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

Ryad, U.

Chapter Six
The Art of Polemics: Tawfīq Ṣidqī's Contributions to *al-Manār* and Riḍā's Use of Them

The present chapter will shed light on the contributions of the above-mentioned Egyptian physician Muḥammad Tawfīq Ṣidqī, who is considered to be the most prolific polemicist in *al-Manār*. In a general sense, the thrust of the approach of Ṣidqī in his polemics was not innovative in the subjects he dealt with. It did not differ much from the earlier Muslim tradition that considered the Holy Scriptures as falsified, but containing many parts which could be used as a source for apologetics in verifying Islamic tenets. Like all Muslim authors in the field, one of his major concerns was to find proofs of Muḥammad's prophethood in the Bible. He extensively selected Biblical passages, which he depicted as inappropriate, and raised many questions about them. From the bulk of these quotations we will select some salient features that are typically of his approach. His treatment sometimes stood apart from the tradition of Muslim earlier writers. The new dimension of his methods, as we shall note, was that he widely made use of the writings of the Rationalist Press Association.[1] In his analysis of Biblical Criticism, he also used his own medical expertise and scientific interpretations, especially on the Christian set of narratives of crucifixion and resurrection.

We have already mentioned that Ṣidqī's stridently articulated views against Christianity and missions brought him into conflict with the colonial authorities, and consequently endangered the existence of *al-Manār*. Ṣidqī's works did not please the contemporary missionary quarterly, *The Moslem World*. In reviewing Ṣidqī's *A View on the Scriptures*, Rev. R. F. McNeile of Cairo wrote that he was not in the least surprised, nor did he intend to complain that an educated Muslim used the methods and results of Biblical Criticism, which to him were wholly incompatible with the belief in an inspired book. He complained about his method, describing it as 'wholly out of date'. In his view, Ṣidqī was ignorant of living scholars, and not a single one of his long list of authorities was a highly recognized scholar of the New Testament. He was only fond of quoting agnostics […]. In his evaluation, the first part of the book was 'disingenuous', the last part was 'far worse'. He concluded: 'we are ashamed to defile a printed page by repeating his statements […] we are willing to grant originality to Dr. Ṣidqī in such points, and are tempted to ask whether they are not reflections of a society, or at least the state of mind, to which the uplifting of women, the casting out of devils, is unthinkable. […] Dr. Ṣidqī is in government employ. What would be the result of a Copt in a similar position,

[1] About its history, see, Bill Cooke, *Blasphemy depot: a hundred years of the Rationalist Press Association.* London: Rationalist Press Association, 2003.

who published articles one-tenth so revolting to the Moslem as these are to the Christian!'[2]

Riḍā, nevertheless, was proud of Ṣidqī's polemical contributions. He always saw his replies to missionaries as unprecedented. No previous scholars, according to him, had ever dealt with similar subjects, especially the concept of *Qarābīn* (sacrifices) in previous religions, as his friend did. He constantly recommended Muslims, who used to read works of missionaries or to attend their gatherings, to study Ṣidqī's works very carefully.[3] In a letter, he enthusiastically told Shakīb Arslān that one of the Chinese Muslim scholars had already translated the work of *ʿAqīdat al-Ṣalb wā al-Fidā*, which he wrote together with Ṣidqī, into Chinese. Without mentioning the Chinese Muslim by name, he added that the translation had been published in his Muslim journal as a response to missionary propaganda in their town.[4] The clue which allows us to identify this Chinese Muslim is Riḍā's reference to him as one of his *mustaftī*s, who regularly sent *al-Manār* letters concerning the 'shameful' situation of Muslims in China. In *al-Manār*, we find a certain 'Uthmān Ibn al-Hāj Nūr al-Haqq al-Sīnī al-Hanafī, who regularly lamented to Riḍā about the situation of Sino-Muslims and their lack of religious knowledge and piety. He was the director of an Islamic journal in the Chinese province Guangdong. His journal was much influenced by Riḍā's thoughts, and sometimes published full chapters from *al-Manār* translated into Chinese.[5] It is clear that this al-Hanafī is the one who was committed to translate *ʿAqīdat al-Ṣalb wā al-Fidā*.

6.1. Al-Matbūlī of Cairo and the Resurrection of Jesus

When Ṣidqī started publishing his polemics in *al-Manār*, an interesting anecdote spread all over the Cairo of 1912. Both Riḍā and Ṣidqī used the anecdote on a regular basis as a point of departure, and compared it with the story of crucifixion. The Cairiene story also appeared as an appendix on the back page of one of Ṣidqī's works.

According to the Egyptian daily *al-Muqaṭṭam* (31 October 1912), a big number of men and women had crowded in the front of the recently built Greek Church downtown in Cairo. The crowds were shouting: 'O, Matbūlī!', and some of them were severely wounded. The police was immediately called, and ambulances were carrying people to hospital. The Governor of Cairo, ʾIbrāhīm Pasha Najīb, came soon to the place. A rumor circulated among the people that Sheikh al-Matbūlī, a holy man buried in the center of Cairo, had been seen standing on the dome of his grave. He then had flown through the air and descended on the building of this Greek Church. A seventy-year old

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[2] *The Moslem World*, vol. 4 (1916), pp. 215-216. About more missionary critique of Ṣidqī, see also, Jeffery, 'Trends', pp. 311-313.

[3] *Al-Manār*, vol. 15/12 (Dhū al-Ḥijja 1330/December 1912), pp. 949-950.

[4] Arslan, *Ikhāʾ*, p. 570.

[5] *Al-Manār*, vol. 31/1 (Muḥarram 1349/May 1930), pp. 75-76. About his questions for *fatwās* in *al-Manār*, see, Riḍā's response on his questions concerning China as *Dār al-Ḥarb* or *Dār al-ʾIslam*, vol. 31/4 (Jumādā al-ʾŪlā 1349/October 1931), pp. 270-278.

lunatic from Upper Egypt, whose name was Fāris Ismā'īl, had been seen running on the street, wearing green clothes and a turban, shouting: 'I am al-Matbūlī'. Seeking his blessing, the people paraded behind him, and started kissing his hands and clothes. The police immediately arrested him, and dispersed the gathering. *Al-Manār* compared this anecdote with the story of the resurrection of Jesus. It drew the attention of its readers to the influence of illusions and false rumors on the minds of laymen and narrow-minded people, especially the women among them. Illusion could also affect the minds of people to the degree that they would see imaginary things.'[6]

6.2. The Religion of God in His Prophets' Books

6.2.1. Jesus as Offering

According to Ṣidqī, the Christians used concepts and events taken from earlier religions in their narratives about Jesus, even though they lacked a historical basis. They tried to show that the 'former' was a proof to the 'later'. Ṣidqī reiterated the words of al-Afghānī that 'the authors of the New Testament tailored a dress from the Old Testament and put it on their Christ'.[7] An example of these was that the exodus of the Children of Israel was a sign of the return of Jesus: 'that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, out of Egypt have I called my son' (Mathew 2:15).[8]

In his understanding, Ṣidqī stated that some Christians used the practice of offerings and sacrifices in previous religions as a token for the crucifixion. He made a critical observation that sacrifices also existed in ancient pagan religions, which had neither known Jesus nor his religion. And since the Mosaic Covenant also included among sacrifices burnt offerings, he argued, did that also refer to the burning of Jesus? And would an animal sacrifice directly refer to the crucifixion? In John (19:32-33) the crucifixion had been described as follows: 'the soldiers […] brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water'. Medically speaking, Ṣidqī contended, it was impossible that human beings bleed water. The symbolic resemblance between Jesus' death and offerings in previous religions was in that sense absent. Ṣidqī maintained that there was also no logic behind his hanging on the cross for six hours, and leaving him in pain and hunger. The same held true for having been pierced, something which is totally different from the way of slaughtering animals as an offering.[9] In pagan religions, people often brought offerings to please their gods. But 'true religions', according to Ṣidqī, never ordered offerings in order to please or to

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[6] Appendix, Ṣidqī, *Dīn Allah fī Kutub Anbyā'ih*, Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Manār, 1330/1912 (Quoted below, *Dīn*).

[7] Ibid., p. 4. Ṣidqī opened his book with some passages from the Bible, such as, 'Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life (John, 5: 39).

[8] Ibid., p. 4.

