Islamic Reformism and Christinaity. A Critical Reading of the Works of Muhammad Rashid Rida and his Associates (1898-1935)

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Chapter Four
False Allegations or Proofs? Riḍā's Formative Polemics on Christianity

In his annotated translation of Riḍā's above-mentioned monograph, *Shubuhāt*, Simon Wood argued that Riḍā's specific wording of the title of his earliest work on Christianity as *Shubuhāt al-Naṣārā wā Ḥujaj al-'Islām* (Allegations of Christians and Proofs of Islam) was carefully chosen. It was no accident, Wood says, that the book was not entitled *Shubuhāt al-Naṣārā wā Ḥujaj al-Muslimīn* (The Criticisms of the Christians and the arguments of Muslims) or *Shubuhāt al-Naṣrāniyya wā Ḥujaj al-'Islām* (the Obscurities of Christianity and the Clear Proof of Islam). Wood does not give any reason why he has given three different English translations for the two keywords, *Shubuhāt* and *Ḥujaj*, in Riḍā's title. He further argued that Riḍā's 'title reflected his understanding of an ideal or ultimate Christianity that was not opposed to Islam. Ideal Christianity, however, was not that represented by European missionaries or their local allies. In that sense, Riḍā felt that the majority of his contemporary Muslims had become an argument against their own religion.'[1]

Wood's argument is true when looking at how Riḍā understood the Christian Scriptures as a whole as well as their relation to Islam. But his analysis of Riḍā's wording of the title is far-fetched and not convincing. Wood only depended on Riḍā's monograph bearing this title, but nowhere mentioned that it was a collection of sixteen articles that had appeared earlier as a special section in a number of issues that Riḍā had compiled a few years later in a small volume. As a matter of fact, and in contradiction to Wood's argument, Riḍā headed eleven of these articles in *al-Manār* with the phrase, *Shubuhāt al-Masīhiyyīn* (sometimes *al-Naṣārā*) *wā Ḥujaj al-Muslimīn* (The Allegations of the Christians and the Proofs of Muslims).[2] As it was his initial work on the subject, Riḍā's *Shubuhāt* only represents, as I shall show in the coming chapters, a formative phase of its author's views on the Christian belief. Drawing a final conclusion on the basis of Riḍā's whole understanding of Christianity and his polemics with his Christian counterparts as a result of studying only this book would be misleading. The work itself should be evaluated in the light of Riḍā's subsequent writings in the historical context mentioned above. Besides, Riḍā published these articles from time to time as response to a variety of Christian Arab missionaries roughly between 1901-1904, a period when Western missionary literature in Arabic was not very widespread among Muslims. As we shall see, this treatise was a rather unsystematic book, sometimes of an inconsistent and rhetorical style.

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[1] Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[2] See, vol. 4/15, vol. 4/16, vol. 4/17, vol. 4/19, vol. 5/19, vol. 6/6, vol. 6/7, vol. 6/8, vol. 6/9, vol. 6/11, vol. 6/12.

In the present chapter, we will discuss Riḍā's responses as having been selected by him in the monograph, but we supplement them with other background ideas that appeared in the journal. Discussing the details of all articles under this section would, however, would fall outside the scope of the present chapter. Riḍā composed six of his articles in *al-Manār* (which were excluded in his monograph) under the same title as answers to the Egyptian Protestant Magazine. Some of these articles also did not directly deal with his views on Christianity, but were mostly devoted to refute Christian 'allegations' against the Qur'ān.[3] In a similar manner, Riḍā published four lengthy reactions to some other articles written in the above-mentioned Brazilian Arabic journal *al-Munāẓir* (see, chapter 2) by a Christian Syrian emigrant under the name of Rafūl Saʿādeh. These articles were not included in the monograph either. They mainly contain refutations of Saʿādeh's arguments that Islam had no success, except because of the Christian principles it bore; and that Muslims were not as wise as other conquerors of Syria (such as the Seleucids and Romans), who had never attacked the habits and feelings of the Syrians.[4] But the reason why Riḍā did not include these articles in the monograph is not known.

It is also worth noting that the last two articles of Riḍā's monograph were written as a reply to Faraḥ Anṭūn's critique of Islam during his above-mentioned debate with ʿAbduh (see, chapter 2). In these articles, Riḍā clearly put Anṭūn on an equal footing with missionaries. He argued that when the like of the editor of *al-Jāmiʿa* saw the failure of evangelists in converting Muslims through purely religious methods, he embarked upon planting doubts in their minds through what he claimed to be scientific methods. He therefore exerted his effort to convince them: 1) that their religion, like other religions, is the enemy of reason and knowledge, 2) that their scholastic theologians denied causes; and 3) that combining of religious and civil political authority in the office of the Caliph harms Muslims, causing their social retardation'.[5]

4.1. A Muslim Doubting the Authenticity of the Qur'ān

It might be also interesting to know that in 1903 a certain ʿAbdullāh Nasūḥī, one of *al-Manār*'s readers from Alexandria, asked Riḍā to discontinue publishing the section of the *Shubuhāt*, which, in his view, had become a platform for the publicity of missionary allegations. According to Nasūhī, no Muslim would have ever known about their publications, had *al-Manār* not published regular sections rebutting their ideas. The reader also believed that missionary treatises and magazines were only read by the Christians

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[3] See, for instance, *al-Manār*, vol. 6/6 (Rabīʿ al-ʾAwwal 1321/June 1903), pp. 217-223; vol. 6/7, (Rabīʿ al-Thānī 1321/June 1903), pp. 252-255; vol. 6/8, pp. 294-298; vol. 6/9 (Jumāda al-ʾŪlā 1321/July 1903), pp. 330-335; vol. 6/12 (Jumāda al-Thāniya 1321/September 1903), pp. 457-461.
[4] For more details, see *al-Manār*, vol. 7/1 (Muḥarram 1322/March 1904), p. 17-27; vol. 7/2 (Ṣafar 1322/April 1904), pp. 94-100; vol. 7/6, pp. 225-231.
[5] As translated by Wood, op. cit., p. 198.

themselves.[6] Riḍā replied that the editors of these publications frequently sent their magazine to the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar and other Muslim scholars, who took no initiative to respond to their contentions. He found it incumbent upon Muslims to counter their writings, otherwise they would be held sinful.[7] Another Egyptian subscriber informed *al-Manār* that one of his friends converted to Christianity only as a result of reading these missionary critiques of Islam.[8] In 1904, Riḍā decided to cease publishing the section. The judge of Bahrain, however, encouraged him to resume his refutations, describing *al-Manār* as a 'shooting star burning the devils, and tearing down their allegations'.[9]

Riḍā embarked upon writing the section of the *Shubuhāt* after he had read an article in an Islamic newspaper by a Muslim journalist, who was affected by missionary writings and became doubtful about some Islamic teachings. Riḍā made it clear that he felt obliged to become directly involved in discussing these issues, although he was always keen on a peaceful attitude in his journal towards other religions, including Christianity. He stressed that *al-Manār*'s policy was neither to inflame the animosity between different religious groups, nor to invite people to defame each other's belief, but missionaries were constantly attacking Islam.[10]

Riḍā was surprised that the Muslim writer had read any of missionary works, but did not try to study any Muslim works in response to them, such as *Iẓhār al-Haqq* or *al-Sayf al-Ṣaqīl*.[11] The doubts, which had emerged in his mind, were: 1) the divergence of some Islamic texts from the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, 2) the silence of these Scriptures about many points which had been later mentioned in the Qur'ān and 3) the fact that many things mentioned in the ḥadīth and the Qur'ān contradict actual reality or the truths already established by modern sciences.

Riḍā argued that silence about something is not the same as its denial. It is not reasonable that one would believe in the Divine message of Islam on the

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[6] *Al-Manār*, vol. 6/11 (Jumādā al-Thānya 1321 /August 1903), pp. 425-427. The same reader had criticised *al-Manār* for giving a special tribute for Pope Leo XIII after his death; see, pp. 434-440.
[7] Ibid., p. 426.
[8] Ibid., pp. 426-27.
[9] *Al-Manār*, vol. 6/23 (Dhū al-Ḥijja 1321/18 February 1904), p. 919.
[10] First article, 'Shubuhāt al-Masīḥiyyīn ʿalā al-ʾIslam', *al-Manār*, vol. 4/5 (Muḥarram 1319 /May 1901), pp. 179-183.
[11] Umar Tamīmī al-Dārī and Muḥammad Zakī Sanad, *Kitāb al-Sayf al-Saqīl fī al-Radd 'alā Risālat al-Burhān al-Jalīl* (The Polished Sword in Response to *al-Burhān al-Jalīl*), Cairo, 1895. It was a response to *al-Burhān al-Jalīl 'alā Siḥḥat al-Tawrāh wa al-Injīl* (The Glorious Proof on the Reliability of the Old and New Testament), which was written by Rev. F. A. Klein, and was translated and published by The Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Jerusalem in 1893. The *Burhān* generated many Muslim works. See, my paper, 'Muslim Response to Missionary Literature in Egypt: Varieties of Muslim Apologetics during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century', presented at The International Congress: 'Religious Change in Pluralistic Contexts', LISOR, Leiden, 28-30 August 2003. The Egyptian scholar Mustafā al-Rifāʿī al-Labbān also wrote a response to a missionary treatise dealing with the same subject under the title: *Mawqif al-ʾIslām min Kutub al-Yahūd wā al-Naṣārā* (The positions of Islam towards the Scriptures of the Jews and Christians), Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Salafiyya, 1353/ 1934-1935.

basis of what the authors of Jewish and Christian Scriptures (whom Riḍā named *mu'arrikhūn* 'historians') had mentioned or neglected. The Muslim writer used the frequently used missionary argument, which attempted to prove the genuineness of the Old and New Testament on the basis of the Qur'ān. In this sense, he further argued that the Qur'ān made a declaration of truth of the revelation of the Bible; but if the revelation of the Bible were proved to be false in some points, would the testimony of the Qur'ān for false Scriptures bring the authenticity of the Qur'ān itself also into suspicion?![12]

In his reply, Riḍā maintained that the Qur'ān has testified to the Torah as a book of laws and precepts, not as a book of history borrowed from Assyrian and Chaldean mythologies. These mythologies were proved to contradict the sciences of geology and archeology. For example, it had been proved that serpents do not eat earth in contradiction with God's command in the Torah for the serpent: 'and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life' (Genesis 3:14).[13] The Qur'ān therefore bore witness to the authenticity of the Torah, as a book of legislation (al-Mā'idah 5:44),[14] but did not give any testimony for other historical books, such as those of unknown authors and written centuries after Moses. In Riḍā's view, any historical analogy between the Qur'ān and other Biblical books, such as Isaiah, Ezekiel or Daniel was baseless, as the Qur'ān had never born witness to them. He asked the writer not to be dazzled by the claims of the Christians that all the books mentioned in the Old Testament were parts of the original Torah.[15] As for the New Testament, Muslims should believe that it was the revelation upon Jesus which included religious exhortations, rulings and wisdoms. All other books of the New Testament were nothing but a part of history, and in the same way as the Torah, they had been written down many years after Jesus' death with no *asānīd* (chains of transmission). The Qur'ān had testified that the Christians did not preserve all parts of the revelation upon Jesus (Al-Mā'idah 5:14).[16]

Riḍā added that the Qur'ān also rebuked the Christians and the Jews for having mingled the original Bible with other historical stories. Thus, Riḍā argued, Muslims have no definitive criteria to distinguish the originally revealed parts from other parts. However, Muslims hold the books of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Leviticus as parts of the original Torah. Riḍā also favored the Sermon of Jesus on the Mount, and other sermons according to the Gospel of Matthew (chapters 5, 6 and 7), as parts of the original Gospel.[17]

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[12] *A-Manār*, vol. 4/5, p. 80.

