) [no. 2]. However, in an earlier passage, al-Qarāfi quotes Gen 49:10 as a prediction of the Messiah (*Ajwiba*, 364–365 [225–226]). As with the case of Isa 54:1 mentioned above, these contradictions are explained by the fact that al-Qarāfi was drawing his biblical material from sources that used different Arabic translations. On the Christological interpretation of Gen 49:10 see above chapter 4, section 1.2. See also Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 98–100.

from them.⁸¹ Another widespread annunciation of Muḥammad, also listed in the *Ajwiba*, was found in the opening line of the blessing with which Moses blessed the Israelites before his death: “God came from Sinai, and revealed himself from Seir; he appeared from Mount Paran with myriads of holy ones at his right hand” (Deut 33:2).⁸² Al-Qarāfi explains that this passage foretells God’s successive revelations through Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad:

Sinai was the mountain from which God spoke to Moses; Seir is Mount Hebron in *al-Shām*, where the Messiah worshiped and conversed with his Lord; and Paran, the mountain of Banū Hishām, where Muḥammad sought religious purification and worshipped God. God’s coming from Sinai is the coming of His prophetic message. God’s revelation from Seir is the manifestation of His favor through the sending of Jesus, reviving what was in the Torah. God’s appearance from Mount Paran—Paran being Mecca as agreed by the People of the Book: according to them Ishmael and Hagar lived in the wilderness of Paran and [it is known that] they lived in Mecca—was the manifestation of Muḥammad’s prophetic message to all the creatures.⁸³

According to al-Qarāfi, Ps 2:7–9 can only refer to Muḥammad, for there is no one else “who inherited the nations and whose power reached the ends of the earth, who encircled the nations and humiliated them with the sword.”⁸⁴ As for Muḥammad being called “son” in Ps 2:7, this was following the ancient

81 *Ajwiba*, 694–697 (419–421) [nos. 3 and 4]. On this passage from Deuteronomy, see also Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 104–106.

82 As quoted in *Ajwiba*, 699 (422) [no. 7].

83 *Ajwiba*, 699–700 (422–423) [no. 7]. The Qur’ān refers to Abraham and Ishmael in Mecca in several places: 2:125–129, 3:96–97, 14:37, and 22:26. In the Hebrew Bible it is said that Ishmael “lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt” (Gen 21:21, NRSV). Jewish and Christian elaborations on the story of Hagar and Ishmael had developed Arabian associations long before Islam, making it is easy to see how the wilderness of Paran came to be identified with Mecca and its surroundings. See Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 63–71, especially 65. On the use of Deut 33:2 by Muslim apologists, see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 109. *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, a mid-8th century midrashic work, contains what appears to be an early Jewish response to the Muslim interpretation of Deut 33:2. See Carol Bakhos, *Ishmael on the Border: Rabbinic Portrayals of the First Arab* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 123.

84 *Ajwiba*, 729 (437) [no. 23].

custom of naming the person obedient to God and the prophet “son,” as when God said: “Israel is my firstborn son” (Exod 4:22). Similarly, al-Qarāfi argues that the man that God remembered, invested with authority, and granted dominion over all the creatures in Ps 8:4–6 cannot be other than Muḥammad.⁸⁵

As was to be expected, al-Qarāfi does not fail to mention one of the oldest and most popular biblical predictions of Muḥammad, namely the oracle of the two riders in Isa 21:6–9, whom Muslim authors readily identified with Jesus and Muḥammad. The Arabic version quoted in the *Ajwiba* reads: “I was told, Stand guard as a watchman and watch. What do you see? I said, I see two riders approaching, one of them on an ass, and the other on a camel. One of the two said to the other, Fallen is Babylon and its graven idols.”⁸⁶ For al-Qarāfi, there can be no doubt that the rider of the camel is Muḥammad, as he explains:

Muḥammad’s fame as a rider of camels is indeed greater than the Messiah’s fame as a rider of asses. The Messiah travelled much on his feet. In the Gospel it is only said that he entered the city mounted on an ass, and the children around him said: ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ Moreover, it is Muḥammad who made the idols of Babylon and of other places fall.⁸⁷

85 *Ajwiba*, 730 (437) [no. 24]. To my knowledge, al-Jaʿfarī (*Takhjīl*, 665) is the first to see in Psalm 8 a prediction of Muḥammad. The Arabic translation he quotes is the same as found in ʿAlī l-Ṭabarī’s *Radd ʿalā l-Naṣārā* (ed. Khalifé and Kutsch, 146; Gaudeul, *Riposte*, 58 [no. 184]), where this psalm is taken to refer to the Messiah, confirming that he was a human being, lower than the angels, and subjected to God’s commands.

86 *Ajwiba*, 731 (438) [no. 25]; translation adapted from Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 272. The Arabic text quoted by al-Jaʿfarī (*Takhjīl*, 665) is the same given by al-Qurṭubī (*Ithbāt*, 44) and is ultimately based on Ibn Qutayba’s version (*ʿĀlām al-nubūwa*, 256 [no. 17]).

87 *Ajwiba*, 731–732 (438). For an in depth study of the traditions on the rider of the camel and the rider of the ass, see Suliman Bashear, “Riding Beasts on Divine Missions: An Examination of the Ass and Camel Traditions,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 36 (1991): 37–75. See also John C. Reeves, “The Muslim Appropriation of a Biblical Text: The Messianic Dimensions of Isaiah 21:6–7,” in *Shaping the Middle East: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in an Age of Transition, 400–800 C.E.*, ed. K.G. Holum and H. Lapin (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2011), 211–222. Reeves emphasizes that the messianic reading of Isa 21:6–7 was “an original Muslim reading of this biblical text, one that was primarily directed towards a Christian audience” (p. 218) and that Jewish and Christian writers who give consideration to the potential messianic force of this text are reacting to its appropriation by Muslims, as in Timothy’s dialogue with al-Mahdī (Newman, *Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 195).

Two further predictions of Muḥammad in the Hebrew Bible according to al-Qarāfi are the stone that struck the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream and then became a great mountain and filled the earth, and which Daniel interpreted as a kingdom set up by God that will crush all other kingdoms, while it itself will stand forever,⁸⁸ and the "bird from the far and remote desert" that God will call upon to carry out his purpose in Isa 46:11. In connection with the latter, al-Qarāfi explains that Muḥammad is called "bird" because of the quick spread of his dominion and guidance to distant lands.⁸⁹

As for the prediction of Muḥammad in the Gospel, in addition to the Paraclete passages which I treat below as a theme on its own, al-Qarāfi mentions Jesus' saying about Elijah in Mt 17:10–12,⁹⁰ and his announcement of the coming of "the ruler of the world" in Jn 14:30.⁹¹ Also John the Baptist's statement that "one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals" (Lk 3:16) is taken to announce Muḥammad, not Jesus, on the grounds that the latter, "who was John's maternal cousin, lived in his own time, not after him."⁹²

9.3 *The Promised Paraclete*

No fewer than five annunciations identify Muḥammad with the Paraclete promised in chapters 14, 15, and 16 of the Gospel of John, in which al-Qarāfi sees many indications pointing unmistakably to the prophet of Islam. Interestingly, Jesus' references to God as "my Father" or "the Father" in these passages have been retained, unlike in Ibn Ishāq's *sīra*, where they have been replaced with the less controversial "the Lord."⁹³ Al-Qarāfi does not offer any explanation,

88 *Ajwiba*, 763 (457) [no. 46], referring to Dan 2:31–45.

89 *Ajwiba*, 774 (462) [no. 51]. In their original context, these verses refer to Cyrus the Great, who conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. and ended the Babylonian exile. He is described as the anointed of the Lord in Isa 45:1–3.

90 *Ajwiba*, 716–717 (430–431) [no. 15]. In Matthew's Gospel, this passage concerns the correct interpretation of Malachi 4:5 ("Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes," NRSV). The evangelist's point is that this prophecy had been fulfilled in John the Baptist. See also Mt 11:14.

91 *Ajwiba*, 719–720 (431) [no. 16]. In John's Gospel, this verse is Jesus' warning that the ruler of this world, i.e., Satan (see also Jn 12:31; 16:11), is coming but has no power over him. Many a Christian polemicist would have seen a great irony in the fact that Jesus' words in reference to Satan were taken as a prediction of Muḥammad!

92 *Ajwiba*, 721 (432) [no. 17]. See also Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 92.

93 See Griffith, "Arguing from Scripture," 38. What appears to have troubled al-Ja'farī, however, is Jesus' reference to the Father's sending the Paraclete "in my name," which has been left out from his citation of Jn 14:26 (*Takhjīl*, 701; *Ajwiba*, 701 [423]). 'Alī l-Ṭabarī had

but we have already seen that he refers elsewhere in the chapter to the custom of naming the person obedient to God and the prophet “son,” which would presumably also explain Jesus’ usage. As for the word Paraclete (*fāraqliṭ*), he explains that most Christians take it to mean savior (*mukhalliṣ*), concluding that this savior must necessarily be Muḥammad, who saved people from infidelity and taught them all things, just as Jesus predicted: “The Paraclete . . . will teach you everything” (Jn 14:26).⁹⁴ Al-Qarāfi further clarifies that Jesus refers to the Paraclete as “holy spirit” in the same verse as an expression of utmost praise, and that his promise that the Paraclete will be with the disciples forever (Jn 14:16) refers to his prophetic message, not to Muḥammad.⁹⁵

More interesting are al-Qarāfi’s comments on the Paraclete’s description as being in a hostile relationship to the world, “which cannot receive the spirit of truth because it does not know him” (Jn 14:17). He sees here an allusion to Muḥammad’s call to monotheism at a time when religious ignorance, idolatry, temples of fire, and the Trinitarian doctrine prevailed.⁹⁶ Indeed, Jesus’ saying that the Paraclete will rebuke the world concerning sin (Jn 16:8) was fulfilled in Muḥammad, who rebuked the Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and pagan Arabs, all of whom he found astray.⁹⁷ Unlike him, Jesus’ disciples lived at a time when monotheism covered the earth. Moreover, they were a group, while Jesus was clearly referring to one great individual who was to come.⁹⁸ The last remark indicates that al-Qarāfi (through al-Ja’farī) is vaguely aware that Christians associate the coming of the Paraclete with the events of Pentecost described in Acts 2. However, he dismisses the claim that the Paraclete is the fiery tongues which descended from heaven on the disciples, since fiery tongues cannot testify on behalf of Jesus, as the latter had predicted (Jn 15:26). On the contrary, it was Muḥammad who vindicated him from the Jews’ accusations that he was possessed and that he was born of adultery: *sūrat al-a’rāf* (7):75 declares Mary to be “a virtuous woman” and *sūrat al-nisā’* (4):171 describes Jesus as “a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him.”⁹⁹

explained it by saying that both the Messiah and Muḥammad were called by the same name of Paraclete, so that “in my name” simply meant “my namesake” (*al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, 184–185; *Religion and Empire*, 140–141).

94 *Ajwiba*, 704–705 (424) [no. 9].

95 *Ajwiba*, 701–703 (424) [no. 8].

96 *Ajwiba*, 706 (425) [no. 9].

97 *Ajwiba*, 712 (428) [no. 12].

98 *Ajwiba*, 707 (425) [no. 9].

99 *Ajwiba*, 709–710 (426–427) [no. 11].

However, Muḥammad's mission was not limited to vindicating the Messiah and his mother. Al-Qarāfi sees in Jesus' words: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (Jn 16:12), a prognostication of the fact that Muḥammad's *sharī'a* contains information concerning religious etiquette, morals, and the attainment of benefits in this world and in the next that Jesus did not proclaim.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, Jesus' saying that the Paraclete "will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears" (Jn 16:13)" confirms the statement in *sūrat al-najm* that Muḥammad "does not speak from his own desire" and that his proclamation "is nothing less than a revelation that is sent to him" (Q 53:3–4).¹⁰¹ In other words, it confirms the belief of Muslims that the Qur'ān is not an inspired text but a divine dictation.

Finally, al-Qarāfi also refers to the Paraclete in his exegesis of Jn 14:30. As noted above, in its original context, this passage is Jesus' announcement that the "ruler of the world" is coming but has no power over him. However, as quoted in the *Ajwiba*, the words, "He has no power over me" are rendered into Arabic as "I have nothing left," or "Nothing belongs to me," which al-Qarāfi takes it to mean that when the Paraclete comes there will be no traces of the call of the prophets, including Jesus, left on the face of the earth.¹⁰² In other words, Muḥammad will only find people who had gone astray and forgotten the *sunna* of the prophets, of which more later.

9.4 *Muḥammad's Name and Description*

Closely connected with the two preceding themes is the annunciation of Muḥammad's name and his description in the Bible to which reference has already been made in connection with Q 7:156–157 and Q 61:6. Most of the alleged biblical instances of Muḥammad's name quoted in the *Ajwiba* can be found in 'Alī l-Ṭabarī's *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla*, where Syriac words based on the root *sh-b-ḥ* are consistently translated with Arabic terms derived from the root *ḥ-m-d*, such as *muḥammad*, *aḥmad*, and *maḥmūd*.¹⁰³ The paradigmatic example is Ps 48:1–2, rendered into Arabic as: "Great is our Lord and He is greatly praised; and in the city of our God there is a Holy One and a

100 *Ajwiba*, 712–713 (428–429) [no. 12].

101 *Ajwiba*, 713–714 (429) [no. 12].

102 *Ajwiba*, 719–720 (431–432) [no. 16].

103 On the principle of translating Syriac *sh-b-ḥ* to Arabic *ḥ-m-d*, see Mingana's explanation in *Religion and Empire*, 130, n. 9, and Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 144–145. On the range of meanings of the lexical root *sh-b-ḥ* in Syriac, see Louis Costaz, *Dictionnaire Syriaque-Français = Syriac-English Dictionary = Qāmus Sīryānī 'Arabī*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 2002), 356–357.

Muḥammad; and the joy extends through all the earth,” and then presented by al-Qarāfi as an explicit mention of Muḥammad’s very name and a designation of Mecca as “the city of our God.”¹⁰⁴ The same procedure is applied to Isa 49:5, translated: “I became *Muḥammad* with the Lord and in my God are my strength and my power,”¹⁰⁵ and to Isa 63:14, paraphrased: “I have made you a name *Muḥammad*.”¹⁰⁶ In yet another telling example, the beginning of the theophanic vision in chapter 3 of Habakkuk: “God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise” (Hab 3:3, NRSV), becomes in the Arabic translation quoted by al-Qarāfi: “God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. Heaven was illuminated by the resplendence of *Muḥammad*, and the earth was full of his praise.”¹⁰⁷ In other cases, Muḥammad’s name has simply been interpolated into the Arabic translation, as in the following renditions of Isa 35:1–2: “Let the arid desert rejoice, and let the wilderness and the desert be glad; let them blossom because they will be given by *Aḥmad* the glory of Lebanon,”¹⁰⁸ and Hab 3:9: “You shall be filled in your bows to overflowing, and the arrows shall be drenched at your command, *O Muḥammad*.”¹⁰⁹

The previous scriptures not only foretold Muḥammad’s prophetic career and strong leadership, but also his moral beauty and sense of justice, as in Ps 72:12–13: “He shall deliver the persecuted and the needy from him who is stronger than he, and he shall look after the weak who has no helper. He shall have mercy for the poor and the weak.”¹¹⁰ Al-Qarāfi follows the long-standing tradition of applying to Muḥammad the description of the servant of God who brings justice to the nations in Isa 42:1–4: “He will not jeer nor shout.

104 *Ajwiba*, 725–726 (434–435) [no. 20]; ‘Alī l-Ṭabarī, *al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, 139; *Religion and Empire*, 88. Compare with: “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God. His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth” (Ps 48:1–2, NRSV).

105 *Ajwiba*, 737 (442) [no. 28]; ‘Alī l-Ṭabarī, *al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, 157–158; *Religion and Empire*, 104–105. Compare with: “I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength” (Isa 49:5, NRSV).

106 *Ajwiba*, 748 (448) [no. 33]; ‘Alī l-Ṭabarī, *al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, 166; *Religion and Empire*, 115. Compare with: “Thus you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name” (Isa 63:14, NRSV).

107 *Ajwiba*, 756 (452–453) [no. 42]; ‘Alī l-Ṭabarī, *al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, 169; *Religion and Empire*, 119.

108 *Ajwiba*, 745–746 (445) [no. 31]. Compare with Ibn Qutayba, *A’lām al-nubūwa*, 258 [no. 34]; *Muslim Writers*, 275, where the interpolation is absent.

109 *Ajwiba*, 761–762 (455) [no. 45]; ‘Alī l-Ṭabarī, *al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, 170; *Religion and Empire*, 119.