[9] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

profit God. Their objectives have been stipulated, for instance, to feed the poor and needy or to expiate one's illegal acts.[10]

6.2.2. The Crucifixion and Divinity of Jesus in the Old Testament

We have seen that Ṣidqī renounced any claim or clarification of the crucifixion as having been foretold in the Old Testament. For example, the book of Daniel indicated the restoration and building of 'Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince' (Daniel, 9:24-27). According to Christian interpretation, the prophecy stated the primary mission of Jesus by giving several particulars. According to this passage, Daniel was told that 'seventy weeks' were required to fulfill his petition concerning the restoration of Israel. The seventy weeks, according to many Christian scholars, were seventy 'weeks' of years, which resulted in a period of 490 years, and these referring to the coming of Jesus.[11] Ṣidqī found this interpretation unconvincing, and placed the prophecy of Daniel in an Islamic context. He argued that as the Israelites had lost the authority on Jerusalem in 132 AD, adding to it 490 years it would mean that the period should have ended in 622, the year of the prophet's migration to Medina. Or it would refer to the year 636, when Muslims conquered Jerusalem. The period of 14 years according to this calculation was left out as an interval period during which the Jews were reposing from the 'injustice' of the Christians.[12] On the basis of the same calculation, Ṣidqī explained that the revelation to Daniel in the same book 'to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy' (9:24) was again a reference to the prophet Muḥammad as the seal of prophets. 'It was his Caliph Omar, who took authority upon Jerusalem, restored it to God's worship, and lifted up the injustice inflicted upon the Jews'.[13]

Another example was that many Christians argued that there were other prophecies of the crucifixion in the book of Isaiah (chapter 53). Ṣidqī interpreted the chapter in the same manner: they had no relation to Jesus whatsoever. He attempted to show the 'errors' of the Christians by citing many passages from this chapter, and compared them with other previous ones in the Bible. He concluded that the whole chapter clearly referred to the conquest of

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[10] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

[11] See, for example, Michael Kalafian, *The Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks of the Book of Daniel: A Critical Review of the Prophecy as Viewed by Three Major Theological Interpretations and the Impact of the Book of Daniel on Christology,* New York: University of America Press, Inc., 1991, pp. 107-136; Edward J. Young, *The prophecy of Daniel : a commentary*, Grand Rapids, Mich. : Eerdmans, 1949; William Kelly, *Daniel's Seventy Week,* Colorado: Wilson Foundation, n.d.; Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days.* Revised edition, Chicago: Moody Press, 1977; Paul D. Feinberg, 'An Exegetical and Theological Study of Daniel 9:24-27,' S. John and D. Paul (eds.), *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg,* Chicago: Moody Press, 1981, pp. 189-222; J. Randall Price, 'Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9 and Other Texts,' in W.R. Willis, John R. Master (eds.), *Issues in Dispensationalism*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1994, pp.132-165.

[12] Ṣidqī, *Dīn*, pp. 15-16.

[13] Ibid., pp. 17-18. For further about his analysis of the book of Daniel, see, pp. 20-26.

Jerusalem. It was Jewish converts to Christianity, such as Paul, who had inserted such notions into their new religion by thoroughly applying them to the figure of Jesus.[14]

In the course of his observations, Ṣidqī turned to refute what he saw as Christian arguments of proving the divinity of Jesus from within the Old Testament.[15] Ṣidqī saw that the Jews had an inherent inclination towards paganism. For instance, they worshipped the golden calf. Their 'affection of paganism' originated from their long-term residence among the pagans of Ancient Egypt and Babylon. This was the reason why they always held their expected Messiah to be a king, who would grant them victory over all nations. Ṣidqī moreover added that when Jesus declared his Divine mission, such 'pagan doctrines were grown in their hearts'. They tried to worship him in a similar manner, but Jesus constantly opposed them by saying, for example: 'depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mathew 7:23)' and 'O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord' (Mark, 12:29). Jewish converts and the Romans, therefore, carried their pagan precepts into Christianity, and went on the extreme side by holding the divinity of Jesus as integral part of their new faith. In this context, Ṣidqī understood the 'exaggeration' in the account of the Jewish historian and apologist Flavius Josephus, who wrote about him: 'Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles' (*Antiquities of the Jews,* Book 18, chapter 3/3. Ṣidqī translated 'Gentiles' as 'Greek' in Arabic).[16] Another account of such exaggeration was of the 'greatest' Jewish convert Paul: 'Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they' (Hebrews 1:4). Ṣidqī believed that at this precise moment the idea of divinity had not been completely developed in Paul's mind, but he later made it much clearer by putting it bluntly that God had 'raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places […] and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church' (Ephesians 1: 17-22).[17]

Ṣidqī followed his usual procedure by selecting some examples from the Old Testament, which were alleged to implicitly support the belief of the divinity of Jesus. He totally discredited the Christian argument that Isaiah had predicted the divinity of Jesus as the one whose 'name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace', and that the same prophet had predicted that Christ was to order and establish his judgement upon 'the throne of David, and upon his kingdom' (Isaiah, 9: 6-7). Ṣidqī concluded that Isaiah's prophecy and the attributes he mentioned were only applicable to the prophet Muḥammad as the seal of the

[14] Ibid, pp. 31-32.
[15] Ibid., pp. 39-61.
[16] Ibid., p. 41.
[17] Ibid., pp. 42-43.

prophets whose followers had ruled over the Holy Land. Supposing that the passage really referred to Jesus, and that people had called him already a 'mighty god', it was still not enough evidence for Ṣidqī on his divinity. It was rather the other way around that it had been a real prediction and warning by Isaiah that the people would contradict the notions of the genuine monotheism, and would turn to worshipping Jesus other than the One God.[18] Ṣidqī forgot, however, to give more clarification of the phrase 'mighty god' in the context of his Islamic interpretation, and how one could understand its application to the prophet Muḥammad from an Islamic viewpoint.

Ṣidqī argued that all these implicit passages used by the Christians could easily be explained as referring to the message of Islam. Prophecies in the Old Testament were not specific in defining persons by name.[19] Take for example the passage, 'Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek' (Psalm 110: 4). This was, according to Ṣidqī, an allusion to the prophet Muḥammad. Ṣidqī compared the blessing by Melchizedek of Abraham to the way the Qur'ān respected him. Muslims remember the name of Abraham during their daily prayers. As for the word 'priest', Ṣidqī interpreted it within an Islamic scope. It would directly refer to the prophecy of Muḥammad, since he was the 'leader of Muslims and their greatest imam, who taught them the religion, judged among them, looked into all of their affairs, led them in their […] prayers, pilgrimage […] gatherings and feasts. They [Muslims] imitated him in their sacrifices and in everything […] He was therefore their greatest 'priest' […] forever.'[20] In Ṣidqī's mind, Muḥammad deserved the prophecy, as Jesus had less status than he in regard to all these 'priestly' functions. He ironically added that Jesus never practiced any priestly job, but was only portrayed as 'offering' in the book of Revelation: 'the Lamb that was slain to receive power' (Revelation 5:12).[21] He added that in the same chapter we find testimony to the prophet Muḥammad. 'The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion' (110:2) showed that the real kingdom and prophethood would be given to Muḥammad after the Jews and Christians. Jesus himself said it clearly that: 'the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof' (Mathew 21:43).[22]

In his polemics, Ṣidqī was not always consistent. As we have noted, he made use of Josephus' remark about Jesus as 'a wise man' and the conversion of many Jews and Romans to his religion. Now he fell back on accusing the Christians of interpolating many passages in Josephus' *Antiquities* in order to serve their desires.[23] He followed the arguments of many seventeenth-century critics, who had doubted the authenticity of certain proofs of the *Antiquities* of Josephus (especially book 18) and its reference to Jesus by arguing that it had

[18] Ibid., pp. 45-46.
[19] Ibid., pp. 50-53.
[20] Ibid., pp. 52-53.
[21] Ibid., p. 53.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., p. 79.

been added by a later Christian copyist. There was no indication throughout that whole voluminous work, except this one passage. None of the early Christian Church Fathers, such as Origen, mentioned Josephus as having written about Jesus.[24] According to Ṣidqī, the situation of the Jews at that time was so fragile and they became 'humiliated' to the degree that the Christians were able to manipulate and change their scriptures.[25]