[13] Ibid., p. 181

[14] 'It is we who revealed the Law (to Moses): therein was guidance and light. By its standard have been judged the Jews, by Prophets who bowed (as in Islam) to God's will, by the Rabbis and the Doctors of Law'..

[15] Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 95

[16] 'Lo! We are Christians, 'We made a covenant, but they forgot a part of that whereof they were admonished'.

[17] Leirvik wrongly stated that Riḍā criticised the Semon on the Mount as naïve. Leirvik, *Images*, p. 141. The Sermon on the Mount was a common stock of Gospel materials widely known in

Nevertheless, he made it clear that any report that might contradict the Qur'ān in these books must be totally rejected, since 'God speaks truthfully, whereas historians lie'.[18]

By the end, Riḍā requested the writer to visit him in his office, if his written answers were not sufficient. One month later, Riḍā maintained that he decided to stop publishing on the subject, as the writer visited him in his office and was convinced by his answers.[19]

4.2. Researches of the Diligent

Very soon Riḍā started to publish his replies against Christian writings once again. As we have mentioned (see introduction), his early replies were directed to the missionary treatise written by the Egyptian Niqūlā Yaʿqūb Ghabriyāl. Riḍā held Christian writers responsible for attacking Islam. He felt compelled to react, even though he was still seeking harmony among different religious groups in society.[20] It was Ghabriyāl's 'unfavorable judgment' of Islam that made him return to polemics. The author tried to prove the authenticity of the Bible as based on Qur'ānic passages. It was also a direct message to Muslims to 'share with the Christians their salvage and the eternal life, which they have acquired through Jesus'.[21]

Riḍā evaluated the method of Ghabriyāl's *Researches* as 'decent', as it did not contain any 'profanity' against Islam as compared to other missionary works. Ghabriyāl personally gave a copy of his book to Riḍā, and requested him to give feedback in *al-Manār*. Salīm Pasha al-Ḥamawī, a Syrian Greek Orthodox and a friend of Riḍā, reviewed the book in his newspaper *al-Falāḥ*, and asked Riḍā to respond to it as well. Other missionary friends of Ghabriyāl made the same request to Riḍā. In the beginning, Riḍā expressed his hesitation, stating that 'the *mujādāla* (debate or polemics) is the job of those who live by it: 'as the seller seeks a buyer, the debater seeks another debater.'[22] Riḍā was

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Muslim literature, see, T. Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literatur*e, Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 33.

[18] Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

[19] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/7 (Ṣafar 1319/June 1901), p. 280

[20] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/10 (Rabīʿ al-Thānī 1319 /July 1901), pp. 379-380. In *al-Manār*, Riḍā titled the article as: 'Shubuhāt al-Tārīkh 'ala al-Yahūdiyya wā al-Naṣrāniyya (Doubts of History about Judaism and Christinaity)'. In the collection of articles he subtitled it as: 'Muwāzana bayna al-ʾAnbiyāʾ al-Thalāthah (Comparison among the Three Prophets)'.

[21] Ghabriyāl, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[22] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/10, p. 380. Other contemporary Muslim scholars also refuted Ghabriyāl's treatise. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Saʿīd al-Baghdādī (d. 1911), the Iraqi head of the Commercial Court in Baghdad, systematically responded to its nine chapters. Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Saʿīd Baghdādī, (Bajah Ji Zadah), *al-Fāriq bayna al-Makhlūq wā al-Khāliq*, Cairo, 1904, pp. 31-83. The book was published in Cairo three years after the appearance of Riḍā's articles in *al-Manār*. Ghabriyāl's work was, in his view, nothing but a 'camouflage', which would swindle the fair-minded Christians and convince them with the authenticity of their Scriptures. In order to discover the deception of its author, Baghdādī advised his readers, Christians or not, to purchase a copy of Ghabriyāl's work, and put it beside him while reading his refutation. On the margin of Baghdādī's work, the author included al-Qarāfī's *al-Ajwiba al-Fākhira* and Ibn al-Qayyim's *Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā.*

worried that he would not be able to respond to the issues mentioned by Ghabriyāl without exceeding his boundaries and attack Christianity. As a result the authors of such works would charge him with religious fanaticism. For him, the lucidity of Islam would need no defender.'[23]

4.2.1. Three Prophets: Historical Doubts about Judaism and Christianity

Riḍā contended Ghabriyāl that anyone who studied the Scriptures of the three religions and the biographies of their narrators would definitely reach the conclusion that Islam was the most 'obvious' and 'soundest' one. Once he had had a conversation with a Christian historian, whom he described as 'not fanatically disposed towards one religion over another'. They imposed upon themselves the hypothetical condition that they did not believe in any religion in order to define who the greatest man in history was. Riḍā nominated Muḥammad, while the historian's choice went to Moses and Jesus. They agreed that the three of them were the greatest and most influential in history, but did not agree on the criteria that made them greatest in terms of status and historical influence.[24]

As for Moses, Riḍā maintained that he was brought up under the custody of the 'greatest king' of his time. In the court of the Pharaoh, Moses rose up in the 'cradle' of royalty and power, and therefore became imbued with love of rule and authority. He witnessed the civilized world of Egypt, the universal sciences, *Funūn al-Ṣinā'ah* (arts of industry) and magic. He grew up in the shadow of the Egyptian laws. The pride of the monarchy made him valiant. He turned against the Pharaoh, as he was conscious of the weakness and humiliation of the Children of Israel as a disgraced nation under the Pharaoh. He sought the partisan support (*'Aṣabiyya*) of his people, and attempted to establish a kingdom like the one under which he grew up. He rebelled against the Pharaoh by using this *'Aṣabiyya*. Riḍā did not consider Moses' miracle of the passing of the sea to have been a matter of magic or supernatural power. Some historians stated that the Children of Israel had crossed the sea at a shallow point at the end of the tide's ebb. When the Pharaoh and his people tried to cross, they drowned due to the increase of the high flow. Riḍā did not mention any historian by name. Here he alluded to theories like those of the Hellenistic Jewish historian Artapanus who pointed to the ebb as a possible explanation.[25] Riḍā compared the story to what, according to him, happened to the French political leader Napoleon Bonaparte (d. 1821) and his soldiers on their way back to the Egyptian shore, when they tried to cross the Red Sea at

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 99

[25] Artapanus explained the crossing of the sea by Moses and the Israelites as a consequence of Moses' familiarity with the natural phenomena of the area. See, for instance, Stanislav Segert, 'Crossing the Waters: Moses and Hamilcar', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 53/3 (July, 1994), pp. 195-203.

the time of the tide's ebb, and the water began to rise. This made their return very difficult. Bonaparte commanded his soldiers to get hold of each other till they were overpowered by the strength of the rising water.[26] All other miracles attributed to Moses were, in Riḍā's view, dubious in regard to their transmission, and of doubtful understanding.[27]

As for Jesus, Riḍā described him as a Jewish man who was brought up under the Mosaic laws, who was judging according to the Roman code, and who had read Greek philosophy. Therefore, he was well acquainted with the three great civilizations and their sciences; and was not keen on establishing a new law or nation. Riḍā also suggested that Jesus, as an eloquent preacher, had some knowledge of Greek philosophy of life, such as asceticism, which had been clearly expressed in the renunciation of worldly pleasures and the humiliation of the body for the sake of the soul and the entering of the Kingdom of the Heavens.[28] Some of the zealous poor followed him, as they found in his mission consolation and comfort. Riḍā argued that these followers embarked on reporting miraculous stories, just as common Muslims were attributing miraculous acts to Muslim Sufis. In his interpretation of the clash of his arguments with the Qur'ānic reports of the miraculous acts attributed to Jesus, such as his fatherless birth, Riḍā maintained that it was a claim that could never be proven, except after establishing the rational evidence of the authenticity of Islam.[29]

As compared to Moses, Riḍā saw that Jesus in many aspects did not accomplish noteworthy achievements regarding science, social reform or civilization. His sermons and exhortations, however, led to the demolition of civilizations, the ruining of prosperity, and the decline of humankind from its highest degrees to the lowest depth of animal existence. The sermons of Jesus would lift up human souls in humiliation and humbleness, encouraging people to discard any flourishing or progressive development in the world. Riḍā mentioned in that regard examples, such as: 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God' (Matthew, 19:24). He added that the doctrine of crucifixion also allowed 'permissiveness', since it taught the believers that any sin was forgiven through it. Riḍā concluded that the teachings of Christianity were derived from paganism and that it 'relinquished any light [produced by reflection]'. He attempted to refute the claim that Western civilization was based on Christianity. A civilization based on materialism, love of money and authority, arrogance and the enjoyment of worldly pleasures, does not match with the

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[26] Riḍā did not give this rationalist interpretation in his commentary on the Qur'ānic passages related to this story. He rendered stretching the sea for Moses to be a miraculous act caused by the Divine Providence. He gave his interpretation in light of Biblical narratives. He only quoted the story as mentioned in Exodus 13 and 14, which he considered to be a proper exegesis for the Qur'ānic story. See, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1999, vol. 9, pp. 91-92.