110 As quoted in *Ajwiba*, 727 (435) [no. 21].

He will open the blind eyes, make the deaf ears hear, and quicken the dead hearts. . . . He will not tire or be weary; he will not incline to passion; he will not humiliate the pious who are like a bruised reed, but he will strengthen the righteous, the humble.”¹¹¹ Also connected with Muḥammad’s description is the allusion to his eloquence in Isa 49:2: “He has made my tongue as a sharp sword.”¹¹²

But most impressive for al-Qarāfi’s readers must have been the biblical annunciation of the bodily sign by which the Christian monk Baḥīrā is said to have recognized Muḥammad already as a young boy during a trade journey to Syria with his uncle Abū Ṭālib.¹¹³ The *Ajwiba* includes two such predictions. The first, attributed to Isaiah, reads: “The trace of his government is on his shoulder” (*athar sultānihi ‘alā kitfihi*), which appears to be based on Isa 9:6 (“For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” NRSV), although it has also been suggested that it is an adaptation of Deut 33:12.¹¹⁴ Al-Qarāfi explains this “trace of his authority” as the sign of Muḥammad’s prophecy, which no other prophet carried on his shoulders. In a later passage, this bodily mark is described as a mole, a detail now inserted in the biblical text: “For us a child is born: he will be wonderful, bringer of glad tidings, the mole (*shāma*) shall be between his shoulders. Prince of Peace, Mighty God. His government will be a government of integrity,”¹¹⁵ thus allowing al-Qarāfi to conclude: “Isaiah has explicitly mentioned the most unique of Muḥammad’s signs, namely the mole, which is the seal of prophecy that he carried between his shoulders.”¹¹⁶

9.5 *Abrahamic Descent through Ishmael and Hagar*

It can be easily seen that one of the objectives of al-Qarāfi’s exegesis in chapter four is underscoring Islam’s connection with Abraham, the father of mono-

111 *Ajwiba*, 742 (444–445) [no. 30]; Ibn Qutayba, *A’lām al-nubūwa*, 255 [nos. 8 and 11]; *Muslim Writers*, 270–271. On Isaiah 42:1–4 in early Islamic sources, see Wheeler, “This Is the Torah That God Sent Down,” 579–582, and Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, 30–31.

112 *Ajwiba*, 737 (442) [no. 28].

113 On Baḥīrā’s discovery of the seal of prophethood on Muḥammad’s back, “in the very place described in his [Baḥīrā’s] book,” see Ibn Ishāq, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, 1:206; Guillaume, *Life of the Muhammad*, 80. See also Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, 50–52; and Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Prophet*, 34.

114 *Ajwiba*, 742 (445) [no. 30]. See Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 271.

115 *Ajwiba*, 749–750 (449) [no. 35].

116 *Ajwiba*, 750 (449). See also Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 103–104.

theism, through Ishmael, acknowledged as “the ancestor of the Arabs.”¹¹⁷ We saw above how the Islamic *umma* is connected with God’s promise to fulfill Abraham’s request concerning Ishmael, a promise repeated to Hagar through the intermediary of the angel.¹¹⁸ The theme of the Abrahamic descent reappears in several other places. For instance, Isa 41:8–16, one of the passages in which Muḥammad’s name is supposedly mentioned, is said to be addressed to a man from Abraham’s family.¹¹⁹ Hagar is described as the “mother of the Arabs” and identified with the “barren one” who is promised a numerous progeny in Isa 54:1–3.¹²⁰ In other cases, the Abrahamic descent is traced through Kedar, Ishmael’s second son, as in Isa 42:11–12,¹²¹ or in the following prediction (apparently based on Ezek 23:22–25, where Kedar is not mentioned):

God will make them victorious over you [i.e., the Jews] and He will raise up a prophet from among them and send down to them a Book, and they will enslave you [lit. your necks will be their possession]. They will conquer you and humiliate you with the truth. The men of the Children of Kedar will march forth from among the companies of nations, with angels on white horses bearing arms. They will surround you and your final destination will be the Fire.¹²²

It is noteworthy that all through chapter four of the *Ajwiba* the terms “Arabs” and “Muslims” are regarded as interchangeable, and, although al-Qarāfi’s main concern is to emphasize the Arabs’ physical descent from the father of monotheism, he does not forget completely Abraham’s spiritual legacy. Thus, Mt 8:11–12 is adduced as a prediction that the presumed “heirs of the kingdom”—the Jews and the Christians—will be cast out and replaced by the Arabs at the eschatological table of Abraham because of their failure to recognize in Muḥammad the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham.¹²³

117 *Ajwiba*, 461 (455). On the view of Ishmael as the ancestor of the Arabs, which predates Islam, see, among others, Grypeou and Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity*, 239–288; Fergus Millar, “Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus and the Origins of Islam,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 44 (1993): 23–45; and Israel Eph’al, “‘Ishmael’ and ‘Arab(s)’: A Transformation of Ethnological Terms,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 35 (1976): 225–235.

118 *Ajwiba*, 697–698 (421) [no. 5], referring to Gen 16:8–12.

119 *Ajwiba*, 747 (447) [no. 32].

120 *Ajwiba*, 739–741 (443–444) [no. 29].

121 *Ajwiba*, 728–729 (436) [no. 22].

122 *Ajwiba*, 460–461 (455) [no. 45].

123 *Ajwiba*, 715–716 (430) [no. 14].

9.6 *Universality of Muḥammad's Mission*

We noted earlier Paul of Antioch's seeming readiness to accept Muḥammad's prophethood, albeit with the proviso that his mission be restricted to the pagan Arabs of his time, and al-Qarāfi's absolute refusal to compromise on this key issue. Not surprisingly, the universal scope of Muḥammad's mission is one of the recurrent exegetical themes in chapter four, where al-Qarāfi highlights again and again the references to this universality he detects in the biblical texts. In fact, the axiomatic conviction that Muḥammad was the first prophet sent to all mankind, clearly controls al-Qarāfi's exegesis and opens him to the charge of circularity, so that any passage with universalistic overtones is seen as a prediction of Muḥammad and, at the same time, a proof of his universal mandate.¹²⁴ Thus, Jacob's announcement of "one to whom everybody belongs" (Gen 49:10), Jesus' foretelling that many will come from east and west to recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob (Mt 8:11), David's proclamation that joy extends through all the earth (Ps 48:2), and Isaiah's utterance, "Understand, O you nations!" (Isa 49:1) are all, in al-Qarāfi's view, predictions of a universalism that took place only with Muḥammad.¹²⁵

One implication of this universalism is that, unlike other prophets through whom God executes vengeance on one particular nation (al-Qarāfi gives here the example of Moses, who fought against the mighty men of *al-Shām*¹²⁶), Muḥammad's universal mandate makes his nation a chosen instrument of divine vengeance on all the unfaithful nations, as al-Qarāfi explains in connection with Ps 149:

Let him whose nation God has chosen for Himself and given him victory rejoice in his Maker. Let the righteous ones among them exult in honor; let them praise God on their beds. Let them extol Him with loud voices and with two-edged swords in their hands, to execute vengeance on the nations who do not worship Him.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ It is important to bear in mind that al-Qarāfi, in agreement with Islamic tradition, considers Jesus to be a prophet sent *only* to the Children of Israel. See his explicit comment in this respect in *Ajwiba*, 715 (430) and his inclusion of the Christians among the Children of Israel in *Ajwiba*, 754 (452).

¹²⁵ See, respectively, *Ajwiba*, 694 (419) [no. 2]; *Ajwiba*, 715–716 (430) [no. 14]; *Ajwiba*, 726 (435) [no. 20]; and *Ajwiba*, 738 (442) [no. 28].

¹²⁶ *Ajwiba*, 725 (434), referring to Q 5:21–26.

¹²⁷ As quoted in *Ajwiba*, 724–725 (433) [no. 19].

That this passage refers to Muḥammad is justified on the grounds that Muslims are the only nation who exults God with loud voices in the call to prayer and that only the Arab swords are two-edged. But this psalm is far from being the only biblical reference to the Islamic conquests, according to al-Qarāfi.

9.7 *Subjugation of the Nations*

Several biblical passages are interpreted as predictions of Muḥammad's military victories. Most often, as in the kingdom of God that supplants all previous kingdoms in Dan 2:44 or the fourth kingdom in Dan 7:23, it is the subjugation of the nations in general that is foretold, over which Muḥammad will establish his authority and everlasting rule.¹²⁸ In some cases, however, it is the subjugation of the Children of Israel that is stressed in particular, as in Ezek 23:23–25, which al-Qarāfi interprets as foretelling the defeat of the Jews by the Arabs assisted by angels.¹²⁹ All these predictions exalt Muḥammad as a great ruler and mighty warrior. Already the angel had announced to Hagar that Ishmael's hand will be above everyone and everyone's hand stretched out towards him in submission.¹³⁰ Jesus' announcement of the "ruler of this world" (*arkūn al-ʿālam*) is also seen as a prediction of the subjugation of the nations by al-Qarāfi, who explains that "arkūn" (from Greek *archon*) means the mighty one.¹³¹ Likewise, the universal rule of the Davidic dynasty prayed for in Ps 72:8–11 is said to have been fulfilled in Muḥammad:

He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the rivers unto the end of the earth. They that dwell in the islands shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Persia shall fall down before him, and all nations shall obey him and submit to him.¹³²

Al-Qarāfi argues that this and other references in the Psalms to a divinely appointed ruler who will inherit the nations and rule them with a rod of iron (Ps 2:7–9) and be given dominion over God's creation (Ps 8:6) cannot apply to anyone but Muḥammad, whose victories with the assistance of God were also

128 See, respectively, *Ajwiba*, 763 (456) [no. 46] and *Ajwiba*, 765–766 (457–458) [no. 47].

129 *Ajwiba*, 760–761 (455) [no. 44]. On the angels sent by God to assist Muḥammad in battle against the unbelievers, see Q 3:124–125; 8:9–12, 48.

130 As quoted in *Ajwiba*, 697–698 (421) [no. 5], referring to Gen 18:12.

131 *Ajwiba*, 719 (431) [no. 16], referring to Jn 14:30.

132 *Ajwiba*, 726–727 (435) [no. 21]. Note that the original references to the kings of Tarshish, Sheba, and Seba in vv. 9–10 have been replaced with the kings of Persia in the version quoted in the *Ajwiba*, thereby making it easier to connect this text with Muḥammad.

foretold by Isaiah: “With my strong hand I have upheld you. I have made you a sharp threshing instrument which threshes all that is under it, and beats it thoroughly until it becomes chaff that whirlwinds scatter” (Isa 41:10–16).¹³³

That al-Qarāfi understood these biblical passages on the subjugation of the nations as foretelling God’s command to Muḥammad to engage in *jihād* is clear from his commentary on Hab 3:3–12, a passage which recalls God’s mighty acts during the Exodus but that al-Qarāfi takes as yet another prediction of Muḥammad. He writes: “He—i.e., Habakkuk—ascribed to him *jihād* on land and sea, and the subjugation of all the nations. Such things did not happen to anyone except Muḥammad.”¹³⁴ As will become evident below, al-Qarāfi conceives Muḥammad’s wars as religiously driven, an expression of his fight against error and unbelief.

9.8 *Muḥammad’s Fight against Error and Unbelief*

We saw earlier that al-Qarāfi identified Muḥammad with the promised Paraclete who would save people from unbelief and teach them all things (Jn 14:26) and whom a world immersed in religious darkness would necessarily oppose (Jn 14:17). Indeed, al-Qarāfi insists more than once in chapter four that Muḥammad was sent with divine guidance into a world in which unbelief and error were rampant, with no traces of the call of the prophets left on the earth, but only people gone astray, unable to remember the *sunna* of the prophets.¹³⁵ These people are “the Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and (pagan) Arabs, all of whom he found astray.”¹³⁶ It is no surprise, therefore, that they opposed Muḥammad’s proclamation of monotheism saying, “How can he claim that all the gods are but one God? What an astonishing thing [to claim]!”¹³⁷ Their opposition, however, did not deter him from carrying out his mission. In fact, his triumph over polytheism had already been predicted by Isaiah in his oracle about the raider of the camel: “Fallen is Babylon and its graven idols” (Isa 21:9).

One particular expression of the religious error that Muḥammad encountered was the beliefs of the Jews and the Christians about Jesus. The Messiah had promised, however, to send “the spirit of truth who will testify on my behalf” (Jn 15:26). According to al-Qarāfi, Muḥammad fulfilled this promise by

133 As quoted in *Ajwiba*, 747 (447–448) [no. 32]. Note again that the references to Israel and Jacob in Isa 42:8 and 42:14 have been skipped in the version quoted by al-Qarāfi, thus facilitating its application to Muḥammad.

134 *Ajwiba*, 758 (454) [no. 42].

135 *Ajwiba*, 719–720 (431–432) [no. 16].

136 *Ajwiba*, 712 (428) [no. 12]. See also *Ajwiba*, 706 (425) [no. 9].

137 Q 38:5, quoted in *Ajwiba*, 706–707 (425).

declaring the truth about Jesus and his mother: to the Jews he proclaimed that Jesus was truly a prophet sent by God, not the possessed son of an adulterous woman; to the Christians he proclaimed that Jesus was human, not divine.¹³⁸ Most of them, however, refused to accept the truth, thereby excluding themselves from the blessings promised to Abraham's descendants. But this, too, had been foretold.¹³⁹

9.9 *The Finality of Islam and the Abrogation of Prior Religion*

The prevalent error encountered by Muḥammad, with the message of the earlier prophets having sunk into oblivion, explains to a large extent the necessary abrogation of the previous religious dispensations and their replacement with Islam. God's final offer of guidance to humankind is channeled through Muḥammad. To him applies, according to al-Qarāfi, Isaiah's prophetic utterance: "The Lord has put me in His quiver as a chosen shaft; and He has kept me close for His secret" (Isa 42:9). It means that Muḥammad is the best of the messengers—God's chosen shaft—and that his *sharī'a* embodies the perfection of divine wisdom—God's secret—, containing benefits not present in other laws.¹⁴⁰ It follows that no other revelation should be expected after the "seal of the prophets," the Paraclete whose message "will remain with you forever" (Jn 14:15). Muḥammad is the stone rejected by the builders which has become the cornerstone, according to Jesus, who predicted that God's kingdom will be taken away from the Christians and given to "another people that eats its fruits."¹⁴¹ The same Jesus was foretelling the replacement of the Temple of Jerusalem with the Ka'ba and the abrogation of all previous directions of prayer when he said to the Samaritan woman, "Believe me, the hour is coming when people will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (Jn 4:21).¹⁴²

The clearest illustration of this important exegetical theme is found, however, in al-Qarāfi's interpretation of the vine in Ezek 19:10–14. Originally an image for the transplanting of Israel from the land of Canaan, "a land with flowing streams" (Deut 8:7), into a desert place—into captivity in Babylon, he explains it as a prophecy of God's rejection of the Children of Israel and

138 See, respectively, *Ajwiba*, 708–711 (426–427) [no. 11], and *Ajwiba*, 771–772 (461) [no. 49].

139 *Ajwiba*, 716 (430) [no. 14], referring to Jesus' words in Mt 8:11–12.

140 *Ajwiba*, 738–739 (443) [no. 28].

141 *Ajwiba*, 721–724 (432–433) [no. 18]. Al-Qarāfi is referring to Jesus' words in Mt 21:42–44, which in their original context are addressed to the chief priests and the Jewish elders. Note that Matthew's text has "a people who *produces* the fruits of the kingdom" (v. 43).

142 *Ajwiba*, 714–715 (429) [no. 13].

their replacement with Muḥammad's nation, the new plant "planted in the wilderness, on the neglected, dry, and thirsty land" (Ezek 19:13), in which al-Qarāfi sees an unmistakable reference to the Ḥijāz, the original homeland of Islam, where Mecca is located.¹⁴³

9.10 *Mecca's Role and Elevated Status*

Biblical references to Mecca's future exaltation and to its role in the new religious dispensation constitute another major exegetical theme in chapter four of the *Ajwiba*. We have already seen how Moses foretold that Mount Paran, in the environs of Mecca, would be the venue for God's final revelation, after Sinai and Seir (Deut 33:2), and that David described Mecca as "the city of our God" (Ps 48:1). Al-Qarāfi also appropriates Isaiah's depictions of the future glory of Zion. For instance, after quoting Isa 60:4–7, he concludes:

The treasures of the two seas were brought to it, the different nations came in pilgrimage, and camels and flocks were brought as gifts and sacrifices. Given that such an exaltation of Mecca only happened through Muḥammad, it means that his religion is true, which was to be demonstrated.¹⁴⁴

Likewise, he connects the adornment of Zion in jewels in Isa 54:11–15 with the building and embellishment of the Sacred Mosque (that surrounds the Ka'ba) by the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Mahdī and other Muslim rulers on the grounds that the passage cannot refer to Jerusalem, which, unlike Mecca, was never "immersed in pains" (v. 11) of unbelief, oblivion of God, idol worship, and immorality, and never became a place of safety for those who came to it (v. 13).¹⁴⁵ Since God's exaltation of a city is one of the characteristics distinguishing the faith of its inhabitants, it follows that Islam is true.