Ṣidqī maintained that the authors of the Gospels did not write everything about Jesus and his life. Jesus only spoke about previous prophecies and legislations, and never mentioned anything about history. Ṣidqī also wondered why Jesus did not rebuke the Jews for their additions in the version of Septuaginta, but reproached them for nullifying the Mosaic Law through their traditions: 'you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down' (Mark 7:13). Ṣidqī labelled their legislations as temporary, and to be replaced by Islam. Jesus had already alluded to Muḥammad's coming by saying: 'I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come' (John 16:12-13).[26]

Ṣidqī intended to prove that the corruption of the scriptures had been dominant since the earliest history of Christianity. Peter, for example, confessed that 'in them there are some things hard to understand that the ignorant and unstable distort to their own destruction, just as they do the other scriptures' (Peter 2, 3: 16). Paul said the same in Galatians, viz. that 'evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ' (1:7). Ṣidqī again wondered which 'one was among all these numerous gospels the favourite of Paul to the degree that he called it gospel of Christ: it might have been one of the apocryphal gospels.'[27]

Ṣidqī made an attempt to reconcile his rejection of the divinity of Jesus with his miraculous birth without a father, which the Christians used as a proof for his supernatural power. In his view, his birth in this way was one of God's countless miracles in His creation. The Divine omnipotence was meant to remove the 'illusions' of Greek philosophy, and to show human beings their inability and to warn them that they should not boast their power. Ṣidqī argued that people always believed in the impossibility of creating animals without father, but God made the matter different by the creation of Jesus. Modern scholars, he went on, investigated many creatures and found that there are tiny animals, such as aphides (plant lice), which are often found to be partheno-genetic in many generations. It is theortically possible that the process of parthenogenesis in the same way could produce human beings and mamals. 'It

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[24] Much has been written about 'Testimonium Flavianum'. For the controversy on his testimony of Jesus, see, for example, Alice Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus: the testimonium Flavianum controversy from late antiquity to modern times*, New York, N.Y., [etc.]: Lang, 2003.
[25] Ṣidqī, *Dīn*, pp. 79-80.
[26] Ibid., p. 81.
[27] Ibid., p. 84.

would be crazy', Ṣidqī wrote, 'to hold such odd examples of creatures as deity. It is just as considering a lady with more than two breasts as a goddess, and worshipping her only because one did never see or hear about someone alike. Or like worshipping a virgin woman who delivered without any intercourse.'[28]

Elsewhere Ṣidqī gave another medical interpretation of the fatherless birth of Jesus. There was no *Naqlī* (traditional) or *ʿAqlī* (rational) objection against making a comparison between the pregnancy of Mary and the exceptional case of somebody like Catherine Hohmann, a masculine hermaphrodite who in her life was said to have a sort of menstruation.[29] However, Ṣidqī did not mean that Mary was not a feminine: 'it was probable that she had male and female genitals, but her female structure was exceeding [the other]. She bore Jesus, delivered and fed him, if we believe in what the New Testament claimed that she got married after his birth and had children (Matthew 1: 25 & 13: 55)'.[30] It is interesting to note that the thirteenth-century Qur'ān exegete Abū Bakr al-Qurtubī made a similar portrayal of Mary, which J.I. Smith & Y.Y. Haddad interpreted as that of a kind of hermaphrodite. According to Qurtubī, 'the truth is that when God created Adam and took the covenant with his progeny, He made some of the liquid in the back of fathers and some in the uterus of mothers. When the waters join, a child is formed. God made both waters in Mary, part in her uterus and part in her back. Gabriel blew in order to arouse her desire. A woman cannot conceive unless her desire is aroused. When her desire was roused with the blowing of Gabriel, the water in her back descended to the uterus, and became mixed and then became fertilized.'[31]

Ṣidqī offered a separate presentation of the Qur'ānic description of Jesus as *kalima* (Word of God) and its relation to the Christian concept of *logos*. He understood the term as metaphorically pointing to all God's creatures, including Adam and Jesus, as God's *Kalimāt*. Islam portrayed Jesus in particular, but not Adam, as God's *Kalima* in order to show the way of his creation, and to rebuff the Christian 'allegation' concerning his divinity and the Jewish 'accusation' of him as an illegitimate child. Another reason, according to Ṣidqī, was that he, unlike Adam, did other miracles, such as talking in his infancy, and curing the sick. In that sense, Ṣidqī blamed the Christians that they incorrectly grasped the figurative meaning of the word *logos*. They exaggerated the concept of Jesus by understanding his place as God's *logos* and therefore the creator of all things (John 1:3). Ṣidqī agreed with the common argument that the Christian tenet of identifying Jesus with the logos was derived from Stoic ideas as incorporated in Judaic and Christian thought in the first and second century.[32]

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[28] Ibid., pp. 87-88.

[29] *Al-Manār*, vol. 18/4 (Jumadā al-Ākhirā 1333/May 1915), pp. 300-301. See, Magnus Hirschfeld, *Sexual Anomalies.* New York, Emerson Books, Inc., 1944.

[30] Ibid., p. 301.

[31] J. Smith & Y. Yazbek Haddad, 'The Virgin Mary in Islamic tradition and commentary', *The Muslim World*, 79/3-4 (1989), p. 167. For other Muslim views, see, for example, N. Robinson, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and the virginal conception', *Islamochristiana* 14 (1988), 1-16.

[32] About Christianity and Stoicism, see, Ralph Stob, 'Stoicism and Christianity', *The Classical Journal*, vol. 30/4 (January, 1935), pp. 217-224.

Ṣidqī compared the Islamic rejection of the crucifixion with that by earlier Christian sects, such as the Cerinthians, Carpocratians, Basilidians, and Arians. He did not define his source at this point, but made it clear in the book *ʿAqīdat al-Ṣalb wā al-Fidā*, discussed below. He directly quoted the Qur'ān translation by George Sale, who elaborated on this point. Ṣidqī, however, quoted an anonymous book under the title, *Riḥlat al-Rusul* (Travels of the Apostles), which included the acts of Paul, Peter, John, Andrew, and Thomas. He asserted that the account of Patriarch Photius of Constantinople that Jesus was not crucified, but another person instead, was based on that book.[33] It is difficult to trace this source. But it is interesting to know that it was Photius who preserved a fragment from a lost work by the Jewish historian Justus of Tiberius, a native of Galilee, who made no reference to the appearance of Jesus.[34]

6.3. The Doctrine of Crucifixion and Salvation

Ṣidqī mentioned his main arguments about the crucifixion and salvation in Christianity in the book of *ʿAqīdat al-Ṣalb wā al-Fidā*, which he co-published with Riḍā. In that work, he expressed his presupposition that some narratives in the Gospels related to the story of the crucifixion were correct. But he tried to make his own reconstruction of the story as an attempt to remove the 'blur' from the eyes of his missionary opponents.[35] Instead of propagating Christianity outside Europe, he advised them to go and save their religion from the critique of the rationalistic attacks of their fellow-citizens. If they did not save their religion there, he cynically said, Europe would once entirely leave Christianity aside.[36]

Throughout his statements, Ṣidqī championed the controversial anonymously published work *Supernatural Religion*, which was later attributed to the above-mentioned English literary figure Walter Richard Cassels.[37] This work attracted wide attention after its publication in 1874. Many scholars began to speculate about the identity of its author. Others heavily responded to its criticism of Christianity. The two Victorian scholar-critics J.B. Lightfoot and Matthew Arnold were among its strongest opponents. Its 'author managed to maintain his anonymity through more than a decade of wild conjectures, until, finally, in 1895, the *Manchester City News* announced that a Manchester poet,

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[33] Ṣidqī, *Dīn*, pp. 118-119.

[34] See, for example, Flavius Josephus and Steve Mason, *Life of Josephus*, Leiden: Brill, 2003; Tessa Rajak, 'Justus of Tiberias', *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, vol. 23/2 (Nov., 1973), pp. 345-368.

[35] Riḍā-Ṣidqī, *ʿAqīdah*, p. 88.

[36] Ibid., pp. 130-131.

[37] Ibid., p. 91. Cf., Cassels, *op. cit.*; see, W.C. van Manen, *Bovennatuurlijke godsdienst*, Sneek: Brouwer, 1876. More about Cassels, see Alan H. Cadwallader, 'Male Diagnosis of the Female Pen in Late Victorian Britain: Private Assessments of Supernatural Religion', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, vol. 5/1 (2007), pp. 69-88. The book is also available at, http://www.ftarchives.net/cassels/bio.htm, accessed on 15 September 2007. Ṣidqī must have made use of the popular edition London: Watts & co., 1902.