[27] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/10, p. 381.

[28] Ibid., p. 382.

[29] Ibid., pp. 382-83.

spirit of Christian asceticism. He strongly believed that the West reached its civilization only after it had entirely abandoned the Christian teachings.[30]

After having mentioned all these points, Riḍā reached his conclusion of the preference of the Prophet of Islam in human history. The prophet Muḥammad was born as an orphan, and was raised up in a nation of paganism, illiteracy and ignorance; one lacking laws, civilization, national unity, knowledge or craft. The highest degree of development attained in his time was that a group of people, who, due to their dealings with other tribes, had learnt to read and write. Neither he nor any of his followers was included in this group. However, he was capable of founding a nation, religion, law, kingdom and civilization in an unprecedented short period of time.[31]

Riḍā's counterpart in the discussion conceded that it was true that Muḥammad was the greatest man in history, but the sad status of Muslims nowadays was not compatible with the teachings of his religion. Riḍā answered that the Islamic civilization declined when Muslims abandoned their religion. The so-called Western civilization, on the other hand, began to exist after having come into contact with Muslims in Spain. The more the West would put Christianity aside, the more it advanced. Riḍā's Christian counterpart considered this answer to be an exaggerated statement.[32]

At the end, Riḍā returned to the Qur'ānic narration of the miracles of prophets. For him, the Qur'ānic narrative should be given preponderance as Divine revelation above all historical probabilities. He argued that the authenticity of any religion should be proven through supernatural acts, which are reported on the authority of its lawgiver. Riḍā favored the Muslim reports as the most reliable for many reasons. First of all, knowledge and oral transmission were known since the first century of Islam. It is not historically established that Muslims were conquered by an enemy, who burnt their books or demolished their entire religion and history. They were never persecuted nor obliged to conceal their belief and in the course of secrecy invented stories. Unlike other religions, Muslims initiated the science of *Tārīkh al-Rijāl* (Biography of Men) with which they examined the authenticity of narratives by means of studying their narrators.

4.2.2. Islam & Christianity: Three Goals of Religion

In a following article, Riḍā rebuked missionaries for their insistence on inviting Muslims to deny the Divine message of one of the three prophets, notwithstanding that his mission was established on the strongest rational proofs. He proposed a comparison between Christianity and Islam in the light of three general objectives that every religion should have: 1) soundness of doctrines, and therefore leading to the perfection of the human mind, 2) cultivation of morality leading to the perfection of the soul; and 3) the

[30] Ibid.,p. 383.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., p. 384.

goodness of acts facilitating welfare and interests of human beings, and therefore leading to the perfection of the body. This composition would demonstrate which one of the two religions really realizes these goals, and deserves to be followed.[33]

With regard to the first aspect, Riḍā argued that Muslims agree that beliefs should be derived from clear-cut proofs. Any sensible person would definitely judge the doctrines of Islam as sound. He did not agree with the author of the *Researches* that 'no one would grasp the essence of the Divine entity except God Himself, as Muslims and others agree'. Riḍā made a distinction between what the reason would prove on the basis of evidence without knowing its deepest entity, and what it would declare as impossible to know. Reason however does not attain knowledge of the true nature of any of the created things, but it comprehends external appearances and attributes. The Torah, in Riḍā's perspective, ascribes to God irrational attributes. Depending on early Islamic polemics, Riḍā maintained that telling about God in the Torah that God 'repented', 'grieved', or 'plotted to destroy man' (Genesis, 6:6-7) would indicate that He was ignorant and incapable.[34]

As for the second objective, Riḍā maintained that the Islamic teachings were the most adequate and perfect, as they were standing upon the foundations of justice and moderation. He was not restrained to say that the Christian teachings, on other hand, were based on 'excess' and 'exaggeration'. He referred to verses such as, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you' (Mathew, 5:44); 'But those mine enemies, [...] that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me' (Luke, 19:27). These verses made him convinced that its core message was a kind of excess in love, which human nature cannot stand.

In terms of the third objective, Riḍā argued that good deeds promote the human being spiritually and bodily, and in that sense all acts of worship in Islam are connected to a value. Prayer, for example, is obligated to prevent *Faḥshā'* (lewdness) and *Munkar* (reprehensible acts). He contended that it is hard to find these meanings of worship in other Scriptures. Worship in the Torah is substantiated only for the sake of 'worldly fortunes'. For instance, feasts in the Bible were only justified as a season of gathering, harvest, and agriculture (Exodus, 23: 14-16). The same holds true for his understanding of the Islamic precepts of transactions, which 'treat Muslims and non-Muslims equally'. Riḍā attempted to compare some of these Islamic precepts with their Biblical counterparts. He quoted that the Torah stipulates that people should not 'bear false witness against thy neighbour' (Exodus, 20: 16), while the Qur'ānic concept of giving one's testimony demands believers to 'stand firmly for justice and not be biased even against oneself, parents, kin, rich or poor' (al-

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[33] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/11 (Jumādā al-'Ūlā 1319 /August 1901), pp. 411-417; Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
[34] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/11, p. 412, Wood, ibid., p. 112. See, for instance, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā fī Ajwibat al-Yahūd wā al-Naṣārā,* edited by ʿIsām Farīd al-Harstānī, Beirut, 1994, pp. 219-221. Many Christian interpreters take these passages as metaphorical. See, for example, Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, Oxford University Press, 1988.

Mā'idah, 4:135). Riḍā further alleged that, unlike the Bible, the Qur'ān combines both faith and good deeds. Riḍā selected many Biblical examples to prove his point. In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul, for example, made it clear that 'Now to one who works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that works not, but believeth in him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness' (4:4-5).[35]

4.2.3. Judaism & Christianity Derived from Paganism?

In this part, Riḍā harshly criticised the Judeo-Christian Scriptures as being rehashed from pagan ideas.[36] In his view, the only means to evade what he considered as the 'objections' of Western scholars and historians against the authenticity of the Scriptures was to adhere to the Muslim belief by admitting the 'corruption' of many parts of them. Here he quoted the famous fictional work *ʿAlam al-Dīn* (The Banner of Religion) by ʿAlī Pasha Mubārak (1823-1893), an Egyptian former minister of education.[37] The four-volume book described a journey to France by an Azharite Sheikh (named ʿAlam al-Dīn) and a British orientalist, who hired him for Arabic lessons. When the Sheikh traveled with his English student to France, his view of the East and West drastically changed. As it was written for educative reasons, the novel contained accounts of the discussions between both men on various fields, such as geography, physics, zoology, religion, and intellectual schools. Riḍā was impressed with such works.[38]

In the *Shubuhāt*, Riḍā quoted from Mubārak's work an imaginary conversation between Sheikh ʿAlam al-Dīn and a French philosopher, who visited Egypt during Napoleon's campaign, on the relation between Islam and Christianity, and on the Bible.[39] The orientalist was the interpreter, and introduced the French philosopher as one of the well-versed scholars in the field of theology. The philosopher was said to believe that 'the Old Testament is composed, and not one of the heavenly-divine books.' Mubārak mentioned that the philosopher relied on the statements of a person to whom he referred as 'Mary Augustus' and 'Origen'. He was probably referring to the church father St. Aurelius Augustine (AD 353-430) and to Origenes Adamantius

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[35] Ibid., p. 417. Other examples are: Galatians 3:10-13, Mathew 5:17, Acts 15: 28-29, and Ezekiel 20: 23.

[36] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/12, pp. 448-453.

[37] ʿAlī Mubārak, *ʿAlam al-Dīn*, Alexandria: al-Maḥrūsa Newspaper Press, 4 vols, 1299/1883. About his life and works see, Said Zā'iyd, *ʿAlī Mubarak wā 'Aʿmaluh*, Cairo: Anglo Bookshop, 1958.

[38] In the same year (of authoring the *Shubuhāt*) he wrote a similar fictional dialogue under the title: *Muḥawarāt al-Musliḥ wā al-Muqallid* (Debates between the Reformer and Traditionalist). See, Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, 'Portrait of the Intellectual as a Young Man: Rashīd Riḍā's *Muḥawarāt al-Musliḥ wā al-Muqallid* (1906)', *Islam and Muslim–Christian Relations*, vol. 12/1 (January 2001), p. 99. Cf. Darrell Dykstra, 'Pyramids, Prophets, and Progress: Ancient Egypt in the Writings of 'Alī Mubārak', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 114/1 (January-March, 1994), pp. 54-65.

[39] Mubārak, *op cit*, vol. 3, p. 1079.

(probably AD 185-254). Mubārak maintained that Augustine would argue that it was not possible that the first three chapters [of Genesis] would have remained in the same form.[40] In his work, Mubārak maintained:

> Origen also believed that what is mentioned in the Torah pertaining to the creation of the world was legendary […] the word Hebrew word *Barrāh* – *fatha* on the *b*, doubling of the *r* and *sukūn* on the *h* – would actually mean 'arrange' and 'order'. It was not possible for anyone to 'arrange' or 'order' something that did not really exist. Thus the application of this word to the creation of the world required that the material substance of the world was pre-existent and eternal; and the time and place are coeternal. Insofar as the substance was living, the soul was eternal as well, since it was the cause of life. As the substance is light, heat, power, motion, gravity and balance, both life and the substance were one thing, which is contradictory to the Torah[41]

There is no evidence that Mubārak had a good command of the Hebrew language. He did not mention any source on which he depended in the argument. Reading the general lines of the two ancient Christian writers on the creation narrative in the Book of Genesis, we find their theories more sophisticated than the way they are introduced by Mubārak. Augustine, born of a Christian mother and a pagan father, firstly attempted to expound the creation narrative in his commentary: *De Genesi contra Manichaeos libri duo* (388).[42] He tried to discover the literal meaning of every statement in the text of Genesis; but when he found that impossible, he resorted to an allegorical interpretation.[43] The first three chapters of Genesis contained a narrative of another sort as compared to those from the fourth chapter onwards which obviously contained a historical narrative. The first chapters were unfamiliar because they were unique. But that, according to Augustine, did not justify one in concluding that the events did not happen.[44] Origen's approach to cosmology was philosophical rather than theological. He believed that the Bible was divinely revealed, which was established both by the fulfilment of prophecy, and by the direct impression which the Scriptures made on him who read them.[45]

Returning to Riḍā's quotation from *ʿAlam al-Dīn*, the author compared some Biblical notions and events with similar ones in ancient traditions. For

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[40] Ibid., p. 1096.