The above-mentioned prediction that the wilderness and the desert shall rejoice and blossom "because they will be given *by Aḥmad* the glory of Lebanon" (Isa 35:1) is taken as yet another foretelling of Mecca's future thriving, when people from all corners of the earth will come in pilgrimage to it.¹⁴⁶ Prophesizing the advent of Muḥammad, Isaiah spoke of "a new praise that

143 *Ajwiba*, 759–760 (455) [no. 43]. See also Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 87–88.

144 *Ajwiba*, 734 (439) [no. 26].

145 *Ajwiba*, 736–739 (442–443) [no. 28]. For a slightly different interpretation of al-Qarāfi's words here, see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 96.

146 *Ajwiba*, 745–746 (447) [no. 31].

comes from the best [city] of the earth" (Isa 42:10),¹⁴⁷ what proves that Mecca is the noblest city on earth. Indeed, Mecca was the "barren one" mentioned in Isa 54:1 who had not given birth to a prophet before Muḥammad.¹⁴⁸ He is the one who made pilgrims come to Mecca from all regions of the earth, thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, "They shall all come to you, and they shall make pilgrimage to you from a remote country" (Isa 60:3–4). This prediction cannot refer to Jerusalem, observes al-Qarāfi once more, because Jerusalem had always been exalted and the object of pilgrimage. It follows, therefore, that Mecca is the one meant and, hence, that Muḥammad's prophethood is true.¹⁴⁹

9.11 *Biblical References to Islamic Rituals*

In addition to the foretelling of Mecca's role as the destination of the pilgrimage of the nations, al-Qarāfi is also able to discern biblical allusions to other elements of Islamic ritual and devotion. Thus, for instance, he interprets David's words, "They exalt God with loud high voices" in Ps 149:6 as a reference to the Muslim call to prayer (*adhān*).¹⁵⁰ Likewise, his words, "And prayer shall be made for him continually, and he shall be blessed" in Ps 72:15 are taken to be an obvious reference to the Muslim practice of invoking blessings upon Muḥammad all day long.¹⁵¹ Finally, Isaiah's call upon the desert and its inhabitants to proclaim God's unity in all elevated places and exalt Him on every hill in Isa 42:11 is read by al-Qarāfi as an allusion to the fact that, unlike other nations who only pray in synagogues and churches, Muslims glorify God wherever the appointed time for prayer finds them.¹⁵²

9.12 *The Original Arab Character of Islam and the Desert Motif*

The last exegetical theme I will consider is what I call the original Arab character of Islam and the related desert motif. It will be remembered that Paul of Antioch had tried to make the case that the Qur'ān itself stresses the Arabic character of the revelation granted to Muḥammad and his being sent to a

147 As quoted in *Ajwiba*, 744 (446) [no. 30]. The biblical text has "from the ends of the earth," as in Ibn Qutayba, *A'lām al-nubūwa*, 255 [no. 8].

148 *Ajwiba*, 749 (449) [no. 34].

149 *Ajwiba*, 753 (451) [no. 39]. Al-Qarāfi reaches the same conclusion in connection to Micah 4:1–2, in which he sees a description of the Ka'ba and Mount 'Arafa. See *Ajwiba*, 754–755 (452) [no. 41].

150 *Ajwiba*, 725 (434) [no. 19]. This is also al-Qurṭubī's interpretation (*Ithbāt*, 35). Instead, al-Ja'fari (*Takhjīl*, 660) sees in this verse an indication of the *talbiya* prayer of the pilgrims in Mecca.

151 *Ajwiba*, 727 (436) [no. 21].

152 *Ajwiba*, 744–745 (446) [no. 30].

people whose ancestors had not been warned beforehand. While al-Qarāfi disavows any attempt to restrict the universality of Muḥammad's mission, he does not deny the original Arab character of Islam, "the only religion that appeared in the wilderness," in which he sees a matter of pride for the Arabs.¹⁵³ The references to the wilderness and to the land of Kedar in Isa 42:11–12 indicate that the truth will reach its utmost splendor in Arabia (*jazīrat al-'Arab*).¹⁵⁴ The inhabitants of the caves and mountaintops mentioned in that passage can only be the Arabs. Similarly, the Arabs are the inhabitants of the deserts and the wastelands called upon to exult in Isa 42:11.¹⁵⁵ Surely, the Arabs of the Ḥijāz are God's "chosen people," selected from among the nations, according to Isa 43:20.¹⁵⁶ No other prophet came from the Ḥijāz except Muḥammad.¹⁵⁷ Under his leadership, the Arabs became the powerful kingdom that Daniel foresaw in his vision.¹⁵⁸ They are God's new vine on the world, while the other nations are now the object of his fury, as prophesied by Ezekiel.¹⁵⁹ Finally, Jeremiah described them as "a mighty nation, an ancient nation, a nation whose language is not understood, and whose men are skilled in warfare and mighty" (Jer 5:15–16). Their mightiness, explains al-Qarāfi, is their reliance on the truth; their ancientness is their annunciation by the prophets of old; their language is the Arabic language, which the Children of Israel do not understand, and their skill in wars and raids is something in which no other nation rivals them.¹⁶⁰

10 Concluding Remarks

Al-Qarāfi's *testimonia* include a contrived quotation accredited to Daniel. The text is distantly based on Daniel 9, but cannot be considered a paraphrase of it. In this biblical passage, concerned with determining the end of the seventy-year period of captivity proclaimed by Jeremiah (Jer 25:11–12; 29:10), Daniel turns to God in search of answers, acknowledging that his sinful people had deserved the disasters brought upon them. In response, an angel reveals Israel's future through a vision of seventy weeks of years marked by the appearance

153 *Ajwiba*, 728 (436) [no. 22].

154 *Ajwiba*, 729 (436) [no. 22].

155 *Ajwiba*, 744 (446) [no. 30].

156 *Ajwiba*, 746 (447) [no. 31].

157 *Ajwiba*, 758 (453) [no. 42].

158 *Ajwiba*, 766 (458) [no. 47].

159 *Ajwiba*, 760 (455) [no. 43].

160 *Ajwiba*, 772–773 (461–462) [no. 50].

of two “anointed ones,” coming at different times, and then a “prince” who will destroy Jerusalem before he himself is destroyed.¹⁶¹ In the *Ajwiba*, Daniel’s prayer of confession has been turned into God’s indictment of Israel, now a cursed people beyond forgiveness, followed by the announcement of the coming of the Messiah and of Muḥammad after him, the prophet announced to Hagar. Then the angel goes on to reveal what will befall Muḥammad and his nation until the end of the world.¹⁶² I offer here a translation of the full text, not so much as to illustrate that Muslim polemicists were able to fabricate proof texts (al-Qarāfi was probably not aware of the spurious character of the quotation), but for what it reveals about al-Qarāfi’s views of salvation history: the Muslims are the new chosen people on earth who have inherited the blessings with which God had gifted Israel, namely prophetic guidance and dominion.¹⁶³ Although the text probably originated in the context of anti-Jewish polemic, it serves well al-Qarāfi’s anti-Christian purposes in the *Ajwiba*, since, as already indicated, he takes “Children of Israel” to include the Christians also. In the translation below, I have added between square brackets some lines from the *Takhjil* omitted in the *Ajwiba*, including a clear reference to Isa 42:

Daniel said: I asked God, may He be exalted, and beseeched Him to clarify to me what will happen to the Children of Israel: Will He forgive them, give them back their kingdom, and raise up prophets among them, or will He grant these things to others? An angel appeared to me in the form of a handsome youth and said: Peace upon you, O Daniel. God says: “The Children of Israel have angered Me and have rebelled against Me and have worshipped other gods instead of Me. They turned from knowledge to ignorance and from truthfulness to lies. So I gave Nebuchadnezzar dominion over them. He killed their men, enslaved their offspring, destroyed their Temple, and burnt their scriptures. And those who came after him did the same to them. I am not pleased with the Children of Israel and I will not cancel their offence. They will continue to be under my wrath until I raise up my Messiah, the son of the virgin maiden. Then I will mark them with the curse and (the sign of) wrath, and they

161 On this passage of difficult interpretation, see Paul L. Redditt, “Daniel 9: Its structure and Meaning,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62 (2000): 236–249.

162 On the connection of apocalyptic themes and different sorts of predictions with the name of Daniel in Islamic literature, see “Daniel,” in *ET3*, s.v. (Roberto Tottoli).

163 See, for instance, Moses’ words in Q 5:20: “My people, remember God’s blessing on you: how He raised prophets among you and appointed kings for you and gave you what he had not given to any people.”

will continue to be cursed with humiliation and misery until I raise up the prophet from the Children of Ishmael, the glad tidings of whom were given to Hagar: I sent my angel to her and he gladdened her with the good news. I will inspire that prophet [and teach him the names.]¹⁶⁴ I will adorn him with piety and make righteousness his distinguishing mark. I will make him pious-hearted, truthful and loyal to his word, resolute in his conduct, and upright in his ways. I will distinguish him with a scripture, confirming the scriptures that came before it¹⁶⁵ and abrogating some of what is in them. I will make him come to Me on a night journey and cause him to ascend from one heaven to another until the highest.¹⁶⁶ I will bring him close, grant him salvation, and inspire him. Then I will return him to my servants with happiness and joy,¹⁶⁷ preserving what has been entrusted to him, executing what he has been ordered. [He will call out to proclaim my oneness with gentle words and good admonitions. He will be neither rude nor coarse, nor will he rage in the streets. He will be gracious to anyone who befriends him and compassionate to anyone who believes in him, but harsh to anyone who opposes him]. He will call upon his people to proclaim my oneness and to worship Me, and he will inform them of what he has seen of my signs. But they will call him a liar and inflict harm on him.” Then Daniel continued to relate his story¹⁶⁸ word-for-word, as the angel dictated it to him, until he reached the last days of his nation when the trumpet shall be blown and the world end. The prophecies of Daniel are many and they are known to the Jews and the Christians, who read them and conceal them: “They try to extinguish God’s light with their mouths, but God insists on bringing His light to its fullness, even if the disbelievers hate it” (Q 9:32).¹⁶⁹

As can be seen, the foregoing passage sums up many of the exegetical themes of chapter four of the *Ajwiba* and expresses unambiguously al-Qarāfi’s conviction that Jews and Christians had deliberately darkened the foretelling of Muḥammad in their scriptures. It also exemplifies, perhaps more clearly than elsewhere in the *Ajwiba*, a fundamental aspect of al-Qarāfi’s approach to the

164 A privilege granted to Adam in Q 2:31.

165 Echo of *sūrat al-an‘ām* (6):92: “This is a blessed Scripture that We have sent down to confirm what came before it and for you to warn the Mother of Cities and all around it.”

166 On Muḥammad’s ascension to heaven during the “night journey,” see Q 17:1 and Q 53:1–18.

167 Reading *ghibṭa* (*Takhjīl*, 701) instead of *‘aṭīya* (*Ajwiba*, 770 [460]).

168 That is, the story of the prophet from the Children of Ishmael.

169 *Ajwiba*, 768–770 (459–460) [no. 48]; *Takhjīl*, 700–701 [no. 68].

Bible: while he finds much of his own theological positions confirmed in it, he never turns to the Bible to obtain new religious knowledge or insight.

The *Ajwiba's* reader who is familiar with the history of Christian self-perception will see in al-Qarāfi's views a development of the narrative of Christian supersession of Judaism, now extended to include any religious dispensation prior to Islam, also Christianity. The reader will also hear familiar echoes of Christian charges of scriptural falsification against the Jews in connection with passages of "the Old Testament" that allegedly provide support for Christian messianic claims. As McAuliffe notes, "the precedent of creating a sectarian self-identity through both co-option and rejection of a prior scripture had already been set."¹⁷⁰

In terms of the hopes for Christian-Muslim theological dialogue, which is the underlying concern of this book, it is unlikely that a perception of the relationship between Islam and Christianity based on abrogation, along with a view of Christians as wilfully knowing, understanding, and rejecting the real truth of Islam, will lead to a conversation which is not aimed, even if surreptitiously, at extracting an admission of guilt.

¹⁷⁰ McAuliffe, "A Centuries-Long Conversation," 180. Reynolds suggests that the qur'ānic theme of *taḥrīf*, which he takes to be primarily a charge of textual misinterpretation addressed against the Jews, may be rooted in the traditional Christian polemical motif of the Jews' failure to read Scripture properly, an accusation particularly prominent in the Syriac Fathers because of their fascination with typological exegesis of the Hebrew Bible. See Reynolds, "On the Qur'anic Accusation," 196–200.

Conclusion: The Prospects of Christian-Muslim Theological Dialogue

Our discussions of God are not domestic matters. Indeed it is fair to say that where theology is the concern there are no outsiders.¹

The main body of this study began by looking at al-Qarāfi's biographical profile, the range of his intellectual concerns, and the local and regional political context with a view to understanding the *Ajwiba* as an intellectual project. It was argued that this work represents al-Qarāfi's personal contribution to an ideological struggle for religious and civilizational hegemony, which may best be understood within the framework of the restoration of Sunnī orthodoxy in Egypt, a renewed sense of self-empowerment among the Coptic community, and the threat represented by Crusaders and (less immediately) Mongols. Al-Qarāfi's words in the introduction to his *Kitāb al-istibṣār*, a treatise on optics and the faculty of sight, reveal that he saw an ultimate test of the truth of Islam in the philosophical and scientific questions that Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily, addressed to the Ayyūbid Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil. These questions challenged the qur'ānic claim that Muḥammad's community is the best nation ever brought forth to men and therefore had to be answered. If that was the case with Frederick's philosophical and scientific questions, all the more necessary was it to answer Paul of Antioch's explicitly religious challenge. Despite the difference of subject matters, both the *Kitāb al-istibṣār* and al-Qarāfi's reply to the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* were written in response to questions put forward by Christians and, arguably, for the same purpose of protecting the Muslim community from the "stigma of deficiency."

Examination of the main written sources used in the composition of the *Ajwiba* has revealed that a very extensive scholarly network connecting a number of otherwise unrelated Muslim thinkers coalesced around the need to respond to this particular Christian apology which, all indications lead one to believe, was becoming popular in the Cairene inter-confessional milieu of al-Qarāfi's time. Furthermore, if we bear in mind that several sources used by the Melkite bishop and the Mālikī jurist in composing their respective works were themselves replies to challenges raised by intellectual representatives of the other religion, we realize that both the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* and the *Ajwiba* are part of a larger, protracted conversation between two reli-

1 Kenneth Cragg, "Islamic Reflections in Contemporary Theology," *The Duke Divinity School Review* 31 (1966), 103.

gious worlds at loggerheads. Medieval Christian-Muslim polemics was indeed a collegial activity, with individual writers adopting and adapting to local needs a shared fund of arguments, presumptions, and prejudices against the other religion.

No doubt, the most salient characteristic of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* is the use of qur'ānic quotations to argue in favor of Christianity. In the first chapter of the *Ajwiba*, in which al-Qarāfi refutes the claims of the *Letter* systematically, one senses straightaway that the main issue of contention between him and the Christian apologist concerns precisely the interpretation of the Qur'ān. Yet, it soon becomes apparent that both writers are often talking past one another, each remaining firmly entrenched in his own philosophical world-view and scriptural frame of reference, which are taken as self-evident and universally binding. Al-Qarāfi's replies also show the extent to which his view of Christians and Christianity is influenced by the qur'ānic criticism that the People of the Book have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords apart from God. Also noteworthy for what it discloses about al-Qarāfi's understanding of religion is his contention that Jesus did not establish a new religious law, but confirmed the *sharī'a* of Moses, adding only some modifications and spiritual counsels. In other words, according to al-Qarāfi's criterion of what constitutes the scriptural basis for a prophetic religion, the Gospel, even the original, undistorted version of it, does not qualify as such. Although the Mālikī jurist is obviously concerned about the correctness of doctrine, he ultimately argues for the preeminence of Islam on the grounds that the societal benefits attained through the implementation of Muḥammad's law are wider and more universal than those resulting from previous prophetic legislation.