Walter R. Cassels, has now avowed himself the author.'[38] Being a lay theologian, Cassels drew much from British and continental Biblical scholars past and present, including the works of such German scholars as Eichhorn and Baur.[39]

Most of the classical Muslim commentators understood the Qur'ānic clause *wā lākin shubbiha lahum* (4:157) that the person who was killed was made to resemble Jesus in their eyes. Putting the likeness of Jesus on another person happened according to these interpretations in a miraculous way. They depended mostly on the Prophetic Traditions claiming that it was a loyal disciple of Jesus who volunteered to die in his place. Other Traditions suggested that God caused Judas Iscariot or one of those who were sent to arrest Jesus to appear like Jesus as a punishment for their betrayal.[40]

Ṣidqī did not follow the lines of the classical *Tafsīr*, and proposed that Judas looked very much like Jesus. He accepted most of the details of the story of the Gospels, but filled in some other details according to his own logic, and to Islamic traditions. Ṣidqī broached it as a historical matter that the Jewish chief priests became 'jealous' of Jesus, when his message began to attract the people of Jerusalem. They made a deal with Judas to lead the soldiers to arrest him, during his last visit to the city (Mark, 14:43-48). All the disciples of Jesus fled away, except Peter, who later denied his relation with Jesus (Mark, 14:50). Pilate, who presided the trial of Jesus, hesitated to condemn him, but he failed to retreat. After his arrest, Jesus was able to escape, either in a miraculous way or not. (Acts 12:6-10 & 16:25). He probably went to the Mount of Olives (John 8:1, 59; 10:39) in order to hide. As Judas regretted his act, he decided to go and hang himself (Mathew, 27:3-10). Due to their similar physical appearance, the soldiers arrested Judas and led him to prison. They thought that he was Jesus. As they were afraid of punishment, they completely concealed his escape. As it were his last minutes before committing suicide, Judas had become very hysterical. He yielded to death, and decided not to tell the truth about his identity wishing that by saving his master this time his sin would be forgiven. As he was awake the whole night, Judas became very pale and tired, and was not able to carry his cross. For this reason, they ordered Simon to carry it. None of Jesus' disciples was present during the time of the crucifixion, 'except some women beholding afar off' (Mathew, 27:55). Ṣidqī preferred the explanation that these women failed to recognize the real Jesus because it is always the habit of women to become emotional and tender-hearted in such situations. He rejected the narrative of the fourth Gospel that Mary and John were standing there (John 19:26). Ṣidqī quoted Renan's critique that it is

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[38] Jerold J. Savory and Matthew Arnold 'The Author of "Supernatural Religion": The Background to God and the Bible', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 16/4, Nineteenth Century (Autumn 1976), p. 681.

[39] Ibid.

[40] See, for example, K. Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim. An exploration,* London 1985; M. Ayoub, 'Towards an Islamic Christology II: The death of Jesus, reality or delusion', *The Muslim World*, vol. 70 (1980), pp. 91-121; E.E. Elder, 'The crucifixion in the Qurān', *The Muslim World*, vol. 13 (1923), pp. 242-58.

difficult to 'understand how the Synoptics, who name the other women, should have omitted her [Mary], whose presence was so striking a feature.'[41] Besides, Ṣidqī went on with his reconstruction of the story that the standing people were also not well-acquainted with Jesus, as he was not a native inhabitant of the city. Even those who were close to the scene could not grasp Judas' dissimilarity with him. They must have thought that it was his exhaustion and distress that might have changed his face. According to his medical knowledge, Ṣidqī argued that many comparable examples occurred, and people became confused when identifying their dead relatives. Such cases could be explained by forensic medicine.[42]

In the evening Joseph of Arimathaea, a disciple of Jesus, secretly asked Pilate for permission to bury the body of Jesus after the crucifixion (John 19:38). In Ṣidqī's view, Joseph did not know Jesus before in person. He could not recognize the identity of the crucified man. Even Nicodemus, who helped Joseph during the burial, had seen Jesus only once at night (John 19:39), three years before the crucifixion (John 3: 1-10). In order to remove the humiliation attached to them and render the Jews saddened, Ṣidqī continued, one or two of the disciples decided to get the corpse of the dead body out of the grave and hid it in another place. In the same way, they also alleged that their Saviour was taken to the heaven.[43] It was until Sunday when Mary Magdalene had told Peter and John that Jesus' dead body was not in his grave. People consequently started to believe that the body had been raised to the heaven. Ṣidqī stressed that Mary Magdalene was the only woman who had seen him and spoken to him. Ṣidqī was certain that the story of the 'seven devils' cast upon her after having witnessed Jesus' rising meant that she became very hysterically nervous (Mark 16:9). She only imagined that there had been two angels talking to her. Such 'illusive imaginations' would sometimes occur in the minds of women, who would become emotional and hysterical; especially at the graveyard in the darkness (John 20:1). Ṣidqī argued that she was not able to determine the right place of his grave. He compared these 'illusions' to the above-mentioned Matbūlī incident. The two angels were, in his view, probably the two disciples, dressed in white, who were trying to take the dead body away. This was in agreement with the other report that 'two men stood by them in shining garments' (Luke 24:4). The differences between the reports of writers of the Gospels, he went on, lied in their entire dependence on the 'circulated unorganised rumours' after the death of Jesus. The disciples became haunted by 'illusions' and 'obsessions' to the extent that they thought that everybody whom

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[41] Riḍā-Ṣidqī, *ʿAqīdah*, pp. 104-105. See Chapter XXV: 'Death of Jesus'. Renan's work is also available at:
http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/ernest_renan/life_of_jesus.html; & http://www.lexilogos.com/document/renan/life_jesus.htm; accessed 20 August 2007.

[42] Riḍā-Ṣidqī, *ʿAqīdah*, pp. 102-103. He quoted William A. Guy & David Ferrier, *Principles of Forensic Medicine*, London 1895.

[43] Ibid., pp. 113-116.

they had met or with whom they had eaten was Jesus (Mark 16:12, Luke 24:16 and John 21:4-7).[44]

To support his arguments, Ṣidqī quoted similar examples of illusions mentioned by European psychologists. William Benjamin Carpenter (d. 1885), an English psychologist, reported about the Scottish historical novelist Sir Walter Scott (d. 1832) that, while having been deeply engaged in reading, he had seen his friend Lord Byron, after the latter's death. When he stepped onwards towards the figure, there had been merely a screen occupied by great-coats, shawls, plaids and such other articles.[45] A similar incident also occurred after a fire had broken out in 1866 in the Crystal Palace in London. People fancied an ape trying to escape, but finally they realized that there was nothing.[46]

Returning to his hypothesis on the crucified person, Ṣidqī maintained that people must have wondered where Judas Iscariot had been. But as they had already known that he was planning to hang himself, it was probable that they had found a dead body whose 'bowels were gushed out (Acts 1:18)' outside Jerusalem. Ṣidqī believed that it was also possible that this dead body was of Jesus himself, if it were true that he died a natural death after his escape. In that case, God must have raised him up only in the spiritual sense. Ṣidqī stressed that his disciples, due to their extreme love to him, never thought of his death, just as the companions of the prophet Muḥammad had done after his death.[47] He moreover argued that it was impossible that people would recognize the one to be crucified, as they 'arrayed him in a gorgeous robe' (Luke 23:10) and Jesus 'came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe' (John 19:2). When they crucified him, they divided his garments (Mark 15:24 & Matthew 27:35-36). The fact that he was unclothed at the moment of the crucifixion must have made it more difficult for the attendants to recognize him.[48]

Ṣidqī suggested yet another scenario of the burial moments of Jesus. It was also probable that Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus became anxious that the Jews would abuse the dead body or leave it to wild animals. After having pretended that they had buried his body, they returned back to the graveyard in order to relocate the body in another grave after having become sure that everybody had already departed. They had made a pledge that they should keep it highly confidential.[49]

The story of his rising up to heaven in the beginning was only confined to his disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24:33). They would only assemble for a period of eight days while the doors were shut for fear of the Jews (John 20:19 and 26). It was only 50 days later when they were able to publicly gather when the Day of Pentecost had come (Acts 2:1). Ṣidqī concluded that if they had really

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44 Ibid., p. 101

45 Ibid., p. 102. William Benjamin Carpenter, *Principles of Mental Physiology with Their Applications to the Training and Discipline of the Mind and the Study of its Morbid Conditions,* New York, 1889. 207-208.