[41] Ibid.; compare Wood's translation.

[42] He wrote his work as a refutation to the Manichees who 'completely reject [the Old Testament] with impious scorn'. See, *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. and annotated by John Hammond Taylor, S.J., 2 vols., New York N. Y./Ramsey, N.J.: Newman Press, 1982, p. 1. See also, William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought Through the Confessions Story*, University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

[43] *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, p. 1.

[44] Ibid., p. 10.

[45] See, *The Writings of Origen I: De Principiis*, trans. by Rev. F. Crombie, D.D., in the series *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. by Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1871-1872, p. 127.

example, the Biblical story of creation in six days resembles that of the six ages of the Hindus, as well as the six Gahambars (holy festivals) of Zarathustra. The philosopher, moreover, criticised the Old Testament as containing 'inappropriate' things attributed to the Prophets, such as fratricide, adultery, and theft. In the same manner, the author turned to draw analogies between Christian doctrines and ancient Pagan cultures. Examples of these were the incarnation of God into a human body and the virginal birth, which had occurred according to Indian, Chinese and Egyptian ancient cults. The ancient Egyptians, for instance, believed that Osiris was virgin-born. The Christian doctrine that Jesus died, was buried, resurrected and elevated to heaven resembled the statements of ancient Egyptians about Osiris and the Greeks about the cult figure Adonis. Also it was said that the Germanic God Odin had sacrificed himself, killing himself of his own choice by throwing himself in a terrible fire until he burnt for the salvation of his worshippers.[46]

Riḍā argued that because the Western people (especially scholars and philosophers) became skeptical about Christianity, some governments, such as in France, started to declare that their states had no official religion.[47] Those philosophers and scholars, he went on, were still convinced that religion was necessary for humankind. Riḍā believed that the 'truth' of Islam, as the religion of the *Fiṭra* (the innate disposition), was concealed away from those scholars. Therefore some of them produced a poor translation of the Qur'ān which did not enable people to understand the truth of Islam.[48] In Riḍā's view, the Russian and Spanish people persisted to be the strongest advocates of Christianity. However, the Spaniards recently suppressed their clergy. The Orthodox Church of Russia excommunicated its philosopher Tolstoy for his rejection of their doctrines. Riḍā was aware of the 'Westernized' group of Muslims, who followed the path of these Europeans in their attitudes towards Islam. In a generalization he stated that these individuals did never study Islam properly, either before studying European thought or after.[49]

4.2.4. Qur'ānic Proofs for the Genuineness of the Bible

As we have already mentioned, it was typical of the missionary writings to prove the authenticity of the Bible on the basis of the Qur'ānic testimony to it as a divinely-revealed book. In his *Researches,* Ghabriyāl cited seven Qur'ānic

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[46] Wood, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-122. About Odin, see, for example, Alby Stone, 'Bran, Odin, and the Fisher King: Norse Tradition and the Grail Legends', *Folklore*, vol. 100/1 (1989), pp. 25-38.

[47] Riḍā referred here to the French Law of Associations (1901). See, Riḍā's conversation with the Sheikh Al-Azhar on the matter, *al-Manār*, vol. 4/4 (Muḥarram 1319/April 1901), pp. 157-160. About the law, for instance, Judith F. Stone, 'Anticlericals and *Bonnes Soeurs*: The Rhetoric of the 1901 Law of Associations', *French Historical Studies*, vol. 23/1 (2000), pp. 103-128.

[48] Riḍā mentioned as an example an English translation of Surat al-ʿAṣr: 'Verily, by three hours after noon a man becomes bad or despicable'. He did identify the translator by name, but Wood argued that Riḍā's paraphrasing looked like the translation of J.M. Rodwell (1862-1876), who translated it as: 'Verily, man's lot is cast amid destruction'. Ibid., p. 123.

[49] Ibid., p. 125.

verses discussing the character of the Bible. Riḍā ridiculed this method, and ironically named the whole book *Abhāth al-Jadaliyyīn* 'the Researches of the Disputants' instead of the *Diligent*. He also accused the author of trying to 'twist the meanings [of the Qur'ān] in the same way as his ancestors did with the Old and New Testament'.[50] It was, in his view, Paul who rendered the laws of the Old and New Testament worthless, and made Christianity permissive and attaching no good values to any good act by requesting people to believe in the salvation of Jesus only. By this Riḍā was on a similar line with many Muslim polemicists who saw Paul as a 'cunning and roguish Jew […] who emancipated himself from the religious practices of Jesus and accepted those of the Romans.'[51] Riḍā put 'shame' and 'denigration' on Christian missionaries because they preached that 'this Jewish man [Paul]' could invalidate both the laws of Moses and Jesus, whereas they refused the message of Muḥammad, which came as confirmation of the Divine message of both prophets.[52]

In Riḍā's understanding, the missionary argument of proving the authenticity of the Bible from the Qur'ān was a 'quotation out of context' in order to distort the Qur'ān's real meaning. The Old and New Testament were earlier 'guidance for humanity', but after their followers deviated from its 'true' message and went astray, the texts had undergone alteration. Riḍā's premise did not go further than his pure conviction that Islam had later brought 'the greatest guidance' and 'glorious evidence'. If the People of the Book believed in it, they would gain 'prosperity' and become 'masters' of others.[53] Again, Riḍā was cynical in reproaching missionaries to concern themselves with non-religious Christians, who did not live according to the precepts of the Bible: 'why would they have sympathy and give their sincere advice to Muslims to follow the Bible, whereas they themselves are in need of advice and sympathy'.[54]

The same held true for the verse quoted by Ghabriyāl: 'Let the People of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein' (al-Mā'ida, 5:47), which he understood as a commandment to the Prophet of Islam to follow the Gospel. Riḍā maintained that the verse did not indicate any command that the Prophet Muḥammad should submit to the percepts of the Bible. The author, in Riḍā's words, sought to furnish any corroborating evidence by misconstruing the verse in a way that would support his desire, and would also corrupt the Qur'ān as they did with their own Scriptures. The verse pertained to the statement in the preceding verse: 'We sent him [Jesus] the Gospel; therein was guidance and light' (5:46). This means that God gave him the Gospel and ordered his people (the Israelites) to act accordingly. Riḍā understood the verse as a proof and objection against the Christians themselves that they did not act

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[50] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/14 (Jumādā al-'Ākhira 1319/September 1901), p. 538.
[51] See, S. M. Stern, 'Abd-al-Jabbār's account of how Christ's religion was falsified by the adoption of Roman customs, *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 19 (1968), pp. 128-185.
[52] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/14, p. 538.
[53] Ibid., p. 539.
[54] Ibid., pp. 538-39.

according to the Gospel. He concluded that 'if it is possible for the Christian evangelists today to argue against Muslims that the Qur'ān commands them to believe and act according to the Old and New Testament and not see that this argument mandates their faith in the Qur'ān, then how can they assert that Muḥammad's request to them to judge by the Gospel would mandate that he submitted to its ordinances?'[55]

Ghabriyāl argued that the Qur'ān confirmed that it would be an error for a Muslim not to believe in the Old and New Testament. He cited the verse admonishing the Muslims to believe in the preceding Scriptures (al-Nisā, 4: 136).[56] Riḍā immediately replied that the Muslim is required to believe in the previous Scriptures, but is never obligated to act according to their laws. According to Muslim exegetes, he argued, the verse was addressing the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*), who outwardly manifested their faith only, with no real conviction. Riḍā paraphrased the verse: 'O you who profess faith in God, His Book and his Messengers' – with their tongues and outwardly – 'it is incumbent upon you to believe in them with your hearts and bring your outward profession to congruity with what you hold inwardly.'[57]

In Ghabriyāl's view, the people of Mecca knew the Old and New Testament in the same manner they knew the Qur'ān. He cited the verse 'And those who disbelieve say: We believe not in this Qur'ān nor in that which was before it' (Saba', 34:31). He interpreted the Arabic phrase, *bayna yadayhi* (lit. between his hands), as 'before it'. This means that the verse directly refers to 'the Old and New Testament'. Riḍā rejected this interpretation by arguing that it pointed to the rejection by the people of Mecca of the Qur'ān and its prophet. Riḍā again paraphrased the verse that the premise of the people of Mecca was to say: 'we do neither believe in you Muḥammad and the book you claim from God, nor in the Scriptures you claim to have been revealed before you'. He argued that the verse neither indicated that the 'illiterate' inhabitants of Mecca during the time of the revelation knew the Old and New Testament, nor did it give any connotation that they specifically studied them. Only a few people among them were able to read and write well (Riḍā counted them as six individuals). However, Riḍā gave his preference to another exegetical interpretation: the phrase '*bayna yadayhi*' referred to the Day of Judgment, not to the preceding Scriptures.[58]

Ghabriyāl's following argument was that the Prophet himself verified the authenticity of the Scriptures and put them on an equal footing with the Qur'ān, as stated by the Quran itself: 'Say (to them Muḥammad): 'then bring a Book, which gives a clearer guidance than these two, that I may follow.'[59] The

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[55] Ibid., p. 539. Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

[56] *Al-Manār*, 'Fī al-'Ayāt al-Wārida bisha'n al-Tawrāh wā al-Injīl (In the related verses dealing with the Torah and the Gospel)', vol. 4/15, pp. 574-78. The verse is: 'O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His Apostle, and the scripture which He hath sent to His Apostle and the scripture which He sent to those before (him)'.

[57] Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

[58] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/15, p. 577.