The same dynamic—the projection of one's notion of religion onto other traditions, which are then evaluated according to one's own standards of true religion and using a terminology specific to Islam—was seen at work in chapter two of the *Ajwiba*, in which al-Qarāfi replies to yet another series of arguments that Christians and Jews are said to raise against Muslim claims. By his time, al-Qarāfi had at his disposal fully-developed Sunnī doctrines of revelation, its transmission, prophetic inerrancy and impeccability, abrogation, eschatology, etc. These doctrines, themselves the product of much theological debate, become in his hands the yardstick of true religion and are brought to bear with full force upon his evaluation of Christianity and Judaism. The fact, however, that a significant number of the arguments which were debated among Muslim scholars are presented in the *Ajwiba* as objections raised by Christians and Jews or projected onto them is more significant than one may think at first glance. It shows that Islam's self-understanding, which was undoubtedly based on the qur'ānic revelations and on the experiences of the early Muslim community, evolved in interaction with other religious groups in what John

Wansbrough famously termed the “sectarian milieu,” a point to which I will return below.

If a single idea can summarize the main thrust of al-Qarāfi’s extended criticism of Christianity in chapter three of the *Ajwiba*, it is the Islamic category of *bid’a* or innovation, that is, any doctrine or practice that lacks prophetic precedent or prescription.² In effect, this concept encapsulates everything that he considers wrong with Christianity as it has evolved historically. Jesus’ monotheistic message and religious practices have been replaced by tritheism and a set of practices without scriptural basis. Christians have abandoned the Torah, appropriating for themselves the power to legislate and, even worse, the power to decide what the truth should be. Only the abandonment of prophetic guidance, and the Christians’ inclination to follow slavishly their self-serving leaders can explain, in al-Qarāfi’s mind, their belief in a wretched God hanging on a cross.

Finally, study of the last chapter of the *Ajwiba*, devoted to the biblical annunciation of Muḥammad, has revealed a vision of religious history that understands Islam as the restoration of the original relationship between God and humanity, which had been lost by humanity’s drifting away from pure monotheism. As interpreted by al-Qarāfi, this logic of restoration is posited on the two following assumptions. First, the missions of previous prophets failed to achieve their purposes, to the point that the world was bereft of prophetic guidance at the coming of Muḥammad. Second, the latter was the first prophet to be charged with a universal mission and hence his religion is enjoined on all humankind. These were already-held convictions for which al-Qarāfi only found confirmation in his reading of the Bible.

The literary exchange between Paul of Antioch and al-Qarāfi illustrates that medieval scholars involved in Christian-Muslim polemics were, more often than not, forceful in their arguments and self-justifying rather than self-critical. But, as one modern scholar sagely remarks, “[i]t is unrealistically anachronistic to expect to find writers of almost a millennium ago following the usages and etiquettes of interreligious dialogue adopted by twenty-first century academicians.”³ Rather than focusing on the rhetorical excesses of medieval polemics, it is more crucial to recognize the enduring theological constructs of the other that this tradition has bequeathed to present-day Christians and Muslims.

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2 On this notion, see above, chapter 5, section 2.

3 Sidney H. Griffith, in *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World*, 219.

As noted at the end of chapter six, the *Ajwiba* recalls the issue of Christian supersessionism for readers familiar with the history of Christian self-perception. This theological perspective remained virtually unchanged until the first half of the twentieth century, when it was subjected to a major reassessment, a process accelerated by the Holocaust. Christians became tragically aware that the teaching of contempt for the Jewish people of the *Adversus Iudaeos* literature had contributed to the rise of anti-Semitism and that theological views *do* have consequences beyond the confines of scholarly discussion. On the Catholic side, this awareness led to Vatican II's reaffirmation of the "spiritual ties" and the "common heritage" which link Christians and Jews, and that, notwithstanding the non-acceptance of the Gospel and even the opposition to its spread by many Jews at the time of Jesus and the early church, "the Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). The Council disavowed earlier views according to which God had rejected the Jews because of their persistent disobedience culminating in the crucifixion of Jesus, and replaced them with the Gentile Church. It must be underscored that Vatican II was not just decrying past mistreatment of the Jews, but endorsing a theological position, namely, that the ancient covenant has never been revoked, or, in Paul's words in Romans 11:29, that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."⁴

The full implications of this radical shift in Christianity's perception of its relationship with the Jewish people are still the subject of much theological investigation. The important thing for us here is to note that a considerable number of Christian theologians and ecclesial bodies have agreed that it is possible to uphold the central affirmations of the Christian faith without simultaneously implying the abrogation of God's covenant with the Jewish people. This new way of thinking has led to a change of attitude on the Jewish side such that, while points of division and tensions still remain, the rapprochement between Judaism and Christianity is indeed "one of the few pieces of encouraging news that can be reported today about the encounter between religions."⁵ In Catholic theology, it was the reconsideration of the teaching of the Church's relation to the Jewish people that opened the way for a review of the traditional position on other religions, including Islam. Critics often point out that the treatment of religions other than Judaism in *Nostra Aetate* remained general, but the fact is that this Declaration did signal a decisive

4 See John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews: 1933–1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

5 Edward Kessler, *An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

change in the way Catholics regard other religions, moving away from a default position of hostility to one of esteem for “what is true and holy in these religions” (no. 2) and hence in the religious lives of their followers.⁶

The point of recalling the recent history of Christian-Jewish relations here is to bring home Mark Heim’s remark that in meeting Islam, today’s Christians undergo “a certain shock of recognition.” That is to say, “Christians find themselves understood by Muslims in terms very reminiscent of those that Christians have historically used to understand other religions, and most specifically Judaism . . . Christianity plays for Islam a role much like the role Biblical Israel traditionally played for Christians, and Jesus plays for Islam something like the role of John the Baptist.”⁷ To illustrate his point, Heim quotes the views of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, a prominent contemporary Muslim thinker born in Indonesia, but he could have also quoted the *Ajwiba* for that matter. However, both al-Qarāfi and al-Attas are writing several centuries after the revelatory events on which Islam is based, reflecting established theological positions which developed over a period of time. If we look at the Qur’ān itself, we see that Islam’s position vis-à-vis prior revelations and the communities that issued from them was not such an obvious matter as al-Qarāfi would lead us to think. Rather it involved—like any process of identity construction—a distinction of the ‘self’ from the ‘others,’ particularly the proximate others, by both linking itself to those prior communities and distinguishing itself from them. Francis Peters, who has analyzed the evolution of the Qur’ān’s view of Christians and Christianity in particular, describes this process as comprising

6 In fact, some theologians have suggested that the new theological assessment of Judaism endorsed by Vatican II could serve as a catalyst for reorienting—analogously—the relationship between Christianity and other religions. For instance, Dupuis writes: “As the Mosaic covenant has not been suppressed by the fact of having reached its fullness in Jesus Christ, so also the covenant made in Noah with the nations has not been cancelled by the fact that in the Christ event the goal set for it by God has been reached. That means that other traditions still have saving value for their followers, but not unrelated to the Christ event” (Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002], 109). The degree to which the *sui generis* relationship between Judaism and Christianity can be extended to other religions remains, however, a strong point of contention, as shown in Adam Sparks, *One of a Kind: The Relationship between Old and New Covenants as the Hermeneutical Key for Christian Theology of Religions* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

7 S. Mark Heim, “Christianity and Islam: Two Kinds of Difference,” *Review and Expositor* 105 (2008), 28.

an earlier stage, indeed, the earliest stage in that discourse, namely, the Qur'ān's own reflections on Christianity, where the Christians are not yet rivals or opponents, but one of the fields against which the Qur'ān attempted to define and distinguish Islam, and then what appears to be a second stage, where the Qur'ān began to turn from a meditation upon Christianity to an argument with Christianity.⁸

In other words, "in their quest for self-identification the Muslims had, like the Christians, to face the problem of problematic continuity: how to separate themselves from what went before without, however, completely severing the tie."⁹ It is worth recalling that Christian supersessionism was articulated against the views of Marcion of Sinope (d. ca. 160), who argued that the Gospel stands in irreconcilable contradiction to the teachings of the Jewish scriptures and therefore excluded these scriptures, and all things Jewish, from the Christian heritage. Yet, at the same time, early Christian writers blamed the Jews for failing to recognize in Jesus the awaited Messiah of Israel, in whom all the divine promises to Abraham found their fulfillment.

The same issues of continuity and discontinuity are precisely what led John of Damascus and in his wake most Christian observers to approach Islam through the category of heresy. Heim explains it well: "There was too much right about Islam (in terms of its overlap with biblical tradition) to see it as truly foreign, and it evidenced too much conscious rejection of Christian teaching (on the Trinity, incarnation, death of Jesus) to see it as truly belonging to the immediate family."¹⁰ There was a theological evaluation of Islam on the basis on their belief in Jesus Christ's "primacy in everything" (Col 1:18). Similarly, al-Qarāfi's severe judgment on the Christianity of his time follows from his belief that Jesus had not only proclaimed the same message as Muḥammad but also announced a messenger to follow "whose name will be Aḥmad" (Q 61:6).

8 Francis Peters, "*Alius* or *Alter*: The Qur'ānic Definition of Christians and Christianity," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8 (1997), 165. In the same vein, McAuliffe points out that identity construction is a key qur'ānic theme and that the Qur'ān consciously constructs its own identity in relation to, and in contradistinction from, other forms of scripture: "The Qur'ān recognizes Christianity and its scriptures through both direct and contrastive description. It constructs a picture of Christians (and of Jews) and of their Bible that parallels the depiction of Muslims—what the Qur'ān calls 'believers'—and the revelation that binds them" (McAuliffe, "A Centuries-Long Conversation," 177).

9 Peters, "*Alius* or *Alter*," 170.

10 Heim, "Christianity and Islam," 30.

The above considerations lead us to ask whether there is a way out of the dialogical impasse that results from seeing others exclusively in terms of their deviation from one's convictions of faith. On the Christian side, a first necessary step is to look at Islam as a separate religion and not simply as a Christian heresy, a step already taken by a significant number of Christians and churches. This makes it possible for Muslims to speak with their own voice, even if that means, as Heim acutely notes, that Christians must confront what is perhaps the most difficult of interreligious questions: "what theological sense can we make of a supersessionist approach to our own tradition?"¹¹ For "Muslims do claim finality and superiority for the Qur'anic revelation and it will not do to adopt a stance that strains this conviction out of the discussion."¹² But can there be discussion, understood as an open-ended conversation, when one of the partners maintains the obsolescence of another's religion? And is it possible to develop an appreciation for the *religious* other while maintaining the essential inadequacy of his or her religious life?

It is necessary at this point to look at how contemporary Muslim theologians who represent the majority opinion look at the matter.¹³ These thinkers do not countenance the bellicosity of medieval polemics and are concerned with fostering better interfaith relations, but not at the expense of unfaithfulness to their own tradition. Tim Winter, for instance, argues that rather than following the pluralist thesis advanced by some contemporary Muslims who have broken with the classical consensus on the abrogation of Judaism and Christianity by Islam, "Muslim supersessionist theologies... may be read in such a way as to *reinforce* rather than obstruct *dialogue and mutual esteem*."¹⁴ In his view, an honest assessment of the Muslim body of scripture appears to confirm the classical reading of the Islamic revelation as "a frankly

11 Heim, "Christianity and Islam," 31.

12 Heim, "Christianity and Islam," 32.

13 Here, I am more interested in the views of scholars who adhere to traditional theological methodologies (recognizing, for instance, the centrality of canonical Ḥadīth discourse) than of those who are seen as having significantly departed from tradition. For a recent overview of the debate, see Mohammad Hassan Khalil, "Salvation and the 'Other' in Islamic Thought: The Contemporary Pluralism Debate (in English)," *Religion Compass* 5 (2011): 511–519.

14 Tim Winter, "The Last Trump Card: Islam and the Supersession of Other Faiths," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 9 (1999), 134 (emphasis mine). See also, by the same author, "Pluralism from a Muslim Perspective," in *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conversation*, ed. N. Solomon, R. Harries, and T. Winter (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 202–211.

supersessionist event.”¹⁵ Yet, it is crucial to understand that we are talking about a “non-categoric” supersession, by which he means that Islam is not construed as an absolute or categoric displacement of what preceded since it does not propose a new type of relationship between God and humanity. Thus, present-day religious plurality is no scandal as such: the existing religions are the “remnants and offshoots” of God’s multiple initiatives prior to Islam. Nevertheless, they are no more than that, remnants and offshoots, deprived of their original completeness as channels of God’s salvific guidance.

In short, for Winter, the qur’ānic critique of Judaism and Christianity is not a “categoric denunciation” of either one of them, but a reproach of a number of errors in their later evolutions which justify their supersession by Islam. These errors are serious enough to necessitate a new and decisive divine intervention. In fact, and this is the key point in his analysis, “[g]iven that Islam explicitly disclaims categoric novelty, its very legitimacy would be questioned were it not to point out deteriorations in its precursors.”¹⁶ Put in other terms, the very *raison d’être* of Islam requires postulating that Judaism and Christianity have irretrievably lost their original efficacy, an efficacy which never had, moreover, a universal scope:

Honestly interpreted, the texts [Qur’ān and Ḥadīth] assume that while other communities are to be tolerated, God’s covenant is emphatically with the people of Islam, as upholders of the final Abrahamic restoration . . . In Muslim reflection, Islam is not a compact with a particular section of humanity, but is the eschatological restoration of this primordial pledge [i.e., the primordial covenant between God and humanity mentioned in Q 7:172] . . . By affirming the Prophet’s eschatological retrieval of this first covenantal relationship, the theologians discount the continuing validity of later compacts between God and individual branches of the Adamic family.¹⁷

As can be seen, Winter is restating the same theological vision of religious history that informs the *Ajwiba*. Unlike al-Qarāfi, however, this modern

15 Winter, “The Last Trump Card,” 137. This is also the view of Muḥammad Legenhausen, “Islam and Religious Pluralism,” *Al-Tawhid: A Quarterly Journal of Islamic Thought and Culture* 14, no. 3 (1997): 115–154; and Yasir Qadhi, “The Path of Allah or the Paths of Allah? Revisiting Classical and Medieval Sunni Approaches to the Salvation of Others,” in *Between Heaven and Hell*, 109–121.

16 Winter, “The Last Trump Card,” 142.

17 Winter, “The Last Trump Card,” 145.

theologian does not fail to state that a supersessionist reading of Islam's foundational texts does not logically require the eternal damnation of all non-Muslims. Indeed, classical Muslim scholars agreed that damnation was entailed only by willful rejection of Muḥammad's message, not by ignorance. On the basis of this classical position, today's Muslims may readily accept that God's grace extends beyond institutional Islam "insofar as present-day forms of pre-Muslim belief adhered to by communities unaware of the teachings of Islam authentically conserve monotheistic ideas and the principle of the divine justice."¹⁸ In the end, "only God knows the criterion for assessing the quality of a person's response to the religious options available in his or her cultural setting."¹⁹ Winter concludes that the Islamic model of non-categoric supersession obviates the sin of arrogance and "can today easily support a theology of an authentic esteem for the Other."²⁰

What are we to think of this assertion? To begin with, the effort to state openly the classical Islamic evaluation of Christianity is certainly more beneficial for interreligious conversation than offering sanitized images of one's doctrinal positions. Winter eloquently explains the rationale of Islamic supersessionism as understood by a majority of classical Muslim scholars. That Christianity has been disfigured to the point of requiring its abrogation by Islam is, of course, an internal theological claim that can be disputed only by Muslim theologians.²¹ However, it is difficult to see how such a perspective can support an authentic esteem for the other today. Although Muslims may respect Christians as fellow human beings, and even engage in just and peaceful relationships, esteem for Christians *qua* Christians, that is, for their religious life, seems *a priori* precluded. The only conceivable purpose for engaging

18 Winter, "The Last Trump Card," 151.

19 Winter, "The Last Trump Card," 151. It is regrettable that Winter's summary of Muslim discussions on the possibility that certain non-Muslims, despite their error, would nevertheless escape punishment in the afterlife does not include the important contributions made by a group of twentieth-century Egyptian Sunnī theologians who in no way may be considered to belong to the pluralistic bent. In this connection, see Muḥammad Fadel, "No Salvation Outside Islam." At any event, in Winter's most recent contribution ("Realism and the Real"), he appears to put greater emphasis on the doctrine of Muḥammad's general intercession, embracing all humanity before final judgment, than on the theoretical possibility that non-Muslims may attain a felicitous afterlife on the grounds of their religious choices.