46 Ibid., p. 102.

47 Ibid., p. 108.

48 Ibid., p. 95.

49 Ibid., pp. 97-98.

found a dead body, it would have been impossible to identify it after having been decayed.[50] Ṣidqī rejected the Biblical claim that there were 3.000 souls who 'gladly received his word and baptized' (Acts 2:41). The house where the disciples were gathering could only include 120 persons (Acts 1:15). Peculiar to him was the quick reporting to the public from various communities about the Holy Ghost, which began to speak with other tongues. He wondered why the disciples had not written the Gospels in these world languages that were familiar to them so that they would have made it easy for the people to accept the message without translation. It would have also been an eternal miracle to them.[51] Ṣidqī doubted the reports on the locality of Jesus after his rising. He raised the question if Jesus had really told his disciples that he would go before them into Galilee after his rising (Matthew 26:32 & 28:10), how come that they had meet him in Jerusalem (Luke, 24:36-37)? What was the wisdom behind sending them to Galilee?[52]

Ṣidqī knew of the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (AD 55-120) and his discussion on the crucifixion. For him, Tacitus' report had been based on the already circulated rumours without any investigation.[53] He was also aware of the ideas of the English humanist F.J. Gould (1855-1938) who denied the story of Tacitus as a forgery.[54] Most of the Roman historians, in Ṣidqī's view, had poor knowledge of the history of Jesus. The Romans had never heard of him, except after the spread of Christianity in Italy. Some of them had looked down upon Christianity. For a long time, they had not been able to distinguish between the Jews and Christians, and had been convinced that the god of the Jews was a donkey, or donkey-headed.[55] Ṣidqī compared the value of such 'pagan' works on Christianity with Western writings on Islam in the Middle Ages. He concluded that Muslims should not take these histories into account, as 'they were valueless and should not be taken as a correct history. They were all based on rumours, inventions, illusions and lies without taking the least trouble in investigating [Christian] history.'[56]

6.4. Ṣidqī's View on the Scriptures of the New Testament and Christian Doctrines

Ṣidqī published his last polemical work in 1913. Under the title *A View on the Scriptures*, he repeated the testimony made by some early Christian writers, such as Papias, Irenaeus and Eusebius on the history of the four Gospels. Irenaeus of Lyons, for example, mentioned that Matthew wrote his Gospel in

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[50] Ibid., p. 114.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., p. 118.
[53] Ibid., pp. 132-133.
[54] Ibid. See, Frederick James Gould, *A Concise History of Religion*, 3 vols., London, Watts & Co., 1893-1897, vol. 3, p. 22.
[55] See, for instance, Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician: Charlatan or Son of God?*, London, 1978, pp. 81-82.
[56] Ibid.

Hebrew or Aramaic. According to him, an anynmous translator took this version and arranged the Greek version.[57] The circulation of these Gospels, in Ṣidqī's view, did not inhibit the Christians to attempt to twist many parts of them. Although the concern of many of these translators was to prove ancient prophecies on Jesus, they were not aware that their insertion of such elements would make them 'blind' about other problematic issues. For example, they had inserted the statement of Jesus 'saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matthew, 27:46), only in order to apply to what they saw as a prophecy in the Psalms: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (22:1). They did not take into account that this would be a sign of weakness, inability and despair. Ṣidqī developed his ideas on the basis of a study of the Protestant writer W.T. Turton, who, in his eyes, was a defender of the truth of Christianity.[58] In his work, Turton wrote: 'it would have weakened the force of Prophecy enormously, since, in the absence of ancient manuscripts, the assertion that the old Jewish prophecies had been tampered with, to make them suit their Christian interpretation, would be difficult to disprove.'[59] Ṣidqī added that the reason why the Christians did not reform these mistakes was the dominant ignorance in ancient times, and the belief that without these matters one's belief would have been invalid. In his words, it was 'only because of their fear of disgrace and shame that they did not dare to change all these mistakes in their scriptures nowadays. This would also have saved them *al-Qīl wā al-Qāl* (prattle)'.[60]

Ṣidqī rendered the vast majority of the material in the New Testament as inauthentic. He maintained that the Twelve Apostles did not write important things on the history of Jesus. Eight of them had never reported anything on his life. He belittled the contribution made by the other four. For instance, Peter was, in his view, a man of weak personality, and because of many negative incidents he could not be trusted. Jesus, for instance, rebuked him 'saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men' (Mark 8:33). Paul blamed him for having faltered the Jews and having lived after their manner (Galatians 2:11-14). Above all, during the Last Supper, Jesus foretold that Peter would deny association with him three times in that night.[61]

Like all other Muslim polemicists, Ṣidqī held the common view that the prophecy of the Paraclete had a direct relation to the prophet Muḥammad. In addition, he quoted the theory of the *Pagan Christs* of the British rationalist journalist John M. Robertson (d. 1933), who had pointed to the emergence of the concept of Paraclete in Christian circles in Asia Minor. The figure of Mani was declared to have called himself the Paraclete promised in the Christian

[57] Ṣidqī, *Naẓrah,* pp. 2-12.
[58] Ibid., p. 45.
[59] Turton, *op. cit.,* p. 386.
[60] Ṣidqī, *Naẓrah*, p. 51.
[61] Ibid., pp. 52-54.

gospel.[62] Another, Montanus, in Asia Minor had claimed to be inspired by the Paraclete.[63] The critique of Robertson and others, in Ṣidqī's view, would support the argument of al-Qairanāwī that the Christians during the time of the Prophet were expecting the coming of another prophet who was to confirm the message of Jesus.[64]

Ṣidqī detected that the Gospels sometimes exaggerated the limits of power of the disciples. They ascribed to them a certain Divine capacity or supernatural powers. Jesus was reported, for example, to have addressed them 'Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained' (John 20: 23). Ṣidqī repeated Riḍā's above-mentioned stance that such instructions in the Gospel could be an indirect call to the believers to commit sins lavishly, while resting assured that they would be forgiven. It was also impossible that those human disciples would have the power to get into the intention of everybody to ascertain his sincerity of repenting. This promise given to them by Jesus, in Ṣidqī's polemics, indicated that the will of the disciples was more effective than anybody else, including God himself. He went further by attacking these notions to be the raison d'être why 'clergymen' in the European Middle Ages had systematically murdered people during the period of Inquisition. The sacralization of such doctrines was the cause of their corruption and tyranny. Ṣidqī recapitulated his astonishment that these notions contradict the other verses in which Jesus himself made it clear that he had no capacity to forgive, except 'for whom it is prepared of his Father' (Matthew 20: 23). Likewise absurd to Ṣidqī were the accounts on Jesus' promise to the disciples that they 'shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you' (Matthew 17: 20). This meant that they left nothing for God to carry out in the universe. According to him, the spread of such concepts among people was the direct motive behind the urgency of sending the Prophet Muḥammad with his message in order to bring people back to the real conception of monotheism.[65]

Ṣidqī challenged his opponents by saying that the Divine wisdom behind the difference of opinions among the Christians and the various sects before Muḥammad was to satisfy human minds with reasonable investigation and thinking, which would promote their readiness to accept the Islamic doctrine after a long period of longing for the truth. As it was the final message, the Muslim umma was never to go astray from the truth. If it were misled, he contended, a new revelation should be needed. But it was the Divine will to send Muḥammad as the seal of prophets as the climax of progress of the human mind.[66] Had God willed that their scriptures would continue to be the

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[62] John M. Robertson, *Pagan Christs: Studies in Comparative Hierology*, London, 1903, p. 268. Cf. for more critical study on the concept of Paraclete according to these sects, see Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 62-69.

[63] Ibid., p. 274.

[64] Ṣidqī, *Naẓrah*, pp. 77-78. Cf., al-Qairanāwī, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 149-150.

[65] Ibid., pp. 108-110.