[59] Al-Qaṣaṣ (28: 49).

pronoun in *minhumā* (than these two), according to Ghabriyāl, would refer to the Qur'ān and the Gospel. For Riḍā, this quotation was 'dishonesty' and 'alteration' of the real meaning of the verse, and Ghabriyāl cited the verse with no reference to its previous passages. In his exegetical view, Riḍā considered the mention of Moses in the preceding verses as an indication that the verse referred to the Qur'ān and the Torah, but not to the Gospel.[60] But this interpretation, in Riḍā's view, does not indicate any approval that the Qur'ān recognized the Torah as equal in all aspects, nor the revelation to Muḥammad as equivalent to that to Moses. The verse pointed to the inability of the people of Mecca to produce a book similar to the Scriptures brought by Moses and Muḥammad, but it did not necessarily imply that the former was equivalent to the latter. As an example, Riḍā compared the case of the Qur'ān and the Torah with two works on the science of logic: 'Were it said to an individual, ignorant of the science of logic […], 'Write me a book that is better than the book Isagoge [of Porphyry], and *al-Baṣā'ir al-Nuṣayriyya*,[61] would we say that this statement demonstrates that the two books are equal in every aspect?'[62]

Lastly, Ghabriyāl cited the verse indicating that the Torah contained God's ordinance or command (al-Mā'ida, 5:43). The verse was therefore a clear substantiation that the Torah was not twisted and that there was no need to follow any other law. Riḍā pointed out that the reason for the revelation of that verse was that a group of Jews intended to escape the punishment of stoning by asking the Prophet to be an arbitrator in a case of adultery committed by a highborn person among them, hoping that he would decide to flog the adulterer. Riḍā argued that the verse elucidated astonishment about the lack of confidence of the Jews in their religion by rejecting its judgement and yielding to another legislator. It was also amazing that they rejected the prophet's judgement, which was in agreement with their own law. Their lack of confidence was also extended to the message of Islam and all other religions.[63] Riḍā's very assertion of the corruption and the human features of the Bible permitted him to allege that although they contained 'the Command of God', the Scriptures were not purely divine in their entirety. He argued that the book

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[60] Riḍā supported his argument by referring to the preceding verses: 'If (we had) not (sent thee to the Quraysh) – in case a calamity should seize them for (the deeds) that their hands have sent forth, they might say: 'O Lord! Why didst Thou not send us a messenger? We should then have followed the signs and been amongst Those who believe'! But (now), when the Truth has come to them from Ourselves, they say, "Why are not (signs) sent to him, like those which were sent to Moses? Do they not then reject (the signs) which were formerly sent to Moses? They say: "Two kinds of sorcery, each assisting the other and they say: "For us, we reject all (such things).' (Al-Qaṣaṣ, 28: 47-48).

[61] *Al-Baṣā'ir al-Nuṣayriyya fī ʿIlm al-Mantiq* was written by Zayn al-Dīn 'Umar b. Sahlān al-Sāwī and dedicated to Nuṣayr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. ʾAbī Tawbah (d. 503 AH). According to Brockelmann, al-Ṣāwi probably died in 540 AH In November 1898, Al-Azhar Council chose *al-Baṣā'ir* to be a textbook on logic. ʿAbduh wrote his commentaries on the text of the book. See, Rafīq al-ʿAjam (ed.), *al-Baṣā'ir al-Nuṣayriyya li ʿIlm al-Mantiq*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, 1993, pp. pp. 1-22.

[62] Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[63] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/15, p.578.

of *al-Sirah al-Ḥalabiyya,*[64] for instance, might contain the 'Command of God', but this did not mean that it was secure from corruption. It had also included the personal views of the author.[65]

4.2.5. Books of the Old and New Testament

Ghabriyāl devoted the second chapter of his book to discuss what he believed to be a rational proof of the authenticity of the Bible.[66] For him, God was omnipotent and wise to stipulate a constitution and to prescribe a law for human beings in order that they would comply with specific duties towards their Maker. The law was regulating the relationship among them, otherwise life would be in chaos with no deterrent or restrain. The people would also annihilate each other, and the good would be on equal footing with the evil, something God would never accept.[67] Ghabriyāl challenged Muslims: 'if that constitution and law were not the Old and New Testament, would you tell me what are they? Is there any other ancient holy book that accomplishes the same objective, as do the two Testaments?'[68]

Riḍā made a low estimation of the logic behind the argument of his counterpart. He wondered why God let humanity without a law for thousands of years before the Torah, and why this wisdom of His did not appear except recently in the case of the Israelites. These question marks were enough for Riḍā to refute Ghabriyāl's arguments. Muslims, on the other hand, believed that God sent down innumerable messengers and prophets to all nations.[69] He also contended that the people of China were not like 'cattle' trampling each other, or like 'fish', the big eating the small with no restrain. They had a civilization of their own, and values both before and after the existence of the Israelites. They were even more advanced than the Israelites in science, culture and order. Riḍā added that they were more advanced than the Christians themselves whose religion advanced them in nothing but animosity, hatred, disagreement, discord, war and murder during the so-called 'Dark Ages', while the Chinese lived in peace and harmony. The same was true for the Hindus. He argued that there is no harm for Muslims to believe the Chinese religion and Hinduism, just as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, were of divine origin, and that God had sent down messengers among them in order to guide them to 'eternal happiness'. But they intermingled their religions with inherited pagan tendencies, the same the Christians did with their originally divine and monotheistic religion.[70]

Riḍā believed that when the Europeans replaced the law of the Old Testament with positive laws, and the customs of the Old and New Testament

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[64] ʿAlī b. Burhān al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sīrah al-Ḥalabiyya: al-Kitāb al-Musammā Insān al-ʾUyūn fī Sīrat al-ʾAmīn al-Maʾmūn*, 3 vols, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.
[65] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/15, 579.
[66] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/17 (Shaʿbān 1319 /November 1901) pp. 654-659
[67] Ibid., p. 654.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., pp. 654-55.
[70] Ibid., p. 656.

with philosophy, they discarded 'asceticism' and 'shook the dust of humiliation off their heads'.[71] By this the Europeans achieved more progress than during the time when they firmly followed the Bible. Riḍā believed at this time that in their good manners the Europeans were the closest people to Islam. These morals included their attachment to 'pride, high motivation, seriousness in work, honesty, trustworthiness, and seeking knowledge according to the universal laws and abiding by rationality.'[72] Riḍā was persuaded that Ghabriyāl's statement about the effect of the cultivation of the Divine laws on human beings was only evident in the case of Muslims, rather than that of the Jews and the Christians. Historically, when Muslims faithfully fulfilled their duties towards God and the people, they became refined, their morals became cultivated and their civilization advanced.[73] Riḍā ironically wondered if the needs of people were really to be fulfilled solely by the revelation of the Torah, why would God send down the Gospel on Jesus? However, this problem was not pertinent to Muslims, as they believed in the genuineness of the origin of the Bible.[74]

Ghabriyāl argued that it was impossible that both the Old and the New Testaments were distorted, as both Judaism and Christianity became widespread throughout the East and the West. In his words, 'the scripture, especially the New Testament, was translated from the original Greek and Hebrew languages into the languages of the peoples among whom they were spread, including Arabic, Aramaic, Abyssinian, Coptic, and Latin.'[75] It was not logical, therefore, that these thousands of Christians had collaborated on altering the Scripture. Ghabriyāl repudiated the Muslim view that the Scriptures were corrupted. Muslims, in his view, definitely failed to pinpoint the altered passages, or to mention the real reasons behind this alleged corruption.[76]

In Riḍā's opinion, the Qur'ān, unlike the Bible, was proven to be in a clear way transmitted orally and in writing. Thus, preference should be given to it above the Bible, as many 'Christian scholars' had admitted.[77] Riḍā quoted a work by the Coptic convert to Islam, Muḥammad Effendi Ḥabīb, a teacher of Hebrew and English in Cairo, which he wrote against the above-mentioned Gibāra (see, the introduction). Ḥabīb quoted J.W.H. Stobart, the principal of La Martiniere College in Lucknow.[78] In Stobart's view, 'we have ample proofs to believe that the existing Qur'ān is itself the original words of the Prophet

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[71] Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
[72] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/17, p. 656.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., p. 656-657. Riḍā concluded his arguments with the stanzas of the *lāmiyyah* by al-Būṣīrī on the character of Old Testament and its people. See the translation of Wood, pp. 156-157.
[75] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/19 (Ramaḍān 1319/December 1901), pp. 743-749.
[76] Ibid., pp. 743-744.
[77] Ibid., p. 744.
[78] Ḥabīb, *op. cit.* J.W.H. Stobart, *Islam and its Founder*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1876. The College was established by Major General Claude Martin in 1836. See, Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *A very ingenious man: Claude Martin in early colonial India*, Delhi [etc.]: Oxford University Press (India), 1992.

Muḥammad, as learnt or dedicated[?] under his observation and instruction'.[79] Stobart's view was a quotation from Muir's work, *The Life of Mahomet*,[80] whom Habib described as the 'forceful enemy of Islam'.[81]

As for the alteration of the Bible, Riḍā argued that Muslims do not acknowledge that all these Scriptures were accurately transmitted from the prophets. They believe that the Jews and Christians subsequently altered them after dispersing throughout the East and the West, and each people embracing Judaism and Christianity had translated them into their own languages.[82] For him, investigating the origin, scribes and transmitters of these books before the great expansion would embarrass the People of the Book, as it would expose many shortcomings in their history. Riḍā repeated an often-cited example by Muslim polemicists that it is not possible to believe that it was Moses who had written the five books of the Torah because they speak about him in the third person, and mentioned his death and burial in one of the chapters.[83]

Riḍā cited from the Book of Deuteronomy that Moses was reported to say: 'Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord' (31:26). For him, this phrase was enough evidence to argue that Moses wrote a particular book, which must have been lost. The next passages would also conclude the alteration of the Torah. Moses said: 'For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you' (31:29).' Riḍā defined the word 'Torah', as *sharī'a* or law, whereas the existing five books are historical, even though they contain some rulings. He compared it with the example of the Qur'ānic verses of rulings, included by Muslim historiographers in the works of the *Sīrah* (the Prophet's Biography) containing sound and unsound narratives. Muslims do not consider the books of *sīra* as Qur'ān or as part of the revelation. The same holds true for the stories on Moses and other Israelite prophets. Riḍā pointed out that the authors of these books did not examine their narratives as Muslim scholars did in their investigation of biographical works on the prophet.[84]

Riḍā's attempted to invalidate the claim of Ghabriyāl that the Scripture was preserved among thousands of people in various languages. As vindication for his conviction, Riḍā quoted an anonymous Christian Arabic work which acknowledged that the original copy of Moses' book disappeared at some moments when paganism prevailed among the Israelites till it was rediscovered in the Kingdom of Hosea the Pious. The Christian author maintained that it is impossible that the original version of Moses had survived until the present time. It was also plausible that it was lost along with the arc when Nebuchadnezar the Great destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. This was