20 Winter, "The Last Trump Card," 153.

21 See, for instance, Abdulaziz Sachedina, "The Qur'ān and Other Religions," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. J.D. McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 297.

in religious conversation with those who are seen as adhering to a corrupted and superseded religion is to persuade them of their error. Although this is a knowledge that Christians can only offer with humility, the centuries-long Christian attitude toward the Jewish people argues strongly against Winter's contention. To insist that Islam recognizes the once pristine validity of Jesus' way offers little theological consolation to present-day Christians and seems a very weak basis on which to build "a theology of an authentic esteem for the Other." Similarly, statements such as that "the basic teachings of the Christian way are accepted by Islam, but the theological elaboration of those teachings in such doctrines as the Trinity, the Redemption and the Incarnation are rejected" can only leave today's Christian interlocutor puzzled and wondering what these "basic teachings of the Christian way" might be.²²

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Even if some Catholics still seem to be unaware of it, the normative Catholic position is that Muslims are worthy of respect not just as human beings and fellow citizens, but also as believers "who endeavor to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own" (*Nostra Aetate*, 3). In deliberately rejecting the approach to Islam through the category of heresy, Vatican II made it possible to appreciate Islam as a coherent religious system that nurtures the spiritual lives of millions of people.²³ This change of perspective warranted the efforts at promoting Christian-Muslim dialogue that followed the Council and to which many Muslims responded generously. This movement, however, seems to have lost momentum over the last few years. I contend that part of the explanation is the insufficient attention given to the impact of fourteen centuries of Christian-Muslim oppositional discourse. It is my suggestion that today's advocates of dialogue between these two religious traditions should not neglect those texts in which the theological evaluations of each other have been expressed in most forceful terms, as we have seen in the case of al-Qarāfi.

John Paul II's gestures of friendship towards Muslims throughout his long pontificate preclude any intention to be disrespectful when he expressed the

²² Legenhausen, "Islam and Religious Pluralism," 132.

²³ Some prominent Catholic intellectuals still held the view of Islam as a Christian heresy in the 1960s. See, for instance, Jean Guitton, *Great Heresies and Church Councils* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 99–121. Interestingly, Guitton was appointed by Paul VI as a lay observer at Vatican II.

view of Islam quoted in the introduction.²⁴ It proves that one can be aware of the deep theological differences between the two religious traditions and nevertheless see the other as someone who deserves respect and whose friendship is worth seeking. The Pope's words truthfully represent a long-standing Christian theological evaluation of Islam and it would be intellectually dishonest to write or act, even with the best of intentions, as if such evaluation did not exist or need not be repeated. By the same token, Winter's exposition of the classical Islamic doctrine of the abrogation of prior religion by Islam should also be accepted as a point of departure for further conversation. An approach to interreligious dialogue that is forthright about each side's views of the other has better prospects for future advance than disregarding the oppositional identities of Christianity and Islam.

But most importantly, we can do more than simply acknowledge our mutual doctrinal assessments. As already suggested, we can apply the hermeneutical stance of the new comparative theology to Christian-Muslim polemical texts in order to refine and perhaps correct aspects of that theological view of the other. Furthermore, study of these texts reveals the breakdown in communication that results from taking one's theological categories as axiomatic and universally applicable. It helps us realize that those categories are themselves the historical products of the complex processes of identity construction through which Muslims and Christians have situated themselves politically in relation to each other. To become aware of this is already to progress beyond the stage of registering the differences with one another.

Christians might discover, for instance, that Judaism was often the implicit (and sometimes explicit) third party in their evaluation of Islam. As Griffith has shown, early Christian apologists consistently characterized Islamic practices and beliefs (particularly in the area of Christology) as Jewish, or at least as influenced by Jewish ideas. The point of these writers was that Islam, in religious terms, amounted to what they saw as discredited Judaism.²⁵ Additionally, there has been a tendency to assimilate Islam with the legalistic Judaism that Jesus is thought to have rejected. Supersessionist views of Judaism were thus brought to bear in the evaluation of Islam. If this connection can be made more evident by the study of the relevant literature, we can expect that the reassessment of Judaism that is taking place in Christian theology may have repercussions on the theological understanding of Islam.

²⁴ See above, introduction, section 7.

²⁵ Sidney H. Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century," *Jewish History* 3, no. 1 (1988): 65–94; idem, "ʿĪsā ibn Zurʿah on the Abrogation of Mosaic Law," 151.

Muslims, for their part, might come to recognize that a recurrent claim of their own polemical tradition—repeated by al-Qarāfī and many others before and after him—has been to assume that Christian religious and political leaders refused to accept publicly Muḥammad's revelation, although they could perceive its authenticity, out of egotism and a desire to keep their own positions of prestige.²⁶ This claim and the attendant accusation of having deliberately falsified their scriptures are long-standing myths of Muslim anti-Christian polemical tradition which are untenable today. These assumptions make it impossible for Christians to speak with their own voice.

Among the different strategies noted by Hugh Nicholson that modern liberal theologians have employed in order to free religion from social antagonism,²⁷ one seems of particular relevance in view of its presence in current Christian discourse on Islam. This is what Nicholson terms the two-dimensional understanding of religion, in which the vertical dimension refers to the transcendental relationship between the believer and the divine reality, and the horizontal to the worldly, socio-political relationships of religious communities. This putative distinction between religion as faith and religion as social identity allows liberal theology to ascribe some degree of truth and legitimacy to the various religions and at the same time reject any form of religiously-motivated social antagonism as extraneous to the real core of the religion, now identified with the vertical dimension of religion. Religions which refuse to adopt this distinction for themselves, such as Islam's persistent presentation of itself as *dīn wa-dunya* (spiritual and temporal), are declared to have a problem with modernity. Yet, it is difficult to escape the impression that many appraisals of Islam vis-à-vis modernity tend to project back in history what in many cases is a fairly recent image of Christianity, namely, a Christianity that has come to terms with modernity, which is then compared to a supposedly stagnant religion. We have seen that al-Qarāfī, before engaging in the refutation of particular doctrines, begins his treatise by offering various vignettes of what to his eyes appears as the decadence of Christian society, his point being that

26 This claim is characteristically expressed by al-Āmirī in the following terms: "As the religion of Islam, expressed with the utmost beauty and elegance, abrogates all other religions and challenges all other authorities, hearts are filled with rage against it as it has demolished the thrones of the scholars of the two books [of Christianity and Judaism], and the thrones of the kings and rulers. It is hardly surprising that its enemies should be so many and that their delirious attacks on it should be so abundant" (al-Āmirī, *al-I'lām bi-manāqib al-Islām*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ghurāb [Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1967], 194; quoted in Winter, "Realism and the Real," 127).

27 See above, introduction, section 5.

once prophetic guidance is abandoned the entire edifice of communal life collapses. While al-Qarāfi's portrayal of Christian mores and institutions is obviously biased and polemical, it nevertheless reminds us that Christian-Muslim theological conversation should be open to discuss the role of religion in wider societal issues.²⁸

The above study of the literary exchange between Paul of Antioch and al-Qarāfi also sheds light on another factor influencing, even in our days, the dynamics of Christian-Muslim conversation. I am referring to the fact that neither of the two traditions speaks with one voice when talking to each other. Their discourse is plural and often contradictory. Paul of Antioch had surely made the effort of presenting his convictions in a respectful way, avoiding any gratuitous vilification of Muḥammad and his religion. But the Melkite bishop's was not the only Christian work addressed to the Muslims known to al-Qarāfi. The latter was also familiar with the less restrained comments of the author of the *Tathlith al-waḥdāniyya*, according to whom Muḥammad's teachings encouraged carnal lust. Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* and similar conciliatory Christian statements do not represent the only message that Muslims hear today. Advocates of Christian-Muslim dialogue should be aware of this and not be dismayed by the slow rapprochement between the two communities.

Finally, it is worth recalling Nicholson's distinction of two moments in the formation of religious identity. The first is the proper *political* moment of exclusion, the 'we are not like them.' This relational nature of identity is then obscured in a second *ideological* moment of naturalization, in which a discourse which in fact represents a highly partial claim is presented as natural and incontrovertible. Religious intolerance, contends Nicholson, stems from this second moment of naturalization, which allows 'us' to declare 'them' as deviant and therefore unworthy of respect, and it is to this process of naturalization of religious identity that any attempt to reduce the real danger of religious intolerance must be directed.²⁹ Another important reason why Christian-Muslim polemical texts deserve attention today is because it is in these texts that Christians and Muslims have come closest to religious intolerance by portraying the other not only as a mirror against which we construct our identity, but as blind and inimical to truth.

To conclude, the study of polemical texts can be an enriching intellectual project of historical research, in need of no other justification, but it can also

28 An indication of the parameters of this conversation can be seen in Richard Sudworth, "Christian Responses to the Political Challenge of Islam," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24 (2013): 191–211.

29 Nicholson, *Comparative Theology*, 12.

be conceived as a theological venture. Francis Clooney speaks of purification and intensification of the theologian's faith as two desirable results from the practice of comparative theology and I believe that both may also result from the type of approach I am proposing here. In the first place, attentive cross-reading of Christian-Muslim polemical literature can play an important corrective role by helping theologians to discriminate between interpretations of the differing religion that were shaped by a prior concern to establish one's truth and other theological evaluations that were made after an honest effort to listen to the adherents of the differing religion. As for the intensification of the theologian's faith, it may be the result of coming to see the truth claims of the other believer in unexpected ways. Simplistic reasons for not paying attention to their critiques may evaporate once these critiques are seen to carry some theological weight. I am not suggesting that the large divide that separates Christianity and Islam will disappear, but progress is possible on particular points of contention. The inescapable political dimension of Christian-Muslim relations is here to stay, but it can be brought to manageable levels, reducing the potential for conflict and reinforcing the reasons for mutual respect and recognition.

Appendix A

Al-Qarāfi's Literary Production

The exact number and precise chronology of al-Qarāfi's works is still to be determined.¹ About thirty of them are known, some only by title, others still in manuscript form, while others await further research to confirm their attribution to him. From among al-Qarāfi's early biographers, it is Ibn Farḥūn (d. 799/1396) who provides us with the longest list.² It includes the following:

(1) *Al-Dhakhira*

Also known as *al-Dhakhira fi furū' al-Mālikiyya*, this encyclopedic work on Mālikī positive law has been edited by Abū Ishāq Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥmān, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2001–2003), and Muḥammad Ḥajjī and Muḥammad al-Amīn Bū-Khubza, 14 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1994).³

(2) *Al-Qawā'id*

This is how Ibn Farḥūn refers to al-Qarāfi's famous work on legal precepts *Kitāb al-furūq*, also known as *Anwār al-furūq fi anwā' al-burūq*, *Kitāb al-anwār wa-l-anwā'*, *Kitāb al-qawā'id al-saniyya fi l-asrār al-fiqhiyya*, or simply *al-Qawā'id*. According to al-Wakīlī, the *Lawāmi' al-furūq* mentioned by Brockelmann refers to this same work.⁴ Recent editions include those by Muḥammad 'Uthmān, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2009), 'Umar Ḥasan al-Qayyām, 4 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 2003), Muḥammad Aḥmad Sarrāj and 'Alī Jum'a Muḥammad, 4 vols. in 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2001), and Khalīl Maṣṣūr, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1998). The last-mentioned edition includes a commentary on al-Qarāfi's *Kitāb al-furūq* by his disciple Qāsim ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Anṣārī, better known as Ibn al-Shāṭṭī (d. 723/1323), entitled *Idrār al-shurūq 'alā anwā' al-furūq*, and a supercommentary by Muḥammad 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn ibn Ibrāhīm al-Mālikī al-Makkī (d. 1367/1948), entitled *Tahdhīb al-Furūq wa-l-qawā'id al-saniyya fi l-asrār al-fiqhiyya*.⁵

1 A comprehensive discussion of al-Qarāfi's bibliography is found in al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:257–358.

2 Ibn Farḥūn, *al-Dībāj*, 129.

3 On this work, see also Muḥammad Muḥammad Aḥmad Muḥammad, *al-Qawā'id al-uṣūliyya li-l-Imām al-Qarāfi wa-taṭbiqātuhu 'alayhā min khilālī kitābihi al-Dhakhira* (Riyadh: Dār al-Tadmuriyya, 2012).

4 Al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:317–318. Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur, Supplementbände I* (Leiden: Brill 1937), 666.

5 On al-Qarāfi's *Kitāb al-furūq*, see also the recent studies by Qandūz Muḥammad al-Māḥī, *Qawā'id al-maṣlaḥa wa-l-maṣada 'inda Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi min khilālī kitābihi al-Furūq: risālat mājīstīr* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2006), and Jāsim Muḥammad Ismā'il Ibrāhīm

(3) *Sharḥ al-Tahdhīb*

Also known as *Kifāyat al-labīb fī kashf ghawāmiḍ al-tahdhīb*, this is al-Qarāfī's commentary on an abridgment of the *Mudawwana* of Saḥnūn (d. 240/853), a foundational Mālikī work, by the Qayrawān jurist al-Barādhī'ī (d. 430/1039), entitled *al-Tahdhīb fī ikhtiṣār al-Mudawwana*.⁶ A manuscript copy of *Sharḥ al-Tahdhīb* survives in MS Fez, Khizānat al-Qarawiyyīn, 386.

(4) *Sharḥ al-Jallāb*

A no longer extant commentary on a systematic elaboration on the branches of the law entitled *al-Tafrīṣ fī fiqh al-imām Mālik ibn Anas*, sometimes referred to as *al-Tafrīṣ fī l-furūṣ al-fiqhiyya*, written by the Mālikī jurist Ibn al-Jallāb (d. 378/988).⁷

(5) *Sharḥ Maḥṣūl al-imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*

Also known as *Nafā'is al-uṣūl fī sharḥ Maḥṣūl al-imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, this is al-Qarāfī's extended commentary on al-Rāzī's highly influential work on legal theory *al-Maḥṣūl fī 'ilm al-uṣūl*.⁸ It has been edited by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā, 4 vols. (Beirut: Manshūrāt 'Alī Bayḍūn; Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), and 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwaḍ and 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd, 9 vols. (Mecca: Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1995).

(6) *Al-Ta'liqāt 'alā l-Muntakhab*

Also known as *al-Ta'liq 'alā l-Muntakhab* and *Sharḥ al-Muntakhab*. This lost work appears to be a commentary on al-Rāzī's own abridgment of his *Kitāb al-maḥṣūl*, known as *al-Muntakhab*.⁹

(7) *Al-Tanqīḥ*

This work on legal theory, written as an introduction to *al-Dhakhīra* and whose full title is sometimes given as *Tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl fī ikhtiṣār al-Maḥṣūl fī l-uṣūl*, is often described as an abridgment of al-Rāzī's *Kitāb al-maḥṣūl*. In the introduction, however,

al-Ḥadīdī, *Tarjīḥāt al-Imām al-Qarāfī al-fiqhiyya fī kitābihi al-Furūq: dirāsa fiqhīyya muqārana* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2011).

6 Khalaf ibn Abī l-Qāsim Muḥammad al-Azdī al-Barādhī'ī, *al-Tahdhīb fī ikhtiṣār al-Mudawwana*, ed. Muḥammad al-Amin walad Muḥammad Sālim ibn al-Shaykh (Dubai: Dār al-Buḥūth li-l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya wa-l-ḥyā' al-Turāth, 1999).

7 'Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Jallāb, *al-Tafrīṣ fī fiqh al-imām Mālik ibn Anas*, ed. Sayyid Kasrawī Ḥasan, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2007).

8 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī 'ilm uṣūl al-fiqh*, ed. Ṭahā Jābir Fayyāḍ 'Alwānī, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Mu'assasa, 1992).

9 Al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:297, 299–300.

al-Qarāfi indicates that he used four books as sources and mentions the *Maḥṣūl* only in fourth place.¹⁰ The *Tanqīḥ* attained much popularity as attested by the extant number of manuscript copies and by the fact that it was the object of several commentaries in addition to the one authored by al-Qarāfi himself (see next entry).

(8) *Sharḥ Kitāb al-tanqīḥ*

Also known as *Sharḥ tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl fī ikhtiṣār al-Maḥṣūl fī l-uṣūl*. According to Jackson, this is probably al-Qarāfi's most important work on legal theory, "at least in the sense that it represents his final conclusions on the subject."¹¹ Recent editions include those by Abū Usāma Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mu'īn Darwīsh (Damascus: Dār al-Numayr, 2008), Aḥmad Farid al-Mazidī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2007), and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Shāghūl (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li-l-Turāth, 2005).

(9) *Al-Aḥwib al-fākhira 'an al-as'ila al-fājira fī l-radd 'alā ahl al-kitāb*

The focus of this book, it was first published in the margin of 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Salīm Bājah'chī'zādah, *al-Fāriq bayna l-makhlūq wa-l-khālīq* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Mawsū'āt, 1904, 2–265; repr. Dubai: Maṭba'at al-Bayān al-Tijāriyya, 1987). Other published editions include those by Bakr Zakī 'Awaḍ (Cairo: Kulliyat Uṣūl al-Dīn, al-Azhar University, 1986), Majdī Muḥammad al-Shahāwī (Giza, Egypt: Maktabat al-Qur'ān, 1992), and Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyih and Tawfiq 'Alī Wahba (Giza, Egypt: Maktabat al-Nāfidha, 2006). See also the unpublished edition by Nāji Muḥammad Dāwūd (PhD diss., Umm al-Qurā University, Mecca 1985).