[66] Ibid., pp. 113-115.

criterion, he went on, He would have preserved them unimpaired like the case of the Qur'ān. However, God had ordained that some parts should remain in them, which contained true doctrine, sermons and high values.[67]

Medieval Muslim polemicists developed some linguistic analysis in understanding the Christian concept of the Sonship of Jesus. They repeatedly attempted to explain to their Christian counterparts that Jesus' Sonship was a metaphor.[68] In the same manner, Ṣidqī ascribed the Jewish and Christian usage of the words 'Father' and 'Children of God' to the fact that people in the historical context of revelation had been feeble-minded. They would have never understood the logic behind the Divine message except by means of allegories and similes. Their scriptures used such terms in order to describe God as merciful and forgiving. Soon after the death of Jesus, Ṣidqī went on, people had begun to believe in the Sonship in the literal sense. He referred to the early Christian and apologist Justin Martyr, who justified the worship of Christ on the basis of certain passages from the Old Testament.[69] This 'erroneous' understanding of the metaphoric meaning of the word 'Son' was, in Ṣidqī's mind, substantiated by the fact that early Christian theologians had mixed their doctrines with ancient foreign philosophies.[70] Ṣidqī added a new Islamic concept to the discussion by stressing that God did not metaphorically use such words as father and son in the Qur'ān because it became well-known among people that they were harmful from a doctrinal point of view. It became therefore useless to use them again, as it might have got 'silly-minded' people back to the doctrine of paganism once again. God, therefore, replaced the word 'Father' in the Qur'ān with many other words and phrases that closely portray the reality of His entity, such as *Ra'ūf* (compassionate) and *Raḥīm* (merciful). The prophet put it clearer in one of his ḥadīths by metaphorically saying that all created human beings are God's *'Iyāl* (children), and that God is more compassionate to his creatures than the mother to her children. Ṣidqī was convinced that people in the time of the Prophet were more advanced than earlier generations, and could easily grasp the meaning of God's mercy without the instrument of allegory.[71]

Ṣidqī maintained that when the Church seized power in the Middle Ages, it saw that any rational investigation would endanger its position and lead people to discard specific Christian doctrines. For this reason, it tried to dishearten the

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[67] Ibid., pp. 116-117.

[68] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity', *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 89/1 (January, 1996), pp. 79-80.

[69] Much has been written about Justin Martyr, see, for example, George H. Gilbert, 'Justin Martyr on the Person of Christ', *The American Journal of Theology*, vol. 10/4 (October, 1906), pp. 663-674; Otto A. Piper, 'The Nature of the Gospel According to Justin Martyr', *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 41/3 (July, 1961), pp. 155-168; Charles H. Cosgrove, 'Justin Martyr and the Emerging Christian Canon. Observations on the Purpose and Destination of the Dialogue with Trypho', *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 36/3 (Septemper, 1982), pp. 209-232; J. E. Morgan-Wynne, 'The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience in Justin Martyr', *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 38/2 (Junuary, 1984), pp. 172-177.

[70] Ṣidqī, *Naẓrah*, pp. 137-146.

[71] Ibid., pp. 147-149.

human *Fiṭrah* (nature) by forbidding reading some religious texts. In his view, people were able to read these banned books only thanks to Protestantism. He believed that those Western scholars, who studied the Bible critically, were a product of Protestantism. He expected that although there would remain some defenders of Christianity in Europe, the critical scholars of the Bible would one time reject the authenticity of the Scriptures altogether.[72]

6.5. Riḍā's Reflection

Riḍā published his reflections on the same subjects together with Ṣidqī in the above-mentioned *ʿAqīdat al-Ṣalb wā al-Fidā*. According to him, the Qur'ānic reference to the crucifixion was meant to be a severe censure of the claims of the Jews. Their offence and rudeness with regard to Jesus had originated from the fact that he declared himself a new prophet. For Riḍā, the Gospels explicitly mentioned that Jesus repeatedly confirmed his prophecy and the oneness of God: 'Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent' (John 17: 3).[73]

In his interpretation of the passage *wā mā qatalūh yaqīnan* (for sure they killed him not), Riḍā argued that the Gospel of Barnabas made it clear that it was Judas Iscariot upon whom God put the likeness with Jesus. Riḍā used Ṣidqī's argument that there was no dispute that the soldiers did not know Jesus in person either, but he gave another metaphoric interpretation to the word *qatala*. It did not mean 'kill' or 'slay', but should be seen as comparable to the Arabic usage of the word in the phrase, *qataltu al-shaʾya baḥthan* (I have studied something thoroughly). The verse could therefore denote that they followed their uncertainty without trying to reach any kind of sure knowledge. Riḍā did not entirely reject the Muslim interpretation that it had been Judas or another person who got the likeness with Jesus. In collecting their arguments, Muslim exegetes depended mostly on the narratives of Jewish and Christian converts to Islam, but did not pay any attention to the premises of the story told in the Christian scriptures.[74]

Regarding the Qur'ānic reference to the 'raising' Jesus, Riḍā drew upon ʿAbduh's exegesis of the verse, 'When God said, 'O Jesus, I am the One who will take you and raise you to me and cleanse you from those who disbelieve' (Al-'Imrān, 3:55). ʿAbduh's interpretation of the Arabic phrases *innī Mutawāffīka wā rāfiʿuka* differed much from most of the early Muslim commentators. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, explained that Jesus was taken by God in his sleep. He hinged on the ḥadīth in which the Prophet was reported to have said: 'Jesus did not die and he will not return to you before the Day of Judgement'. The whole passage would thus mean: 'I am the One who collected

[72] Ibid.
[73] Riḍā-Ṣidqī, *ʿAqīda*, p. 5.
[74] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

you (*mābiḍuka*) from the earth and raised you from among the idolaters and those who disbelieved in you.'[75]

In her *Qur'ānic Christians*, J.D. McAuliffe studied the interpretation of ʿAbduh (which Riḍā followed) on that Qur'ānic verse. Her analysis can be accepted in a general sense, but she has sometimes failed to understand the technical language of *Tafsīr al-Manār*.[76] ʿAbduh maintained that some commentators interpreted *mutawaffīka* as 'causing you to sleep', others explained the phrase that Jesus was collected from the earth to heaven alive in body and spirit; but the majority of the commentators paraphrased it as 'I rescued you from those aggressors so that they could not kill you. Rather I caused you to die a natural death (*umītuka ḥatfa anfik*) and then raised you to Me.'[77] The key to a more proper interpretation, according to ʿAbduh, lies in the conjunctive *wā*, which does not point to the order of the actual event (*al-Tartīb fī al-Wujūd*). Both ʿAbduh and Riḍā tended to accept the alternative interpretation that *al-Tawaffī* overtly meant causing to die in the usual sense of death. The *raf'* (raising) afterwards denoted a 'raising' of the soul: 'it is not odd to speak of an individual, meaning only his soul. Because the soul (*al-Rūḥ*) is the true essence of a man, while the body is like a borrowed garment. It increases and decreases and changes. But the human being is human because his soul persists.'[78] ʿAbduh explained the ḥadīth referring to the bodily raising of Jesus and his eventual return before the Last Day to preach the message of Islam and judge among people with Islamic law into two ways. First of all, all prophetic traditions referring in this regard had been transmitted in an *aḥād* (narrated by a small number people) way; and *al-'Umūr al-I'tiqādiyya* (the doctrinal matters) should not be taken on the basis of such traditions. As a doctrinal issue, the raising or the return of Jesus should be only taken through the *mutawātir* ḥadīth.[79] Secondly, the verse could be understood as referring to the spiritual triumph (*al-Ghalaba al-Rūḥiyya*) of Jesus:

> The Messiah did not bring a new law to the Jews: he brought them something which would prize them from their inflexibility over the external signification of the words of the Mosaic Law and set them to understanding it clearly in its real meaning. He instructed them to observe this true essence and to do whatever would draw them to the

[75] McAuliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 131. For more interpretations, see, pp. 132-141.
[76] Ibid., p. 142. Take for example her translation of the Arabic term *Nuktah Balāghiyya* as 'joke'. Although the word *nuktah* means in another context 'joke', it refers here to a technical term in the science of *Balāghah* (Arabic rhetoric). It is any word specifying the hidden meaning of the phrase or the sentence.
[77] *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 3, p. 261. Translation is McAuliffe's, ibid., p. 142. A.H.M. Zahniser, 'The forms of *tawaffā* in the Qur'ān, a contribution to Christian-Muslim dialogue', *The Muslim World*, vol. 79 (1989), 14-24.
[78] McAuliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
[79] *Tafsīr al-Manār*, p. 261. McAuliffe skipped this point altogether.