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[79] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/18, p. 744. Compare: 'There are ample and sufficient grounds for believing that the existing Qur'ān consists of genuine words, and is the original composition of the Prophet as learnt or transcribed under his own instruction. Stobart, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.
[80] William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet,* 4 vols., London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1861.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 161.
[83] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/18, p. 745. See, Jawziyyā, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
[84] Ibid., p. 741.

therefore the reason why it was reported among the Jews that the priestly scribe Ezra was the one who had regained it by collecting the fragmented copies of the holy books and correcting their mistakes.[85]

Riḍā severely reproved the 'People of the Book' for their belief that Ezra had corrected and edited the Torah, while discarding the belief that the prophet Muḥammad had the ability to restore the whole Divine message. He moreover did not accept the idea that Ezra re-wrote the Scriptures as they originally had been. He even went further to argue that it was not true that Ezra wrote the Torah on the basis of Divine revelation to him. Riḍā held a view in this regard similar to many of early Muslim exegetes (such as Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurtubī, al-Ṭabarī) and polemicists. In his *al-'Ajwiba al-Fākhira* (The Unique Replies), the Egyptian jurist Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 684 AH/1285 AD), for instance, maintained that Nebuchadnezar murdered the Jews and burnt the Torah. Ezra had collected it after many years. One should not be sure about its authenticity, since it might have contained lots of najasāt (impurities).[86] In that regard Riḍā cited chapter seven of the Book of Ezra in which it was stated that Ezra had 'set his heart to study the law of the Lord' as a result of a letter given to him (Ezra 7:10-12). Riḍā interpreted this Biblical passage that Ezra was merely one of the scribes of the revealed law, just as any scribe of the revelation during the early age of Islam: 'If we [Muslims] assume that the Qur'ān was lost, and was never preserved by heart, and then say that Mu'āwiya was inspired to write it only because he was one of the scribes – would the People of the Book accept this argument from us?'[87]

4.3. The Glad Tidings of Peace

4.3.1. Muḥammad's Superiority above all Prophets?

When the Egyptian missionary magazine *Bashā'ir al-Salām* (*The Glad Tidings of Peace*) praised the Israelites as 'the blessed family tree', Riḍā portrayed its editor as someone 'swimming in the sea of illusions'.[88] In its own words, the *Glad Tidings* said that: 'is it not amazing that the Creator of the heavens and the earth was alone with the Children of Israel in the wilderness, where He addressed them and they addressed him […]. Moses amongst them was in deep conversation with Him, addressing various topics, just as two intimate

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[85] Ibid., p. 747. The work is titled: *Khulāṣat al-'Adilla al-Saniyyah ʿalā Ṣidq 'Usūl al-Diyāna al-Masīḥiyya* (The Essence of the Superior Evidences on the authenticity of the Christian Religion). Wood incorrectly translated the word *khulāṣat* as *summary*, and concluded that the work was an abridgement of another work. Wood, *op. cit.*, footnote, p. 163.

[86] Al-Qarāfī, *al-Ajwiba al-Fākhira*, on the margin of al-Baghdādī's *al-Fāriq*, p. 211. See also the attitudes of al-Juwaynī in his *Shifā' al-Ghalīl*, edited by Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, Cairo, n.d., p. 59. See also the treatise of al-Jāḥīẓ, *al-Mukhtār fī al-Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*, edited by M.A. al-Sharqāwī, Beirut and Cairo, 1991, p. 86.

[87] Ibid., p. 749.

[88].Ibid.

companions or close friends'.[89] The writer addressed his Muslim readers saying that the Prophet of Islam did not deserve to talk to God directly, listen to His voice, nor witness His majesty the same as the general folk of the Israelites did, let alone the elite among them. Muḥammad also had not had the privilege to speak to Gabriel. He was rather overcome with the feeling of fainting and trance, and by sweat appearing on his forehead on a day of severe cold.[90]

Riḍā considered this argument as a severe sacrilege against the Divine. For him, Muslims reported that their prophet ascended to the Heaven and witnessed some of 'the greatest miracles of God' during his journey by night (*al-Miʿrāj*). He also saw God and talked to Him without intermediary. Riḍā rejected the writer's view concerning Moses. According to the Book of Exodus, Moses and those among the Children of Israel saw lightning and heard thundering, the noise of a trumpet, and the mountain smoking (Ex. 20:18). The Israelites 'said unto Moses, speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we would die' (20:19). These passages, in Riḍā's opinion, disproved of the author's statement that the laymen of the Children of Israel were talking to God directly and heard His voice. In his comparison between the two cases of *ru'yah* (vision), Riḍā relied on the Qur'ānic narratives. In the case of Moses, he 'fell down senseless' (al-'Aʿrāf, 7:143), while Muḥammad 'saw one of the greatest signs of his Lord.' (al-Najm, 53: 18).[91] Riḍā stressed that the Israelites, who were honored and dignified by God, became rebellious and ungrateful to Him later. They also deserved 'aversion' and 'loathing', and were deprived of God's favor and mercy. The Arabs were given a 'blessing' through the removal of paganism. Riḍā found it strange that the writer quoted Qur'ānic verses to prove God's blessing on the Israelites, while ignoring the verses manifesting their rebellion and disbelief.[92]

On another level, Riḍā went on discussing his theological attitude towards anthropomorphism as contrasted to Biblical concepts. For Muslims, he argued, their fundamental basis of belief was the absolute dissociation from any resemblance between God and the created beings. Any Qur'ānic passage that might indicate anthropomorphism should be subjected to metaphorical interpretation. In comparison to the 'anthropomorphism' and 'paganism' of others, Riḍā maintained that Muslims believed that God is far above having [a] voice, place or direction, and that all of His attributes in the Qur'ān are merely a form of divine proclamation. Riḍā reproached the writer of the *Glad Tidings* for saying that God was in deep conversation with Moses as intimate friends: 'It is no surprise that those who say that Jesus is a god would say that God met alone with Moses, addressing various topics in His conversation with him'.[93]

Like contemporary Muslim periodicals, missionary papers had a separate section in which they used to answer questions of their readers. These queries

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[89] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/16, p. 619.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., p. 621.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Wood, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-145.

mostly dealt with theological issues, and were sometimes raised by Muslim readers. A Muslim 'friend' and reader of his journal, for instance, once raised the question: Can we consider Peter, Paul, John and other New Testament authors as messengers of God? Is there any prophecy on their message in the Old Testament, just as that on the coming of Jesus?[94] Riḍā was certain that the question was a novelty, and could not be asked by a faithful Muslim. Muslims believed that messengers were those who received the revelation of an independent religion, and were commanded to preach it. Muslims never used the word 'prophecy' to mean 'glad tiding'. Riḍā was thus convinced that such a question was invented by the magazine in order to give a false impression and to delude their readers, or they were sent by a 'cultural' Muslim who had nothing to do with Islam, except his name […], nationality and lineage'.[95] Another query was raised by another 'friend': Why it is only the Christians who are constantly involved in dispatching missionaries since the appearance of Christianity until the present day? The editor of the *Glad Tidings* answered: 'because Christianity is verily the guidance, and so far as guidance is in one's heart, he cannot restrain himself and conceal it from his fellow human beings.'[96] In his reaction, Riḍā repeated his aforementioned point of view that no religion was established without mission (see, chapter 3). However, Riḍā added that 'the true *daʿwa* was that of the disciples of Jesus, which was based on their strong faith; nevertheless, few joined them whereas the Islamic *daʿwa* continued to gain millions: as soon as a Muslim trader would enter an Asian or African city, it would convert to Islam immediately'. It was only the European supremacy, Riḍā went on, that made missionaries 'loudly speak and write'. The true answer, which the Christian writer should have given, was that 'the Christians preached their religion because politics motivated them, followed by money and protected by weapons'.[97]

4.3.2. Fear and Hope

In another article, the *Glad Tidings* asserted that 'many Muslims die on the carpet of hope to enter Paradise and enjoy its pleasures as based on the magnificent promises in their Qur'ān […] The only reason for that is nothing but their ignorance of the reality of themselves and the perfections of the Almighty'.[98] It further argued that Muslims of knowledge and mental faculties would seek relief from the burden of their sins through extravagant asceticism, devotion, supplication, and prayers to God. The magazine reckoned among these the fearfulness expressed by the Companions of the prophet, such as Abū Bakr and 'Alī. The *Glad Tidings* alluded that 'if these Companions had known

[94] Ibid., pp. 623-624.
[95] Ibid., p. 624.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid., p. 626.
[98] *Al-Manār*, vol. 5/3, p. 98.

and believed in the doctrine of Salvation, they would have lived safe from God's stratagem and punishment.'[99]

Riḍā harshly criticised the writer's knowledge of Islam. According to him, the missionary writer incorrectly included the ḥadīth scholar Sufyān al-Thawrī as one of the Companions. He was infuriated by what he considered as 'offenses' against the Companions and Muslim rightly-guided *imams*. He furthermore asserted that Muslims have a higher esteem of the prophets than the Jews and the Christians who portrayed them as cruel, unjust, drunk, and committing adultery or murder. Riḍā was convinced that if a Muslim were required to believe in the collection of the books of the Old Testament, and his religion permitted him to elevate anyone above prophets, he would give his preference to those rightly-guided *imams* above the prophets of the Torah'.[100]

Back to the concept of 'fear' and 'hope', Riḍā believed that they represent the basis of the true religion. In his view, the author disparaged the Islamic perception with regard to these two concepts only in order to attract people to his religion. He indirectly tried to promote the doctrine that salvation and the eternal life in the Kingdom would be solely obtainable through the belief that God would save people through becoming incarnate in a human body.[101] Riḍā extended his above-mentioned argument by stipulating that the Christian message would encourage people to be more libertine through murder, committing adultery, getting drunk, and be a source of spoil to the creation while being convinced that they would be saved by means of this doctrine. He also criticised the writer for ignoring that his own Scriptures were not devoid of passages referring to biblical prophets and saints, who were also fearful to God and hopeful for His blessings.[102] Riḍā made it clear, however, that many 'fair-minded' Christians were on the same line with Muslims in their belief that all prophets and upright believers adhered to the absolute monotheism. Their fear of God was to keep them abreast from sins and evils, while their hope was to stimulate them to do righteousness.[103] In conclusion, Riḍā reminded his missionary opponent of the various examples of fear mentioned by al-Ghazālī, such as fear of revoking repentance, and the incapacity to fulfil obligation.[104]

4.3.3. Faith and Acts of Muslims

Under the title, '*Imān al-Muslimīn wā A'māluhum* (Faith and Acts of Muslims)', the *Glad Tidings* wrote that 'it is possible according the school of *ahl al-Sunna* that one could truly believe in Islam, while persisting in evil action'.[105] Citing various Biblical verses, the writer raised two points of objection to Islam: 1)

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[99] Ibid., p. 100.
[100] Ibid., p. 99.
[101] Ibid., pp. 99-100.
[102] Ibid., p. 100.
[103] Ibid., pp. 100-101.
[104] Ibid., p. 101. For more, see, chapter 4 of *Iḥyā 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4, 'Kitāb al-Khawf wā al-Rajā'; various editions.
[105] *Al-Manār*, vol. 5/11, p. 436.