(10) *Al-Ummiyya fī idrāk al-niyya*

"A treatise examining the semantic and conceptual field of the term *niyya*."¹² The latest edition of this work is included in Muḥammad ibn Yūnus al-Suwaysī al-Tawzarī al-'Abbāsī, *Majāl al-niyya fī l-fiqh al-islāmī* (Tunis: Dār Ṣaḥnūn, 2010, 325–416). It had been previously edited by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Akhḍar al-Akhḍarī (Damascus: Al-Yamāma, 1997), and Musā'id ibn Qāsim al-Fālih (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ḥaramayn, 1988).

(11) *Al-Istighnā fī aḥkām al-istithnā'*

A treatise on exceptive sentences in Arabic, including a study of their use in the Qur'ān and their application in oaths, conditional repudiations, and confessions. It has been edited by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1986), and Ṭahā Muḥsin (Baghdad: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu'ūn al-Dīniyya, 1982).

¹⁰ Al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:285–289.

¹¹ Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 18.

¹² Powers, *Intent in Islamic Law*, 8.

(12) *Al-Iḥkām fī l-farq bayna l-fatāwā wa-l-aḥkām*

Also known as *al-Iḥkām fī tamyīz al-fatāwā ‘an al-aḥkām wa-taṣarrufāt al-qāḍī wa-l-imām*. This pioneering work is the focus of Jackson’s study, who describes it as being primarily “a scholarly protest against certain abuses of power and its confluence with authority in the early Mamlūk state. Chief among these were the exclusivist policies of the lone chief justice of the capital at Cairo, Tāj al-Dīn b. bint al-A‘azz, who refused to implement rulings handed down by judges from other schools whenever these contradicted his Shāfi‘ī views.”¹³ In response, al-Qarāfī “raises and attempts to address such critical issues as the difference between the legal opinion (*fatwā*), the legal ruling (*ḥukm*), and the discretionary action (*taṣarruf*); the corporate status of the *madhhabs*; the definition and limits of law; and the distinction between legal, non-legal and para-legal, on the basis of which it can be determined which judicial or caliphal pronouncements are binding and which are not.”¹⁴ Editions of the *Iḥkām* include those by ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Aleppo: Maktab al-Maṭbū‘āt al-Islāmiyya, 1967; 4th ed.: Beirut 2009), and Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Rāziq (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Thaqāfī, 1989).

(13) *Al-Yawāqūt fī aḥkām al-mawāqīt*

Also referred to as *al-Yawāqūt fī ‘ilm al-mawāqīt*, this work dealing with time-related legal conditions, particularly in ritual prayer, has been recently edited by Jarrāḥ Nāyif al-Faḍlī (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla Nāshirūn, 2011).

(14) *Sharḥ al-arba‘in li-Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī uṣūl al-dīn*

Al-Qarāfī’s no longer extant commentary on the *Kitāb al-arba‘in fī uṣūl al-dīn*, one of al-Rāzī’s several theological treatises, dealing with the main questions of classical Islamic theology (*kalām*), such as the creation of the world in time, the existence of God, the divine attributes, the reality of the soul, resurrection, Muḥammad’s prophethood, reward and punishment, etc.¹⁵

(15) *Al-Intiqād fī l-i’tiqād*

Also referred to in other sources as *al-Inqād fī l-i’tiqād* and *al-Inqādh fī l-i’tiqād*. Both its title and al-Qarāfī’s references to it in *al-Dhakhīra* and *al-Istighnā’* indicate that this no longer extant work was a treatise on *kalām*.

13 Jackson, *Islamic Law*, xix–xx.

14 Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 15–16.

15 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-arba‘in fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, 2 vols. in 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 2004). In *Ajwiba*, 260 (146), al-Qarāfī refers his readers to his commentary on al-Rāzī’s *Kitāb al-arba‘in* for an explanation of Moses’ hearing of the Word of God from the blazing bush. This episode was quoted as an example by some Christian apologists to prove the possibility of the union of the divine essence with a material being.

(16) *Al-Munjiyāt wa-l-mūbiqāt fī l-ad'īya wa-mā yajūz minhā wa-mā yukrah dhikruhu wa-mā yuḥram*

A book on correct and incorrect ways of making supplications to God. Al-Qarāfi refers to it in his *Kitāb al-furūq*, whose last three sections are devoted to the same topic.¹⁶ According to Brockelmann, a manuscript copy of this work survives in MS Alexandria, al-Maktaba al-Baladiyya, 16 (*fiqh mālikī*).¹⁷

(17) *Al-Istibṣār fī mudrakāt al-abṣār*

A scientific work on optics and the faculty of sight, it has been edited and translated into Spanish by Aman Salama under the title “Kitāb al-istibṣār fī mā tudrikuhu al-abṣār = La observación de lo que las miradas pueden alcanzar” (PhD diss., Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2004). A German translation is provided in Eilhard Wiedemann and Max Meyerhof, “Über ein optisches Werk des Aḥmad al-Qarāfi,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 17 (2006–2007), which also includes a facsimile edition of MS Escorial, Cód. 107, fol. 84–112.¹⁸

(18) *Al-Bayān fī ta'liq al-aymān*

Also known as *al-Bayān fī mā ashkala min al-ta'aliq wa-l-aymān*. According to al-Wakīlī, there survives a 21-page summary of this work on conditional repudiations and divorce oaths in MS Rabat, al-Khizāna al-Āmma, K 160.¹⁹

(19) *Al-'Umūm wa-raf'uhu*

This title could well refer to al-Qarāfi's *al-Iqd al-manẓūm fī l-khuṣūṣ wa-l-'umūm*, first attributed to him by Ḥajjī Khalifa (d. 1657).²⁰ This work is entirely devoted to the scope of legal injunctions, particularly the distinction between what Islamic jurists refer to as unqualified (*muṭlaq*) and universal (*'amm*) expressions.²¹ It has been edited by 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwaḍ and 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2001), Aḥmad al-Khatam 'Abd Allāh, 2 vols. (Mecca: al-Maktaba al-Makkiyya; Cairo: Dār al-Kutubī, 1999), and Muḥammad 'Alawī Banaṣir, 2 vols. (al-Muḥammadiyya, Morocco: Maṭba'at Faḍāla, 1997).

16 Al-Qarāfi, *Kitāb al-furūq* (ed. Sarrāj and Muḥammad, 2001), 1411–1433. The reference to *al-Munjiyāt wa-l-mūbiqāt fī l-ad'īya* is found on page 1363.

17 Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1943), 482.

18 On al-Qarāfi's *Kitāb al-istibṣār*, see also above, chapter 1, section 3.3.

19 Al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:329–330.

20 Ḥajjī Khalifa, *Kashf al-zunūn*, 2:1153.

21 Al-Qarāfi's innovative views on this issue as discussed in *al-Iqd al-manẓūm* are studied in Jackson, “*Taqīd*, Legal Scaffolding and the Scope of Legal Injunctions in Post-Formative Theory.”

(20) *Al-Ajwiba 'an al-as'ila al-wārīda 'alā khuṭab Ibn Nubāta*

No longer extant, this work appears to have dealt with grammatical and/or linguistic matters in connection with the sermons of Abū Yahyā ibn Nubāta (d. 374/984), a preacher at the court of the famous Sayf al-Dawla al-Ḥamdānī in Aleppo.²²

(21) *Al-Iḥtimālāt al-marjūha*

In this work of legal theory, al-Qarāfi elaborates on al-Rāzī's ten cases of conflicting evidence resulting from the fact that some words may have more than one meaning.²³ It has been recently edited by Jalāl 'Alī l-Qādhidhāfi al-Jihānī in his *Min khizāna al-madhab al-mālikī* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2006), 215–279.

(22) *Al-Bārīz li-l-kifāh fī l-maydān*

Nothing is known about this work except its title, which suggests that it might have been a treatise on *jihād*.²⁴

Ibn Farḥūn ends with a “wa-ghayru dhālika” (et cetera), thus indicating that his list is not exhaustive. Other titles attributed to al-Qarāfi by other biographers and editors of his works are:

(23) *Al-Munāẓir fī l-rīyāḍiyyāt*

A no longer extant work on mathematics first attributed to al-Qarāfi by Ismā'īl Bāshā (d. 1920).²⁵

(24) *Al-Khaṣā'is fī qawā'id al-lugha al-'arabiyya*

A treatise on Arabic grammar attributed to al-Qarāfi by al-Marāghī (d. 1945).²⁶ It has been recently edited under the title *Kitāb al-Khaṣā'is* by Ṭahā Muḥsin 'Abd al-Raḥmān and Kiyān Aḥmad Ḥāzim Yahyā (Beirut: Dār al-Madār al-Islāmī, 2013). An edition by Nājī Muḥammadū Ḥīn 'Abd al-Jalīl appeared in *Ḥawlīyyat Kullīyyat al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya bi-l-Zaqāzīq* 29 (1430/2009): 2633–2774.

22 His sermons were collected and arranged together with some sermons by his son and grandson in about 629/1223. See “Ibn Nubāta,” in *ET2*, s.v. (Marius Canard). Al-Qarāfi mentions a line from Ibn Nubāta's sermons and the discussion it aroused among scholars in his *Kitāb al-furūq* (ed. Sarraj and Muḥammad, 2001), 143–144.

23 See al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī 'ilm uṣūl al-fiqh*, 1:351–362.

24 Al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:336.

25 Ismā'īl Bāshā, *Hadiyyat al-'arīfīn*, 1:99.

26 Al-Marāghī, *al-Fatḥ al-mubīn*, 2:87.

(25) *Al-Qawā'id al-thalāthūn fī 'ilm al-'arabiyya*

There are two recent editions of this treatise on Arabic grammar by Ṭāhā Muḥsin (Damascus: Dār al-Yanābī' li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2009), and 'Uthmān Maḥmūd al-Ṣinī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Tawba, 2002).

(26) *Al-Mu'īn 'alā kitāb al-talqīn*

The title indicates that it is a commentary on the *Kitāb talqīn fī l-fiqh al-mālikī* by the Mālikī jurist and *qāḍī* 'Abd al-Wahhāb ibn 'Alī ibn Naṣr al-Baghdādī (d. 422/1031). A manuscript copy seems to have survived in the Raza Library in Rampur, India.²⁷

(27) *Mukhtaṣar Tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl fī l-uṣūl*

An abridgment of al-Qarāfī's *Tanqīḥ fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, it has been published in the volume *Mutūn uṣūliyya muhimma fī l-madhāhib al-arba'a* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī, 1989, 40–79; reprint of *Majmū' mutūn uṣūliyya li-ashhar mashāhīr al-madhāhib al-arba'a*, ed. Muḥammad Hāshim al-Kutubī, Damascus: al-Maktaba al-Hāshimiyya, n.d.). There is also a more recent edition by Aḥmad Muḥammad Walīd al-Nashshār (Damascus: Dār al-Farfūr, 2007).

(28) *Ikhtīṣār qawā'id 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām*

Attributed to al-Qarāfī by the Qarawiyyīn scholar Muḥammad ibn Qāsim al-Qādirī (d. 1913) in his *Raf' al-'itāb wa-l-malām*.²⁸

(29) *Al-Fuṣūl fī l-uṣūl*

A no longer extant work on legal theory, attributed to al-Qarāfī by al-Wakīlī.²⁹

(30) *Muṣannaf kāmil fī qawlihi ta'ālā "wa-mā ja'alnāhum basharan [sic] lā ya'kulūna al-ṭa'ām"*

In his biographical dictionary, al-Ṣafadī ascribes to al-Qarāfī a entire work on *sūrat al-anbiyā'* (21):8 which does not seem to have survived.³⁰

27 Al-Sulmī, *Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī*, 72. See, however, al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:343–346.

28 Edited by Muḥammad al-Mu'taṣim bi-llāh al-Baghdādī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1985), 21, quoted in al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:321.

29 Al-Wakīlī, *al-Imām*, 1:294–298.

30 Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, 6:147.

(31) A work on the syntactic analysis of the word “faḍlan”

Attributed to al-Qarāfī by the Moroccan scholar Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Fāsī (d. 1170/1756) in his study of al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Iqtirāḥ fi ‘ilm uṣūl al-naḥw* entitled *Fayḍ nashr al-inshirāḥ min rawḍ ṭayy al-Iqtirāḥ*.³¹

³¹ Al-Fāsī, Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Fayḍ nashr al-inshirāḥ min rawḍ ṭayy al-Iqtirāḥ*, ed. Maḥmūd Yūsuf Fajjāl, 2nd ed. (Dubai: Dār al-Buḥūth li-l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya wa-l-Iḥyā’ al-Turāth, 2002), 752.

Appendix B

The Arguments from The Letter to a Muslim Friend

Al-Qarāfi (or his source) breaks down the arguments of Paul of Antioch's *Letter to a Muslim Friend* into fifteen points. Some modern editors call them *shubuhāt* or specious allegations, but al-Qarāfi simply introduces them with a neutral, "among his words, he said that . . .," even if he might have considered them such. It should also be kept in mind that al-Qarāfi (or his source) is summarizing the text and thus he sometimes condenses into densely-packed sentences arguments which are more developed in the Paul's original treatise. After each argument, I indicate the references to the editions of the *Ajwiba* by Dāwūd and 'Awaḍ, as well as the sections of the *Letter* which the paragraph summarizes. My rendering of the Arabic text into English is indebted to Griffith's translation of the *Letter*.

- I. Muḥammad, God bless him and grant him salvation, was not sent to us, and it is not necessary for us to follow him. We say that he was not sent to us only because of what God, may He be exalted, says in the sublime Book: "We have sent down the Qur'ān in Arabic" (Q 2:2), and "We have never sent a messenger except in the language of his [the messenger's] people" (Q 14:4). Also, "He is the one Who raised up among the scripture-less one of them to be a messenger" (Q 62:2). Then there is, "You shall warn a people to whom no one has come previously to warn them" (Q 28:46; 32:3). There is also, "that you might bring a warning to the Mother of Cities and those around her" (Q 42:7), and, "You shall warn people whose fathers had not been warned" (Q 36:6). And also, "Warn your own nearest of kin" (Q 26:214). We are only bound to follow someone who came to us speaking our tongue and brought us the Torah and the Gospel in our own languages.
(*Ajwiba*, 148–149 [68]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* §§ 6–7)
- II. The Noble Qur'ān proposes extolling Jesus, upon whom be peace, and his mother Mary, may God be pleased with her, and this is what we think and believe in their regard. The two religions are one and the Muslims do not disapprove of us.
(*Ajwiba*, 158–159 [76–77]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 8)
- III. The Noble Qur'ān proposes that Jesus, upon whom be peace, is the spirit of God, exalted be He, and His Word, and this is our belief.
(*Ajwiba*, 162 [81]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 9)
- IV. It says in the Sublime Book [in reference to Jesus]: "I will place those who follow you above those who have disbelieved unto the day of resurrection" (Q 3:55).
(*Ajwiba*, 169 [91]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 10)

- V. The Noble Qurʾān testifies to the precedence of the shrines of the Christians and their churches over the mosques of the Muslims in the words of the Most High: “Were it not for God’s use of some people to repel others, the monks’ cells, the churches, the synagogues, and the mosques, in which His name is much remembered, would have been destroyed” (Q 22:40). It places the monks’ cells and the churches before the mosques, and causes God’s name to be much remembered in them. This indicates the truth of what the Christians maintain and that they are not obliged to give up what they follow, for turning away from truth can only be toward falsity.
(*Ajwiba*, 173 [94–95]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* §§ 11–12)
- VI. The Great Qurʾān voices praise of the Apostles and the Gospel and of the fact that the latter remains unchanged, in the words of the Most High: “We have sent down to you the Book with the truth, confirming the Books that were before it” (Q 5:48), that is, the Torah and the Gospel. If it confirms them, they have not been altered. And they cannot have been changed after that because of their renown in all times and places, which makes any change in them impossible. And also because of the saying of the Most High in the Qurʾān: “*Alif, lam, mim*. That is the Book wherein there is no doubt, a guidance for the God-fearing” (Q 2:2). The Book is the Gospel, according to God’s words, may He be exalted: “If they call you [Muḥammad] a liar, the messengers before you were called liars; they brought clear signs, Psalms, and the enlightening Book” (Q 3:184). The Book here is the Gospel, because if He meant the Qurʾān, He would not have said “that” but “this.” And also because of His saying: “And say: I believe in whatever Book God has sent down” (Q 42:5).
(*Ajwiba*, 180–182 [98–99]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* §§ 13–17)
- VII. The Noble Qurʾān commends the People of the Book in the words of the Most High: “Say, O unbelievers, I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship. I am not going to worship what you worship, nor will you worship what I worship. You have your religion and I have my religion” (Q 109:1–6). And in His saying, exalted be He: “Do not debate with the People of the Book save in the best way, except for those of them who have done wrong” (Q 29:46). Those that do wrong are only the Jews, the calf worshippers and killers of the prophets. And also in His saying: “Say, we believe in what has been sent down to us and has been sent down to you. Our God and your God is one and we submit to Him [or: we are Muslims]” (Q 29:46). He did not say, ‘Submit to Him’ [or: ‘Become Muslims yourselves’]. And also in His saying, “You surely will find the people with the strongest enmity toward those who believe to be the Jews and those who practice polytheism. And you will find the closest in affection to those who believe to be those who say, ‘We are Christians.’ That is because there are priests and monks among them and they do not act arrogantly” (Q 5:82).