world of the spiritual by paying great heed to the complete fulfilment of religious obligations.[80]

Riḍā shifted to give an interpretation of the verse: 'And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before *his* death; and on the Day of Judgment he will be a witness against them' (al-Nisāʾ, 159). Some exegetes defined the pronoun *his* in the verse as referring to Jesus. This meant therefore that all of them would believe in Jesus before his death because he would be still alive in heaven. In Riḍā's view, the pronoun referred to the person who would believe in Jesus, but not to Jesus himself. In other words, everybody among the People of the Book, before his own death, would witness the truth about Jesus. Riḍā's understanding of the verse in this manner was closely related to the Muslim eschatological point of view that everybody would witness his final destination of *al-Thawāb* (reward) or *al-ʿIqāb* (punishment) during the last moments before his death. Riḍā quoted the prophetic traditions that clearly pointed out that the believer will receive the good tidings about God's contentment before his death, on the other hand the unbeliever will be told about God's torture and punishment. The angels consequently will address those who are about to die about the truth of Jesus. Riḍā attempted to prove his interpretation in the light of the Qur'ānic verse indicating that when Pharaoh was overwhelmed with the flood, he confessed his belief (Yūnus, 90).[81]

Riḍā made it clear that the belief in the murder and the crucifixion of Jesus at the outset is not needed for Muslims. Disbelief in it would not decrease Muslim knowledge of Christian ethics or history. It were the Christians who took it as the basis of their faith. Riḍā only criticised it because the Christians made it a point of departure in their attacks against Islam, especially when they found the Qur'ān abhorrently condemning it.[82]

6.5.1. Riḍā Discussing Crucifixion in a Missionary School

In his commentary on these verses, Riḍā recalled his early contact with missionaries, when he arrived in Cairo. Once he passed by the above-mentioned English Missionary School (situated at Muḥammed ʿAlī Pasha Street). A missionary was standing at the entrance of the school asking people to come in and listen to the word of God. When Riḍā was invited in, he saw many people sitting on wooden benches. A missionary preacher stood up and started to address his audience by dwelling on the question of Crucifixion and the Original Sin.[83] Riḍā related the words of the preacher without giving any elaboration on the Christian theological interpretations of the concept of the Original Sin as such. In the missionary's words, human beings were born sinful and deserve punishment because of the Adamic guilt. It was a 'dilemma' for

[80] McAuliffe, p. 143.
[81] Riḍā-Ṣidqī, *ʿAqīda*, 12-14.
[82] Ibid., 14-15.
[83] Ibid., p. 18-19.

God, Who was supposed to be characterized by justice and mercy. If He were to punish Adam and his offspring, it would contradict His mercy. If not, it would not correspond with His justice. Since the creation of Adam, God had been 'thinking' of solving the problem by finding a way to combine mercy with justice. It was only 1912 years ago (from the year Riḍā wrote his treatise), when He found this solution by incarnating His only son in the womb of a woman from Adam's offspring. This son was destined to live and bear the pain of crucifixion in order to salvage human beings.[84] As soon as the missionary finished his sermon, Riḍā stood up and asked: 'If you have gathered us in this place in order to convey to us this message out of mercy and compassion to us, would you allow me to clarify the effect of your sermon on me?' The preacher allowed him. Riḍā took the position of the preacher and started to refute the contents of the sermon by raising six points for discussion. According to Riḍā, his missionary counterpart was not able to give any answer, but made it clear that their school was not a place for debating. Those who were interested in debating were asked to go to their library. Riḍā proudly relates that the audience was shouting: 'There is no God, but Allah and Muḥammad is His messenger!'[85]

During this discussion, Riḍā identified some theological problems surrounding the man's sermon. He recapitulated his amazement at how it was possible that the Maker of the world would be failing to find a solution to this predicament for thousands of years. Those who believe in this doctrine, he went on, do not seek the least of rationality behind their faith.[86] Riḍā was dismayed that the Maker of the universe would be incarnated in the womb of a woman, who had the tiniest place in His kingdom. The outcome was a human being, who was eating, drinking and being tired to the extent that he was slain in humiliation with thieves.[87] Likewise scandalous to Riḍā was the suggestion that God had to leave Jesus to his enemies who tortured him and stabbed him, even though he was guiltless. The divine toleration of their acts would significantly contradict the concept of mercy and justice, which the Christians sought behind the doctrine.[88] For Riḍā, the concept of forgiveness never contradicted the Divine justice and perfection. Riḍā made a parable that any master who forgives his guilty slave is never described as unjust. Forgiveness is, on the other hand, one of the most excellent virtues.[89]

6.5.2. Reward and Salvation in Islam

After having recalled this discussion in the missionary school, Riḍā recurred to discuss the infallibility of prophets, which he had already discussed in the *Shubuhāt*. It was again a reaction to the missionary claim that the prophet

[84] Ibid., p. 17-18.
[85] Ibid., p. 19.
[86] Ibid., p. 20.
[87] Ibid., p. 20-21.
[88] Ibid., p. 22.
[89] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

Muḥammad took the place of Jesus in Islam as redeemer for Muslims. Riḍā was frustrated by their propaganda among the simple-minded Muslims that Jesus had never committed a sin. As in the case of Muḥammad, we are left with some reports that he did make mistakes. According to him, the sinful was never capable of saving his followers from any sin.[90]

Riḍā argued that Islamic instructions in this regard were superior to the Christian doctrine of the crucifixion. In his words, as it never encouraged its followers to exert efforts towards good deeds in order to be saved, this doctrine made people lax in blindly relying on something that had 'corrupted their minds and ethics. He stressed that the light of knowledge and independence, which was originally taken from Islam, liberated the whole Europe from it.[91] Despite Riḍā's deep belief in the sinlessness of all prophets (including Jesus and Muḥammad), he was convinced that his Christian addressees were not able to produce any *ʿAqlī* (rational) or *Naqlī* (traditional) proofs from within their religion. Very suspicious about their way of transmission, Riḍā maintained that the Christian scriptures had no explicit texts telling us that a big number of the followers of Jesus had accompanied him in every minute of his life so that they could have given their testimony that he never lapsed in sin in his whole life. In accordance with Islamic theology, Riḍā differentiated between the Arabic usage of *Khatī'ah* (guilt or fault) and *Dhanb* (sin). As for the former, it never happened from the part of prophets, since it included all acts of divergence by committing what God prohibits, and shunning from what he commands. The latter concept was derived from *Dhanab al-Ḥayawān* (the tail of animal) because it refers to any act that entails unpleasant and opposing results. All prophets would have made this kind of mistakes. An example of these was the prophet Muḥammad's permission to the Hypocrites not to join him in the Expedition of Tabūk (or the Expedition of Distress, circa 630 AD), when they decided to stay behind in Medina. In Riḍā's view, such acts – even though a *dhanb* in the literal sense – could not be considered as a *khatī'ah,* which might prevent human beings from deserving the Kingdom of God and His eternal reward.[92] However, he pointed out that such issues did not represent the core of the Islamic doctrine; and their rejection would bring no harm. For Riḍā, the Muslim criterion of salvation and eternal pleasure in the Hereafter was only accomplished by means of purifying one's soul from all 'false' pagan dogmas and performing good and virtuous acts in this world.[93] This kind of purification does not mean that the believer should be fully infallible from committing any mistake; but he should always wipe off these mistakes by showing remorse: 'It is like one's house which one regularly sweeps and wipes by using all cleaning methods. Whenever any dust or filthiness touches it, one would immediately

[90] Ibid., p. 24.
[91] Ibid., p. 30.
[92] Ibid., p. 26.
[93] Ibid., p. 27.

remove it away […] Clean houses have sometimes little dust and filthiness, which could be easily removed.'[94]

6.5.3. A Pagan Nature of the doctrines of Crucifixion and Salvation?

Riḍā remarked that many Christians had personally confessed to him that such doctrines as the crucifixion, Salvation and Trinity could never rationally be proved. Their mere support originated from the Holy Scriptures with which they must comply regardless their rationality or irrationality. In Islam, he further argued, there was no fundamental doctrine that did not conform to rationality, except some reports on the 'unseen world', which cannot be proven by means of human reason independently. But their occurrence cannot be denied, as they are considered as *Mumkināt* (possibilities).[95]