Islam was a false and valueless faith, as it did not impress the sense of repentance and good endeavour upon the mind of the believer, while abandoning him when his sins outweigh his good acts. It also denigrated the majesty of the Creator and amplified the misery of the created, 2) the Muḥammadan religion was also incapable of bringing the complete salvation for humankind.[106]

In his reply, Riḍā maintained that his 'disputant' did not perceive that his own argument could turn against him. He reiterated that the New Testament is the only way of redemption and that inheriting the Kingdom could be only achieved by the belief in Jesus, even when the believer was an evildoer or libertine. He also pointed out that faith was closely associated with good deeds in 75 Qur'ānic verses.[107] Riḍā argued that Islam stipulated that faith should produce sound deeds, while acts had no value in Christianity. But it was the missionary 'net' with which the magazine attempted to 'catch' the ignorant into accepting Christianity through his allegations against Islam. At the same time, however, he completely forgot that preaching that salvation was confined to the doctrines of trinity and crucifixion only would never motivate its followers to do good and avoid evil. The 'ignorant' would therefore be deluded by the missionary argument, since he would be more inclined to choose the faith which would not obligate or burden him with additional religious duties.[108]

Riḍā agreed with the statement of the *Glad Tidings* that any faith that does not aim at perfection and piety is false. Its writer, however, criticised the concept of punishment according to some Muslim traditions that sinful Muslims will be 'imprisoned in the Hellfire for a period not less than seven hundred years and not more than seven thousand years.'[109] Riḍā rejected his assertion that such reports are not mentioned in the Qur'ān or in sound ḥadīths. They were only related in some unsound and unacceptable ḥadīths of no binding proofs. Riḍā followed ʿAbduh's view that the affairs related to the Day of Judgement should be taken from the Qur'ān and the *mutawātir* ḥadīths. To make the point clear, the *Glad Tidings* quoted the Qur'ānic verse: 'There is not one of you but shall approach [hell] (Maryam, 19:71).' Riḍā interpreted the verse as not addressing Muslims. According to one exegetical view, the verse, in connection with the whole context of previous passages, was meant to address the unbelievers. Another view indicated that it generally referred to all people (believers and unbelievers). But believers would quickly pass alongside the Hellfire in order to appreciate God's blessing when they would enter the Paradise.[110]

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[106] Ibid.
[107] Riḍā cited Qur'ānic verses such as, 4:123-124, 8: 2-4, and 103:1-3.
[108] Ibid, p. 437.
[109] As quoted in ibid.
[110] Ibid., p. 438.

4.3.4. Absurd Treatment

The *Glad Tidings* also attacked Islamic doctrines and practices as inferior to the *Jāhiliyya* Arab pagan society. It saw that Islam added six new elements of paganism to its pagan characteristics, which Riḍā considered as an absurd treatment.[111]

First of all, Muslims hold Muḥammad in the second place after God in the formula of *shahāda*, which they claim to be written on the Throne of God even before the Creation. Riḍā explained the general Muslim point of view that the Muslim must believe in the prophethood of Moses and Jesus, just as his belief in the prophethood of Muḥammad. As for the connection of the two names of Allah and Muḥammad in the *shahāda*, it had been narrated in some traditions that the Muslim should also utter the word *ʿAbduhu* (his servant) in the formula. The *shahāda* being written on the Throne, in Riḍā's mind, was not one of the essential doctrines of Islam. 'And if the formula was really written down there, this would imply no form of paganism, since 'the servant remains servant, and the lord remains lord'.[112]

The *Glad Tidings* alleged that Muslims raise the status of the ḥadīth to the Qur'ān, and for this reason the Sunnīs became angered by the *Shīʿī* rejection of ḥadīth. Riḍā considered both claims as false. The Qur'ān was the fundamental basis of religion, while the *sunna* was giving additional clarity. The Muslim is fully requested to believe in the Qur'ān and recite it in his worship. But disbelief in any one of the ḥadīths will not harm his faith as a Muslim. Riḍā further explained that the Muslim is not obliged to follow the ḥadīths related to worldly affairs (*dunya*), such as the one on cultivating the palm-tree. Muslims, he went on, can distinguish between the Qur'ān, as a direct revelation, and the indirect revelation, which the prophet was reported to have uttered in his own words.

The missionary magazine, on the other hand, pointed out that the name of Muḥammad was connected with the name of Allah in many places in the Qur'ān as an associate in matters such as command and prohibition, and the obligation of obedience and love. It also maintained that Muslims take him as their master and intercessor. Taking a created being as an intercessor was identical to pre-Islamic Arab polytheism. The writer defended himself as a non-polytheist. The Christians believe in Jesus as the eternal word of God, and as the creator, not the created. Muslims, on the other hand, are polytheists, since they know perfectly well the status of their prophet as a human being, while insisting on having him as an intercessor.[113] In the Qur'ān it is also stated that God and the angels perform *ṣalāh* (prayer) over the Prophet (33:56). But Muslims exaggerate in their perception of his pre-existence to the degree that

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[111] 'Sakhāfat Bashā'ir al-Salām fi al-Jāhiliyya wā al-Islam (The absurdity of Bashā'ir al-Salām concerning the Jāhiliyya and Islam)', *al-Manār*, vol. 5/13, p. 517.
[112] Ibid., p. 517.
[113] Ibid., p. 520.

they state that he was eternal light and pre-existing to humanity. Riḍā replied that the prophet of Islam was nowhere in the Qur'ān or in the *sunna* described as master. Riḍā criticised the writer for his misunderstanding of the verse. Muslim scholars interpreted the *ṣalāh* as 'mercy and compassion'. For Riḍā, the magazine's assumption was not logical: 'were every individual from whom we ask mercy and anybody whom we call 'master' like a god of ours, then we and the writer would have uncountable deities.'[114] Riḍā expressed a puritan view by stating that the exaggeration in honouring the prophet in that way ensued from the books and narratives of *mawālid,* and the faith of the common folk. In his reply, Riḍā added that the concept of intercession (*shafāʿa*) in Islam merely meant 'supplication'. In that sense, every Muslim was an intercessor, and similarly every believer summoning upon God for himself and others. The comparison between Jesus and Muḥammad in this manner was, in Riḍā's view, absurd. He cynically said: 'it means that polytheism is the Muslim belief in their prophet as God's servant and his intercession as supplication to God, while the pure monotheism is the Christian belief that their prophet, who was born 1902 years ago, is God, the Pre-existent, the Eternal, the Creator of all things before and after him.'[115]

4.3.5. Exceeding the Borders of Politeness

We have mentioned that Riḍā did not include all articles under the section of *Shubuhāt* in *al-Manār* in his later compiled treatise, which Wood has translated. In this part, two of these articles were written as replies of the *Glad Tidings*, which clearly display his increasing frustration with what he called 'exceeding the borders of politeness'. Riḍā was shocked by what he saw as anti-Islamic views uttered by its newly-appointed editor-in-chief, Niqūlā effendi Rafāʾil (or Raphael), whom he formerly knew as a 'decent' person.[116]

In the *Glad Tidings*, Rafāʾil published one of his debates with a Muslim at the Protestant library in the city of Suez. The Muslim objected to the doctrine of the crucifixion of Jesus using Qur'ānic verses. But Rafāʾīl asked his Muslim adversary whether he would believe in the crucifixion if he were a contemporary to Jesus, and personally witnessed it. The Muslim replied in the affirmative that he would have definitely believed in it just as other attendants. Then Rafāʾil argued that it was more reasonable to believe in an incident as an eye-witness than to have faith in the story as had been told by an illiterate man in Mecca nearly seven hundred years later. The Muslim's reply was challenging in saying that he would definitely believe in the illiterate man, who was proven

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[114] Ibid., p. 519.

[115] Ibid., p. 520; Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

[116] *Al-Manār*, 'Daʿwā Ṣalb al-Masīḥ (the Claim of Jesus' Crucifixion)', vol. 6/2 (Ṣafar 1321/May 1903), pp. 62-67. Niqūlā Rafāʾil was the founder of another Christian bi-monthly magazine under the title: *al-Iṣlāḥ al-Maskūnī* or *al-ʿAṣr al-Dhahabī* (1 June, 1906). See the index of Dār al-Kutub, *op. cit*, p. 562. He was also the author of *al-Daʿwa al-Waṭaniyya ʾilā Tabshīr al-ʾUmma al-ʾIslamiyya* (The National Call for Doing mission among the Muslim Community), Alexandria, 1900. See, Nuṣayr, *op. cit.* , p. 129.

to be a messenger of God, while rejecting his eyesight and that of other people as well. Rafāʾil re-contended that Muḥammad's words might have been the teachings of the Satan, but not of God. The great miracles achieved by Muḥammad were again enough evidence for the Muslim to believe in the Divine origin of his prophet's message. Rafāʾil, however, contested that while the Qur'ān rejected the reality of crucifixion, the Holy Scriptures, historical narratives, while the majority of the people still believed in it. According to Rafāʾil, the Muslim, unable to reply, was defeated by this argument and left the place. Rafāʾil added that the Qur'ānic view on the crucifixion was quoted from the belief of *al-Dustiyūn* (Docetics) that the physical body of Jesus was an illusion, as was his crucifixion. Jesus was in reality incorporeal, and he only seemed to have a physical body and could not physically die. Rafāʾil argued that Muḥammad had copied their belief in the Qur'ān (4:156) that the Jews: 'did not kill him, and they did not crucify him, but a similitude was made for them'.[117]