[The Qurʾān] mentions our good qualities and our good intentions, it denies that we are polytheists, quoting God's words: "those who practice polytheism" (Q 5:82), and it puts us on a par with others in the saying of the Most High: "Those who believe, those who practice Judaism, the Christians, and the Sabaeans, those who believe in God and in the last day, and do good works; they will have their reward with their Lord, no fear will be upon them, nor will they grieve" (Q 2:62).

(*Ajwiba*, 212–214 [123–124]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* §§ 17–22)

- VIII. [The Qurʾān] speaks approvingly of our sacrificial offerings and, in the saying of the Most High, warns us if we disesteem what we possess: "When the Apostles said, 'O Jesus, son of Mary, is Your Lord able to let down a table for us from the heavens?', He said, 'Fear God, if you are believers.' They said, 'We want to eat of it and our hearts will become calm and we will know that you have told us the truth, and we will be witnesses to it.' Jesus, son of Mary, said, 'O God, our Lord, let down for us a table from the heavens to be a feast for the first and for the last of us, and a sign from You, and sustain us; You are the best of sustainers.' God said, 'I will let it down for you, and whoever of you disbelieves afterwards, I will punish him with a punishment with which I will not punish anyone else in the world'" (Q 5:112–115). The table is the sacrificial offering in which we partake in every holy liturgy.

(*Ajwiba*, 221–222 [127]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 23)

- IX. God, may He be exalted, has given us notice declaring that we shall put our faith in Jesus, upon whom be peace, saying: "There is no one among the People of the Book who will not come to believe in him before his death" (Q 4:159). How can we [Christians] follow someone [Muḥammad] about whom God, may He be exalted, gave notice that he doubts his own situation, in His saying: "Surely, either we or you are upon right guidance or in manifest error" (Q 34:24). God commanded him in the opening *sūra* that he should ask for guidance to the straight path—"the path of those on whom You have bestowed favor, who do not evoke God's anger nor go astray" (Q 1:6). The ones on whom He has bestowed favor are the Christians, and the ones against whom He is angered are the Jews, and those going astray are the worshippers of idols.

(*Ajwiba*, 224–225 [129–130]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 24)

- X. It is not part of God's justice, may He be exalted, to demand of us that we follow a messenger whom He has not sent to us and whose Book we are unacquainted with in our own language.

(*Ajwiba*, 236 [135]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 24)

- XI. If the Muslims knew what we mean by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, they would not criticize us for it. What is meant by the Father is the essence, and by the Son, the *nutq* (=reason, logos), which subsists in that essence, and by the

Holy Spirit, the life. The three are one same God. The Muslims also believe in these three. Moreover, we have not attributed [these names] on our own initiative, but Jesus, upon whom be peace, said in the Gospel: "Go to all the peoples, baptize them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). At the beginning of the Qur'ān, it says, "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful" (Q 1:1), and limits itself to these three: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

When we say that the Messiah is a son born of God before the ages, without a temporal beginning, we mean that he is eternally *nutq* and that the Father is eternally *nātiq* (rational). God, may He be exalted, sent His *nutq* without any separation from the Father, his progenitor, just as the light of the sun is sent onto the earth without being separated from the orb, its progenitor, and just as the speech of man is sent to anyone who hears it without any separation from the mind that is its progenitor. The *nutq* became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Lady Mary, the virgin, may God be pleased with her. He was born of her in his human nature, not in his divine nature.

When we say that the Messiah is the Son of God, we do not mean fleshly sonship, or that God has a child from a female companion. The Qur'ān affirms the son with the meaning of *nutq* in the words of the Most High: "by the begetter and what he has begotten" (Q 90:3). The reason for the incarnation of the Word of God as a man is that God, may He be exalted, only addresses anyone from behind a veil, given that subtle things do not become manifest except in material things. For this reason, He became manifest in a human being, since that is the most exalted form of what God has created. [Through Jesus' humanity, God addressed the creatures who came in contact with him,] just as He addressed Moses, upon whom be peace, through the bush. He worked miracles through his divinity and manifested weakness in his humanity, and both actions belong to the Messiah, just as we say, 'In his body, Zayd is mortal, while in his soul, he is eternal.' In the same way, the humanity [of Jesus] was crucified, but not the divinity, just as when the red-hot iron is hammered and cropped, the hammering and cropping impinge upon the iron, not upon the fire. For this reason, the Qur'ān calls Jesus 'the spirit of God' and 'His word,' as it says that his name is Jesus. Therefore, the Creator, who is the Father and His *nutq* and His life, is one. Their multiplicity does not entail a multiplicity of creators, just as when we say, 'the tailor sews the garment,' and 'the hand of the tailor sews the garment,' we are not bound to say that two tailors sew the garment, but only one tailor. In the same way, our saying, 'God, may He be exalted, and His Spirit and His Word are one God,' does not imply that we worship three gods, just as three men are not implied when we speak of a man's intelligence, his rationality, and his life.

(*Ajwiba*, 237–239 [136–138]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* §§ 25–43)

- XII. When we advance one part of the Qur'ān in argument, we are not bound by the rest of it. It is just as when the creditor produces a bill of debt for a hundred dinars on which it is written that the debt has been paid, such a bill of debt does not benefit the debtor.

(*Ajwiba*, 266 [150]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* § 45)

- XIII. If the Muslims say, 'Why do you freely attribute words like 'son,' spirit,' and 'hypostases' [to God], given the fact that it gives the impression that you believe in a multiplicity of gods and that the gods are three composite individuals, and that you believe in carnal sonship?', we say to them, 'This is like your attributing ambiguous words such as 'hand,' 'eye' and the like [to God], which give the impression of positing corporeity [in Him], while you do not in fact believe in it. (*Ajwiba*, 267–268 [150]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* §§ 49–52)

- XIV. The Muslims disallow our use of the word *jawhar* in connection with God, may He be exalted, whereas it is not to be disallowed, given that existent beings are limited to substances and accidents, because the existing entity is either in need of nothing else for its existence—the substance—or depends on something else for its existence—the accident. In addition to our saying 'needing nothing else for its existence' and 'depending on something else [for its existence],' no third possibility exists. Since it is impossible for the Most High to be an accident, it becomes clear that He is a substance, by reason of the necessary limitation to one of the two. As for the Muslims saying that *jawhar* is something that receives accidents and occupies an extended space, which makes it impossible to apply such an expression to God, may He be exalted, it is not so. What occupies an extended space and receives accidents is the material substance, not the subtle one, like the light, the soul, and the mind.

(*Ajwiba*, 270–271 [152–153]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* §§ 55–58)

- XV. God, be He praised and exalted, owns justice and grace and He disposes freely of both of them. He sent Moses, on whom be peace, with the religion of justice, due to the severity in it, and when it was well established in their souls, there remained the perfection that only the most perfect of the perfect could bring about, namely, God, may He be exalted. Because He is bountiful, it was necessary that He exercise His bountifulness through the most grace-filled of beings, and among the existing beings there is none more grace-filled than His word, that is, His *nuṭq*. So He exercised His bountifulness by means of it, it having united with the most grace-filled of perceptible beings, namely, man, that His power might become evident. And so the result was the ultimate of perfection, and beyond perfection there remains only diminution.

(*Ajwiba*, 274 [153–154]; cf. *Letter to a Muslim Friend* §§ 59–62)

Appendix C

The Corruption of Early Christianity

1. Paul's Self-Immolation and the Ploy to Divide the Christians (*Ajwiba*, 537–543 [321–323])

The entirety of the Christians continued to practice circumcision until the time of Paul, who forbade it to them. He was more disastrous for the Christians than Satan. This Paul removed them from religion as a hair out of dough [i.e., without difficulty] and made them plunge into the darkness of error. It will have dire results for them! The reason is that he was a Jew and was massively intent on combatting Christians and killing them. His heart was not satisfied with that and so he devised a stratagem. He memorized the Gospel (*al-Injil*). Then he betook himself to an important monk and asked to serve him. He was accepted. He showed effort, sincerity, and zeal in different ways of piety and benevolence for a long time. One night, he woke up and screamed, agitated from what he had seen in his dream. The monk asked him about it. He said, "I saw the Messiah (peace be upon him). He blew upon my mouth and blessed me. Now I find within myself words I do not recognize." Then he mentioned some of those words and they found them to be from the Gospel in their entirety. They believed it was due to the Messiah's care for him and to his great blessing. The monk said, "I am more entitled to serve you and you are more entitled to leadership." And so he occupied the leading position, advanced, and became famous to the point that the kings of the Christians began to visit him on a fixed day of the year.

When his power over their hearts had become a reality, he told them during one of their visits to him: "The Messiah commanded me to descend tomorrow from this cell (*qilliyya*) and sacrifice myself at the foot of this mountain as an offering to him." This became distressing for the kings because of the end of his blessing and the pain of his departure, and that he will sacrifice himself with his own hand. They spent that night with sleepless eyes and their hearts anxious until morning. They entered to bid farewell. The king with the highest rank and most elevated position went in first to be alone during his farewell to him. Paul (may God curse him) said to him, "I am going now to the Messiah. I have a secret to entrust to you before I die. Know a measure of it and lift up its beacon." The king said to him, "What is it, O holy Father?" He said to him that the Messiah was the son of God the Most High. The king asked him, "The son of God?" He replied, "The son of God. Were he not, the things that were manifested through him would not have been manifest." The king kept to this, although he had not heard such a thing before that day. Then the king with the intermediate rank entered. Paul said to him, "I have a great secret. I am going to the Messiah. I leave it to you. Preserve it and live by it." He asked him, "What is it?" Paul said to him, "Mary is the consort of God." The king believed it, although he had not heard such a thing before that

time. Then the king with the lowest rank entered to see him. He scared him and made it as long as with the first two. He confided to him that God was the third of three. He then came out in the heat of the day. Everyone was standing on a common level waiting to see what would happen to Paul. He came out from his hermitage (*ṣawma'a*) wearing the robe of sacrifice and with a sharp knife. He descended to the foot of the mountain and sacrificed himself with his own hand. Everyone was looking at him. The king with the highest rank hurried to him after he had given up the ghost and took him in order to carry him to his country and have his blessing upon his kingdom. The other two kings took issue with him. So he divided Paul's remains between him and the other two in three parts and took the third containing the head. The other two kings contested his right to take the third that contained the noblest part of the body. The situation made it necessary to burn the body, reduce it to dust, and divide it into three parts for the sake of justice and equal shares. Afterwards, they went back to their countries. The king with the highest rank revealed his belief that Paul had confided to him and the other two did the same. Each one denied the doctrine of the other and denied that the monk Paul had said such thing or that it was part of the Prophetic messages and [Revealed] Books, and hence that it was unbelief. Each one fought the other as a religious duty and an act that draws one near to God. The harm they inflicted on one another was considerable and many of them were killed by their own swords and by the swords of the Jews, which was Paul's objective. Look how strong this hatred was and how great this craftiness!

2. The Cunning Jewish King (*Ajwiba*, 543–549 [323–326])

A party of our historians and of their historians said that when Jesus (peace be upon him) called the Children of Israel to faith, only a small group responded to him. Then he was raised up [to God]. The people delighted in his words until his followers reached seven hundred men. They waged war against the Children of Israel and called them to faith. Paul the Jew, who was also known as Būlus, was the king of the Children of Israel. He routed them and made them flee from Syria to al-Durūb.¹ They bested him. Paul said [to his army²]: "Indeed, their words are appealing, and they have gone to your enemy. They will send them back to their religious community (*milla*) and they will outnumber us. Commit yourselves to me in everything, whether good or bad." So they did. He left his kingdom and sallied forth to meet them [i.e., Jesus' followers], wearing their clothes so as to deceive them. They took him and said: "Thanks be to God who has taken your power from you." He said to them, "Gather your leaders. My foolishness does not go so far that I come to you without a proof (*burhān*)."² Their leaders said,

1 That is, the mountain passes of the Taurus and the Anti-Taurus ranges that connect northern Syria with Asia Minor.

2 *I'lām*, 241.

"What is the matter with you?" He said, "The Messiah came to me as I was departing from you and took my hearing, sight, and reason, so that I could not hear, see or reason. Then he lifted this from me and I made an oath to God to join your cause. And so I have come to live among you and to teach you the Torah and its laws."

They believed him and he commanded them to build a house (*bayt*) for him to worship God the Most High and pave it with ashes. So they did. He taught them whatsoever God willed. Then he locked the door and they walked around the house. They said, "We fear that he might have seen something displeasing." After a day, he reopened it. They said, "Have you seen anything displeasing?" He said, "No! Rather, I have an opinion I present to you. If it is correct then adopt it. It is the following: Have you ever seen a flock sent to pasture except from its master's [house] and leaving except from where the flock is commanded to do so?" They replied, "No!" He continued, "I have seen the morning and the night, the sun and the moon and the constellations coming only from there [i.e., from the east]. That is the direction which most deserves to be prayed in." They said, "You speak the truth." So he made them change their direction of prayer (*qibla*) from the Temple of Jerusalem to the true east. After that he locked the door for two days. They were more fearful than the first time and walked around it. Then he opened the door. They said, "Have you seen anything displeasing?" He said, "No! Rather, I have an opinion." They said, "Let us have it." He said, "Do you not claim that a man, if he gives a present to another man and the latter spurns it, he will be molested? God Most High has subjected to you all that is on the earth and in the sky. God is more entitled to not having his presents spurned. So how is it that some things are permitted [to eat] and others forbidden? Everything between the beetle and the elephant is permitted." They said, "You speak the truth." And so they followed him in permitting the forbidden things. After that he locked the door a third time. They were more fearful than the second time. When he finally let them in, he said, "I have an opinion." They said, "Let us have it." He said, "Clear everybody out of the house except Ya'qūb, Naṣṭūr, Malkūn, and Mu'min." They did so, and he said: "Have you ever known of any human being who has made a creature out of clay that became a living being?" They replied, "No!" He continued, "Have you ever known of any human being who has healed the blind and the leper, and bring the dead to life?" They replied, "No!" He said, "I claim that God Most High has manifested himself to us and then veiled himself again." One of them said, "You speak the truth." One said, "No. Rather, God is three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Another said, "[They are] God and his son." Another said, "He is God Most High who was incarnate for us." And so they split into four sects. Ya'qūb kept to Paul's saying that the God Most High is the Messiah and so did his devotees, who are the Jacobites. Naṣṭūr said that the Messiah is the son of God Most High by way of mercy and so did his devotees, the Nestorians, except that his devotees did not believe that he was son by way of mercy, but rather as mentioned before. As for Malkūn, he said that God Most High is three, and so did his devotees, the Melkites. Then Mu'min stood

and said to them, “May God’s curse be on you!” By God, this one has attempted nothing other than to corrupt you! We were the companions of the Messiah before him. We saw Jesus (peace be upon him) and we transmitted his words. This one is only leading you astray.” Paul said to those who followed him, “Rise up with us and let us combat this Mu’mín and kill him and his companions. Otherwise, he will corrupt your religion.” Mu’mín went to his people and said, “Do you not know that the Messiah is the servant of God and his messenger, and that he told you so?” They replied, “Yes!” He said, “Indeed, this accursed one has led those people astray.” They [i.e., Paul and his army] rode in their tracks and routed Mu’mín and his companions. They fled to Syria, where the Jews captured them. Mu’mín and his companions informed them of the news and said, “We have fled to you to be safe in your country. We have no need for anything in this world. We only need caves and hermitages (*ṣawāmīʿ*), and we shall wander about the land.” The Jews left them alone. Then some of those who had disbelieved imitated the companions of Mu’mín regarding the hermitages and monasticism (*raḥbāniyya*). And this is the word of the Most High: “But monasticism was something they invented” (Q 57:27). The Prophet (God bless him and grant him salvation) met thirty monks from among the companions of Mu’mín. They followed him and died Muslims. Referring to them was revealed the word of the Most High: “We supported the believers against their enemy and they were the ones who came out on top” (Q 61:14), that is, [We supported the believers] with a proof (*ḥujja*). This event took place forty years after the Messiah (peace be upon him).