Riḍā had not expected that Rafāʾil would attack Islam in this manner. In Riḍā's evaluation, Rafāʾil's Muslim counterpart was definitely a common person who lacked deep religious knowledge; and the missionary must also have exaggerated by adding or deliberately perverting the words of his partner in the dialogue. Riḍā even doubted the Muslim's replies as real. He did not imagine that the faithful Muslim, who was confused by this argument, would leave such a debate without giving any explanation of the Qur'ānic report concerning crucifixion. Riḍā was convinced that the story of crucifixion had become a controversial issue among the Christian themselves. It was Riḍā's first time to mention the Gospel of Barnabas, which he described as one of the Gospels where there was no mention of the story, even though the Christians tried to destroy it.[118]

Regarding the miracles achieved by the prophet Muḥammad, Riḍā held the classical point of view that the Qur'ān was his most significant miracle. He drew an analogy between the prophet and the author of many valuable medical books, who also proved to be a clever physician after many successful and useful treatments. The performance of miracles was never his evidence to be a good doctor. Muslims similarly believed that the Prophet was also given many miraculous acts, but, due to their less value, he never made them the cornerstone of his mission. The prophet, on the other hand, 'came to address minds, to support science, to explain reasoning, and to abolish witchcraft […] and swindle by encouraging man to promote himself through knowledge and work'.[119]

Rafāʾil's assertion that Islam was copied from Docetism was, in Riḍā's opinion, baseless. He argued that when missionaries objected to a Qur'ānic story related to a prophet or a nation known to them, they would immediately

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[117] Ibid., pp. 63-64. It was the argument of many Western scholars that the Docetic views of Jesus looked like the Qur'ānic concept of non-crucifixion. See, for instance, H. Gregoire, *Mahomet et le monophysisme*, in *Mélanges Charles Diehl*, Paris 1930, i, 107-119.
[118] Ibid., p. 65.
[119] Ibid., p. 66.

claim that Muḥammad plagiarized it from such-and-such false or heretical sects. But if their Scriptures gave no mention to a story mentioned in the Qur'ān, they would draw the conclusion that it was no revelation. In plain words, Riḍā confirmed that the prophet never learnt thoughts of other nations, and had no knowledge of other languages than Arabic.[120]

In conclusion, Riḍā asked his Christian compatriots to understand that he never intended to start attacking Christianity. But it was his duty as a scholar to defend his religion against any attacks and offenses. Missionaries, according to him, were not seeking the truth. He also demanded fair-minded Christians not to blame him. They should help him to bring the missionary attacks to an end.[121]

According to *al-Manār*, the editor(s) of the *Glad Tidings* soon dismissed Rafā'il. He also failed to find any other job as a journalist. Therefore he started to publish his own missionary publications, and toured Egyptian towns and villages to preach Christianity among Muslims. He sent Riḍā a letter with copies of his publications. In his letter, he wrote: 'Because I noticed that your magnificent journal is zealous in defending Islam, I am sending this letter to you in order that you would reply to it according to your knowledge, and publish the reply in your journal. And if you were not able to give reply due to its solid evidences, I would earnestly request you to pay it some of your attention.' Riḍā refused to give any answer, as it was logical for him that he only aimed at using *al-Manār* as a channel for making publicity for his writings. Riḍā furthermore qualified Rafā'il's 'evidences' as 'childish fantasies'.[122]

4.4. The Standard of Zion

4.4.1. Sinlessness of Prophets and Salvation

Riḍā received the missionary periodical *Rāyat Ṣuhyūn* (The Standard of Zion) with the editor's request: 'I request a reading of the article on the sinning of prophets and a reply to it'.[123] The article maintained that 'Muslims say that God sent many prophets to the world. The greatest among them were six: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. Many [Muslims] say that all of these prophets were sinless, and therefore were competent to grant salvation to their followers. If they had been sinners, it would have never been easy for them to do that, since the sinner can not grant his salvation from the sin to

[120] Ibid., pp. 66-67.
[121] Ibid. A few weeks later, Riḍā received a letter from one of his readers in Suez in which he reacted to Rafā'il's concept of crucifixion. He cited a few passages from the Gospel, which he saw as an indication that the disciples of Jesus were also confused in recognising him even before his crucifixion: (Mathew, 26:34, cf. Marcus 14:30, Luke 22:34 and 13:38). See, vol. 6/3, pp. 116-117.
[122] *Al-Manār*, 'al-Fidā' wā al-Qadāsah (Salvation and Holiness)', vol. 7/12 (Jumādā al-'Ākhira 1322/August 1904), pp. 453-457.
[123] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/21 (Shawwāl 1319/26 January 1902), pp. 816.

others.'[124] On the basis of stories from the Old Testament, the *Standard* argued that all these prophets, except Jesus, were sinners. Examples of these were Adam's disobedience to God and Noah's getting drunk. As for Abraham, it was reported that he 'lied twice because of his fear of the people'. Moses was commanded by God to go to the Pharaoh, but he showed great fear and increasing timidity, which would make God angry with him. When the Children of Israel were in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt, Moses uttered incoherent words. God, due to this sin, forbade him to return to the land Canaan, and ordained him to die of poverty.[125] In the Qur'ān, the *Standard* went one, it was also stated that all of them asked God's forgiveness, except Jesus. [126] This was exactly the same line of argument in the missionary writings of the late nineteenth century. The American missionary E.M. Wherry (1843-1927), for example, addressed the moral excellence of the Old Testament Major Prophets and Muḥammad. He further concluded that 'we nowhere find a single sentence or word, or even a shadow of a hint that Jesus was a sinner'.[127]

In his answer, Riḍā firstly explained that the author was incorrect in counting Adam among the five prophets of resolve (*ulū al-ʿAzm*) from an Islamic point of view.[128] Muslims do not believe that due to their infallibility prophets would be their saviors; they were only sent as preachers. It is only one's faith and good deeds that can save a person. Riḍā ridiculed the writer by stating that he did not understand the notion of infallibility (*'ismah*) attributed to prophets according to Islam. Their infallibility merely means that they never committed any *kabīrah* (grave sin), and does not signify that they were different from all human beings, or that they never experienced pain and fear. As for the author's statement that wine-drinking was the only sin Noah committed, Riḍā stressed that in the New Testament it is related that Jesus drank wine as well. As Jesus committed the same 'sin', he would not have had the ability to save the people either. Riḍā interpreted the tale of Abraham's sinning by lying in an allegorical way. He intended to protect his wife by saying: 'she is my sister', which meant 'in religion'. He hid the truth only out of necessity, in order to get rid of evil and injustice by protecting his wife against slavery or capture.[129]

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[124] Ibid., 817.

[125] Wood incorrectly Miṣread the word *faqr* (poverty), and translated the phrase 'caused him to die in the desert). Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

[126] As cited in *al-Manār*, vol. 4/21, p. 818.

[127] As quoted in, Alan M. Guenther, 'The Image of the Prophet as Found in Missionary Writings of the Late Nineteenth Century', *The Muslim World*, vol. 90/1 (2000), p. 58.

[128] The messengers of *'Ulū-al-ʿAzm* in Islam were five: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. The prophet Muḥammad was asked to 'bear up [hardships] as did the apostles endowed with resolve bear up with patience' (Al-Aḥqāf: 35). They were called as such because they were resolve and arduous in facing the immense trial of their people.

[129] In his polemics with Samuel Ibn Nagrela, Ibn Hazm made it clear that the text of Genesis 20:12 on the tale specifically defined 'sister' in words attributed to Abraham himself, as 'daughter of my father'. The only way in which Abraham's marriage to his sister could be defended, Ibn Hazm said, would be by appeal to the Islamic principle of abrogation. See, Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Hazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures*, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1998, p. 60.

Neither did Riḍā accept the idea that the fear expressed by Moses should be a sin or violation of the law. It was his human feeling of fearfulness and of the sublimity of his Divine mission. It was also not appropriate, according to Riḍā, to consider the prophets seeking forgiveness as a mark of rebellion or violation of God's religion. It was only their perception of glorifying Him.[130]

4.5. Conclusion

In the above-mentioned articles, we have shown that Riḍā discussed both Judeo-Christian and Muslim Scriptures on the basis of classical and modern interpretations. Riḍā's usage of Western sources in this specific period was not entirely absent. It is interesting to see that he quoted the Western critical study of the Bible from a work of fiction, such as *ʿAlam al-Dīn*, and quoted the statements of a Christian convert to Islam.

Riḍā found the Egyptian magazine, *Glad Tidings of Peace,* the most obvious among the Christian missionary publications in their enmity towards Islam. All of these missionary publications reflected the general thesis that Islam was at many levels inherently inferior and irrational as compared to Christianity. Specific criticisms included the following: the Qur'ān was inconsistent and inharmonious; and Muḥammad was inferior to Moses and Jesus and therefore not a real prophet. Therefore, Muslims did not properly adhere to their Scriptures, which strongly commanded them to believe in the Bible.[131] In his answer, Riḍā's supposedly abstract comparison of Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad was not entirely based on Islamic sources. He went beyond these sources by restricting his arguments to some descriptive analysis of the characters of the two prophets in comparison to Muḥammad. In the case of Moses, it was his upbringing under the custody of the Pharaoh, which made him a diligent and proud person. Jesus was portrayed as a Jewish man, who was much influenced by the Roman and the Greek way of life.

In his answer, Riḍā was in the 'defensive arena', and his main objective was to refute the 'allegations' of the missionaries as much as he could. He was anxious that they would definitely affect the common Muslims who had no solid knowledge. Besides his critique of the textual authenticity of the Bible, Riḍā cynically attacked its content and the current interpretation of its message. The teachings of the canonical gospels were, for example, excessive in love and power in contrast to the Qur'ānic concept of moderation. He frequently attacked his Christian counterparts for their implicit propagation of 'evildoing' and of libertine behaviour among their followers through their confirmation that the only way of redemption was to believe in Jesus, whatever sins they might commit in their life. In comparison to that, he further argued, Islam required the believers that faith should produce sound deeds.

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[130] *Al-Manār*, vol. 4/21, pp. 819-820.
[131] Wood, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.