3. State-Manufactured Christianity (*Ajwiba*, 549–552 [326–328])

The matter continued that way, without all of them being in agreement, until the time of King Constantine Caesar, two hundred and thirty-three years after the Messiah (peace be upon him) was raised up [to God]. His enemies multiplied and his kingdom was about to be destroyed because of the opposition of his subjects towards him, and because of their weakness and their negligence in supporting him. Constantine wanted all his subjects to be under one *sharīʿa*. The councilors (*ahl al-raʿy*) of his realm suggested to him that the people devote themselves to a worship based on vengeance [lit. seeking blood], since that was more suitable for securing their support. They found that the Jews had mentioned in their chronicles that a man came to them calling for the abrogation of the Torah and claiming the prerogative of interpretation (*taʾwīl*) for himself. The Jews searched for him while he was with a small group of his followers and seized one of them. Someone bore witness that he was the one they were looking for and they crucified him. They did not verify his identity except for the fact that he could not be found afterwards. Then Constantine betook himself to those who claimed adherence to the religion of the Messiah (peace be upon him). He found them holding different opinions and divided in their sayings. Constantine recovered what remained from the written record of their *sharīʿa*, attributed to the Messiah. He gathered his

ministers to discuss it. He confirmed whatever pleased him from their *sharī'a* and did what he judged fit respecting it, according to his choice and to what corresponded with his objective, such as the doctrine of the crucifixion (*ṣalbūt*), so that his people would worship God by seeking vengeance for the crucified, and the abandonment of circumcision, because this was the case among his people. Then he strengthened this by means of a dream he claimed to have had. He gathered his Byzantine subjects at the beginning of the seventh year of his reign and said, "I saw that by this sign I will conquer and vanquish the nations." Then he pointed to the cross. It made a deep impression on them. There was in his time a woman diviner (*kāhina*). He sent for her. She stated [having seen] something similar to it, thus corroborating Constantine's words and dream. The people did not know what the secret of that sign was until he carried out a military expedition under that sign and came out victorious. He scared them and vehemently exhorted them. They asked him about the secret of the sign, pressing him hard about it. He told them, "It was revealed to me in my sleep that God Most High had descended to earth from heaven and the Jews crucified him." This struck great fear in them, in view of the confirmation of it they had previously been given [i.e., the victory under the sign of the cross and the testimony of the diviner]. They submissively yielded to Constantine, and the circumstances of his realm were strengthened. He enacted these laws which they have today, or most of them. And perhaps most of the Gospel, or a great part of it, is Constantine's compilation (*talfiqāt*). The Christians do not deny these historical reports on the whole, even if some of them deny some of their details, and they are not able to negate the warring acts of Paul the Jew, nor their ousting from Syria.

Appendix D

Biblical Predictions

References to al-Qarāfī's *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira 'an al-as'ila al-fājira* are to the edition of Nājī Muḥammad Dāwūd (PhD diss., Umm al-Qurā University, Mecca 1985), followed by the edition of Bakr Zakī 'Awaḍ (2nd ed., Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1987) in parenthesis. References to al-Ja'farī's *Takhjil man ḥarrafa al-Tawrāh wa-l-Injil* are to the edition of Maḥmūd ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Qadaḥ (2 vols., Riyadh: Maktabat al-'Ubaykān, 1998). The exegetical themes correspond to al-Qarāfī's interpretations of the biblical passages, which are not necessarily the same as al-Ja'farī's.

	<i>Ajwiba</i> (pages)	<i>Takhjil</i> (pages and number)	Biblical passage	Description	Exegetical themes
1	692–693 (417–418)	651–652 [no. 1]	Gen 17:18–21	God promises Abraham to make of Ishmael a great nation, a promise fulfilled in the Islamic <i>umma</i> .	• Prediction of the Islamic <i>umma</i> • Abrahamic descent
2	693–694 (418–419)	658–659 [no. 7]	Gen 49:10	Muḥammad was the one sent to all announced by Jacob before his death.	• Prediction of Muḥammad • Universality of Islam
3	694–696 (419–420)	657–658 [no. 6]	Deut 18:14–15	Muḥammad was the prophet “like me” announced by Moses to the Children of Israel.	• Prediction of Muḥammad

TABLE (cont.)

	<i>Ajwiba</i> (pages)	<i>Takhjil</i> (pages and number)	Biblical passage	Description	Exegetical themes
4	696–697 (420–421)	656–657 [no. 5]	Deut 18:18–19	Muḥammad was the prophet “like Moses” promised by God to the Children of Israel.	• Prediction of Muḥammad
5	697–698 (421)	653 [no. 2]	Gen 16:8–12	An angel promises Hagar that Ishmael will subjugate the nations, a promise fulfilled in Muḥammad.	• Subjugation of the nations • Abrahamic descent
6	698 (422)	654 [no. 3]	Gen 21:13	God promises Abraham to make Ishmael a great nation, a promise fulfilled in the Islamic <i>umma</i> .	• Prediction of the Islamic <i>umma</i> • Abrahamic descent
7	698–701 (422–423)	654–656 [no. 4]	Deut 33:2	Moses foretells Muḥammad’s emergence in Mecca, accompanied by his pure Companions.	• Prediction of Muḥammad • Mecca’s elevated status • Prediction of the Islamic <i>umma</i>
8	701–704 (423–424)	701–703 [no. 69]	Jn 14:26	Muḥammad was the promised Paraclete who saved people from unbelief and taught them all things.	• Muḥammad as the Paraclete • Fight against error and unbelief

	<i>Ajwiba</i> (pages)	<i>Takhjūl</i> (pages and number)	Biblical passage	Description	Exegetical themes
9	704–707 (424–425)	703–705 [no. 70]	Jn 14:15–17	Muḥammad was the promised Paraclete, whose prophetic message will remain forever.	• Muḥammad as the Paraclete • Fight against error and unbelief • Superiority and finality of Islam.
10	707–708 (425–426)	705–707 [no. 71]	Jn 14:23, 25–26	Muḥammad was the promised Paraclete who will teach all things.	• Muḥammad as the Paraclete • Fight against error and unbelief
11	708–711 (426–427)	708–710 [no. 72]	Jn 15:26; 14:29	Muḥammad was the promised Paraclete who testified on behalf of Jesus against the accusations of the Jews.	• Muḥammad as the Paraclete • Fight against error and unbelief • Christology
12	711–714 (427–429)	711–712 [no. 73]	Jn 16:7–8, 12–13,15	Muḥammad was the promised Paraclete who will disclose things which the Messiah did not say.	• Muḥammad as the Paraclete • Fight against error and unbelief
13	714–715 (429)	712–713 [no. 74]	Jn 4:20–21	Jesus foretells the replacement of the Jerusalem Temple as direction for prayer.	• Abrogation of the previous dispensations

TABLE (cont.)

<i>Ajwiba</i> (pages)	<i>Takhjil</i> (pages and number)	Biblical passage	Description	Exegetical themes
14 715–716 (430)	713 [no. 75]	Mt 8:11–12	Jesus predicts the unbelief of Jews and Christians who will refuse to acknowledge Muḥammad.	• Universality of Islam • Fight against error and unbelief • Abrahamic descent
15 716–719 (430–431)	714 [no. 76]	Mt 17:10–12	Jesus announces a prophet to come who will teach all things.	• Prediction of Muḥammad • Fight against error and unbelief
16 719–720 (431–432)	714 [no. 77]	Jn 14:30	Jesus announces the coming of the “ruler of the world” who will find the world gone astray.	• Prediction of Muḥammad • Subjugation of the nations • Fight against error and unbelief
17 720–721 (432)	715 [no. 78]	Lk 3:16	John the Baptist announces the advent of “one who is more powerful than I.”	• Prediction of Muḥammad
18 721–723 (432–433)	715–716 [no. 79]	Mt 21:42–44	Jesus announces that God’s kingdom will be taken away from the Children of Israel and given to another nation, who will crush whoever opposes them.	• Prediction of Muḥammad • Prediction of the Islamic <i>umma</i> • Abrogation of the previous dispensations

	<i>Ajwiba</i> (pages)	<i>Takhjil</i> (pages and number)	Biblical passage	Description	Exegetical themes
19	724–725 (433–434)	659–660 [no. 8]	Ps 149:2,4–7	Reference to the Muslim call to prayer and foretelling of God's vengeance through the Arabs on the unfaithful nations.	• Reference to Islamic rituals • Subjugation of the nations • Universality of Islam
20	725–726 (434–435)	661 [no. 10]	Ps 48:1–2	Mention of Muḥammad's name and his emergence in “the city of God,” and allusion to the universality of his mission.	• Muḥammad's name • Mecca's elevated status • Universality of Islam
21	726–727 (435–436)	662–663 [no. 13]	Ps 72:8–15	Description of Muḥammad and the Muslim practice of invoking blessings upon him; prediction of the subjugation of the nations.	• Muḥammad's description • Reference to Islamic rituals • Subjugation of the nations
22	728–729 (436)	662 [no. 12]	Isa 42:11–12 (attributed to David)	Prediction of Islam's emergence from the Arabian desert.	• Original Arab character of Islam • Abrahamic descent

TABLE (cont.)

<i>Ajwiba</i> (pages)	<i>Takhjil</i> (pages and number)	Biblical passage	Description	Exegetical themes
23 729–730 (436–437)	664–665 [no. 16]	Ps 2:7–9	David announces a “son” of God who shall inherit the nations and rule them with a rod of iron.	• Prediction of Muḥammad • Subjugation of the nations
24 730 (437)	665 [no. 17]	Ps 8:4–6	David announces a man invested by God with dominion over all the earth.	• Prediction of Muḥammad • Subjugation of the nations
25 731–732 (438)	665–666 [no. 18]	Isa 21:6–9	Isaiah announces a man riding on a camel who will destroy the graven idols.	• Prediction of Muḥammad • Fight against error and unbelief
26 732–734 (438–439)	666–667 [no. 18]	Isa 60:4–7	Foretelling of Mecca's elevated status and the pilgrimage of the nations to it.	• Mecca's elevated status • Reference to Islamic rituals
27 734–736 (439–442)	667–668 [no. 19]	Isa 54:11–15	Foretelling of Mecca's elevated status.	• Mecca's elevated status

	<i>Ajwiba</i> (pages)	<i>Takhjūl</i> (pages and number)	Biblical passage	Description	Exegetical themes
28	736–739 (442–443)	668–669 [no. 20]	Isa 49:1–5	Mention of Muḥammad's name, his eloquence, his universal mission, and the manifestation of the perfection of divine wisdom in his <i>sharīʿa</i> .	• Muḥammad's name and description • Universality of Islam • Superiority and finality of Islam
29	739–741 (443–444)	669 [no. 21]	Isa 54:1–3	God promises Hagar that her seed shall be greater than Sarah's seed and will possess the earth and rule over the nations.	• Prediction of the Islamic <i>umma</i> • Abrahamic descent • Subjugation of the nations
30	741–745 (444–447)	669–670 [no. 22]	Isa 42:1–11; 9:6	Mention of Aḥmad's name, his universal mission, and that he will carry the sign of prophethood on his shoulders.	• Muḥammad's name and description • Superiority and finality of Islam • Mecca's elevated status • Reference to Islamic rituals • Original Arab character of Islam

TABLE (cont.)

	<i>Ajwiba</i> (pages)	<i>Takhjil</i> (pages and number)	Biblical passage	Description	Exegetical themes
31	745–746 (447)	671 [no. 23]	Isa 35:1–2	Mention of Aḥmad's name and prediction of Islam's emergence from the Arabian desert and Mecca's future role.	• Muḥammad's name • Original Arab character of Islam • Mecca's elevated status • Superiority and finality of Islam • Universality of Islam
32	747–748 (447–448)	672–673 [no. 25]	Isa 41:8–16	Mention of Muḥammad's name and prediction of his victories in war and the spread of his kingdom.	• Muḥammad's name • Abrahamic descent • Subjugation of the nations
33	748 (448)	673 [no. 26]	Isa 63:14–16	Mention of Muḥammad's name.	• Muḥammad's name
34	748–749 (448–449)	674 [no. 28]	Isa 54:1	Prediction of the emergence of a prophet from Mecca, who will attract a great following.	• Mecca's elevated status • Prediction of the Islamic <i>umma</i> • Fight against error and unbelief

<i>Ajwiba</i> (pages)	<i>Takhjūl</i> (pages and number)	Biblical passage	Description	Exegetical themes
35 749–750 (449)	675–676 [no. 29]	Isa 9:6–7	Prediction of a prophet-king who will carry the sign of the seal of prophecy (a mole between the shoulders).	• Description of Muḥammad • Superiority and finality of Islam
36 751 (450)	678 [no. 34]	Isa 5:1 (?)	Mention of Aḥmad's name.	• Muḥammad's name
37 751 (450)	679 [no. 36]	Isa 24:16	Mention of Muḥammad's name.	• Muḥammad's name
38 751–752 (450–451)	681 [no. 39]	Isa 43:20–21	Isaiah predicts Islam's emergence from the Ḥijāz and the choosing of the Arab nation.	• Original Arab character of Islam • Prediction the Islamic <i>umma</i>
39 752–753 (451)	683–684 [no. 44]	Isa 60:1–4	Isaiah predicts the pilgrimage of the nations to Mecca.	• Mecca's elevated status • Reference to Islamic rituals
40 753–754 (451–452)	688–689 [no. 51]	Hos 11:12	Hosea predicts the emergence of the Muslim community, God's "holy and faithful nation."	• Prediction the Islamic <i>umma</i> • Fight against error and unbelief

TABLE (cont.)

<i>Ajwiba</i> (pages)	<i>Takhjil</i> (pages and number)	Biblical passage	Description	Exegetical themes
41 754–755 (452)	689 [no. 52]	Mic 4:1–2	Micah predicts the pilgrimage of the nations to the Ka'ba and Mount 'Arafa in Mecca.	• Mecca's elevated status • Reference to Islamic rituals
42 755–758 (452–454)	689–690 [no. 53]	Hab 3:3–12	Mention of Muḥammad's name, his emergence from the Ḥijāz, and prediction of the subjugation of the nations.	• Muḥammad's name • Original Arab character of Islam • Subjugation of the nations
43 758–760 (454–455)	695–696 [no. 62]	Ezek 19:10–14	Ezekiel predicts the rejection of Israel and the emergence of Islam from the Ḥijāz.	• Abrogation of previous dispensations • Original Arab character of Islam
44 760–761 (455)	696 [no. 63]	Ezek 23:22–25 (?)	Ezekiel predicts the defeat of the Jews by the Arabs, assisted by angels.	• Subjugation of the nations • Abrahamic descent
45 761–762 (455)	696 [no. 64]	Hab 3:9 (attributed to Daniel)	Mention of Muḥammad's name and of his military campaigns.	• Muḥammad's name • Subjugation of the nations

	<i>Ajwiba</i> (pages)	<i>Takhjil</i> (pages and number)	Biblical passage	Description	Exegetical themes
46	762–763 (455–456)	697–698 [no. 66]	Dan 2:31–45	Daniel predicts the emergence of a prophet who will subjugate all the nations and establish his authority on earth until the end of this world.	• Prediction of Muḥammad • Subjugation of the nations
47	764–767 (457–459)	699–700 [no. 67]	Dan 7:2–8,20–23	The Arabs are the fourth kingdom of Daniel's vision which will subdue the previous kingdoms and will stand forever.	• Subjugation of the nations • Original Arab character of Islam
48	768–770 (459–461)	700–701 [no. 68]	Daniel (spurious quotation)	An angel announces to Daniel the advent of Muḥammad and his eventual rejection by the Children of Israel.	• Prediction of Muḥammad • Abrogation of previous dispensations
49	771–772 (461)	717 [no. 80]	1 Jn 4:1–3	The Apostle John attests that Muḥammad is from God because his belief about Jesus is the truth, while Jews and Christians are both in error.	• Fight against error and unbelief • Christology

TABLE (cont.)

	<i>Ajwiba</i> (pages)	<i>Takhjil</i> (pages and number)	Biblical passage	Description	Exegetical themes
50	772–773 (461–462)	692–693 [no. 58]	Jer 5:15–16	Jeremiah foretells the emergence of the mighty Arab nation, which God will incite against the Children of Israel.	• Prediction of the Islamic <i>umma</i> • Original Arab character of Islam
51	773–774 (462–463)	681 [no. 40]	Isa 46:9–11	God announces Muḥammad's emergence from the desert and the quick spread of his message.	• Prediction of Muḥammad

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