Riḍā reiterated the arguments of the above-mentioned Ṭāhir al-Tannīr verbatim. As we have mentioned, Tannīr drew parallels between various Christian doctrines and other doctrines held in antique religions. As for the crucifixion, he also quoted other sources, such as a piece of work by the nineteenth-century rationalist Thomas William Doane who argued that 'the idea of salvation through the offering of a God as a sacrifice is very ancient among the pagan Hindus and others.'[96]

6.5.4. An Illusive Crucifixion?

As continuation to his reflection on the crucifixion, Riḍā occasionally drew from the arguments of Ṣidqī, sometimes with no differentiation between Ṣidqī's and his. Riḍā doubted the soundness of the Christian narratives on the crucifixion as lacking the quality of *tawātur*. Riḍā took pride in the status of the *tawātur* in Islam. For him, historical reports acquire this specific attribute, when they are related after the agreement of a large group of narrators, whose collusion to lie over the narration is impossible. In order to avoid any doubt, the absence of collusion and error should be also testified from the side of this multitude of informers.[97] The fact that Mary Magdalene and other women, for example, had been in doubt about the crucified person violated the conditions of *tawātur*.[98]

Riḍā challenged the Christians to prove the *tawātur* of their Scriptures in that sense. He also distrusted the reliability and the holiness, which the

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[94] Ibid., p. 28.
[95] Ibid., p. 31.
[96] Ibid., p. 32. 'The idea of expiation by the sacrifice of a god was to be found among the Hindoos even in Vedic times. The sacrificer was mystically identified with the victim, which was regarded as the ransom for sin, and the instrument of its annulment. The Rig - Veda represents the gods as sacrificing Purusha, the primeval male, supposed to be coeval with the Creator.' T. W. Doane, *Bible myths and their parallels in other religions,* New York : Commonwealth Co, circa 1882, p. 181.
[97] Ibid., pp. 35-36
[98] Ibid., p. 36.

Christians ascribed to their Scriptures. He found no evidence whatsoever on their internal infallibility or the infallibility of their writers. The same held true for the synods which had been established to authorize them. The fact that the Qur'ān has been narrated by the way of *tawātur* was a more reliable foundation for faith than their non-*mutawātir* books. Riḍā warned Muslims not to believe in the missionary propaganda that their Scriptures had been transmitted without interruption since the time of Jesus, and that all Christian sects had accepted them with no difference. Riḍā drew the attention of common Muslims to the fact that Islam, unlike Christianity, was born in the 'cradle' of power, civilization and culture. In that milieu the Qur'ān was preserved.[99]

Riḍā retold Ṣidqī's arguments regarding the alleged prediction in the Old Testament of the crucifixion.[100] He also repeated his ideas concerning the confusion of the soldiers, who had led Jesus to his prison. Riḍā used his own experience as an argument. Often, he would greet strange people confounding them with his friends. But after having talked to them, he would recognize that they were not his friends. Riḍā quoted from the same medical work used by Ṣidqī. Besides, he cited another incident mentioned in the afore-mentioned educational French work, *L'Émile du dix-neuvième siècle*, that it has been attested that people would sometimes be confused in recognizing others who have similar appearance.[101] Unlike Ṣidqī, who mainly interpreted the confusion about the crucifixion from a medical and scientific point of view, Riḍā repeated the classical Muslim view that it was primarily caused by a Divine supernatural act, when God put the likeliness of Jesus upon another man and changed his appearance. For this reason, he was able to escape unseen.[102] Riḍā tried to substantiate this Islamic viewpoint on the basis of passages from the New Testament. He alluded, for example, to Jesus' words to his followers that 'a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world' (John 16:32-33). This was a prediction of what Matthew stated when he said that 'all the disciples forsook him, and fled' (Matthew 26:55) (See also, Mark 14:50).[103]

The preferable alternative, in Riḍā's eyes, was the narrative of the crucifixion as told in the Gospel of Barnabas. He added that if it were true that Judas Iscariot had plans to commit suicide and had later completely disappeared, Riḍā argued, it could mean that it was him who had been crucified. Giving up himself to the soldiers must have been much more undemanding than to commit suicide. In Riḍā's mind, it was also reasonable that when Judas

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[99] Ibid., pp. 38-39. Riḍā mentioned many examples of why Muslims should not take the reliability of these Scriptures for granted. Most of these examples were quoted from Ṣidqī's arguments. There is no need therefore to repeat them. See, pp. 39-44

[100] Ibid., p. 44

[101] Ibid., p. 46

[102] Ibid., pp. 47-48.

[103] Ibid., pp. 48-49.

witnessed the Divine Providence having saved his master, he must have instantly perceived how grave his infidelity was. He therefore submitted himself to death in order to have his sins wiped off. Riḍā compared the escape of Jesus with that of the prophet Muḥammad before his migration to Medina, when the Meccans fell asleep in front of his house and did not perceive him passing by.[104]

Riḍā held the same view as Ṣidqī that the whole event of the crucifixion was based on illusions and rumors. It was only the 'hysterical' Mary Magdalene, who was touched by the 'seven devils', who had witnessed the Resurrection and claimed to have talked to Jesus. After having heard the story, the disciples circulated it among the common people. Riḍā clarified all that happened as something that normally occurs to people in the situation of 'nervous excitement', such as fear, sorrow or thirst. In these circumstances people sometimes imagine that other persons are talking to them. This could also be compared to things happening in dreams and visions.[105]

Similarly to Ṣidqī, Riḍā made the interesting remark that all reports related to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus looked much like the supposed imaginary visions appearing to *sūfī* figures occasionally. An example of these was the occurrence, which took place in the Moroccan city Fez, and was narrated by the writer of the well-known eighteenth-century influential *sūfī* work *al-Dhahab al-ʾIbrīz*.[106] The author related a story on the authority of his master that a butcher lost one of his most beloved children, and remained overwhelmed by the presence of that child in his thoughts day and night. He once went to Bāb al-Futūḥ (a famous gate in Fez) in order to purchase sheep. While he was thinking about his dead son, he saw all of a sudden the boy standing beside him. The man claimed that he was really asking his son to seize the sheep till he would buy another one. When the surrounding people asked him about whom he was speaking to, the butcher retrieved his consciousness once again. The son disappeared. 'None knew exactly', the author concluded, 'what occurred inside him out of longing to his child, except God the Almighty.'[107]

Riḍā mentioned another example about an elderly lady from his hometown al-Qalamūn who often saw the dead and talking to them. A brother of hers, who had drowned, was her most habitual companion in conversation. Riḍā and others were almost sure that the lady was not lying or swindling her story, for

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[104] Ibid., pp. 56-57.

[105] Ibid., p. 64.

[106] Riḍā did not define the writer by name. But it is obvious that he referred to *al-Ibrīz min Kalām Sayyidī al-Ghawth ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh*, which was authored by the Mālikite jurist Aḥmad ʾIbn al-Mubārak al-Sijilmāsī (d. 1742). In his unpublished work, 'al-Ḥikmā al-Sharʿiyyā', Riḍā criticized many points of this work. See, *al-Ibrīz*, edited by Muḥammad 'Adnān al-Shammā', 2 vols, Damascus, 1st edition, 1986. See also the French translation of Zakia Zouanat, *Paroles d'or Kitāb al-Ibrīz, enseignements consignés par son disciple Ibn Mubārak al-Lamtī*, du Relié, 2002. More about al-Ibrīz, see, Valerie J. Hoffman, 'Annihilation in the Messenger of God: The Development of a Sufi Practice', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 31/3 (Aug., 1999), pp. 351-369.

[107] Riḍā-Ṣidqī, *ʿAqīda*, p. 65. Riḍā quoted the story from Sijilmāsī's, vol. 2, p. 72.

she was overwhelmed by that experience.[108] Adding to these examples, Riḍā now glossed long citations from the Arabic translation of Gustave Le Bon's work *Psychologie des foules*,[109] especially on the author's ideas concerning 'the suggestibility and credulity of crowds'. In his works, Le Bon put more emphasis on mass movements in general, and appealed more directly to the sensibilities of the middle class.[110] Riḍā quoted his particular ideas on how the community thinks in images, and the image itself instantaneously calls up a series of other images of no connection with the former. The ways in which a community distorts any event which it witnesses must be manifold, since the temperaments of individuals composing the gathering are very different. The first perversion of the truth affected by one of the individuals of the gathering is the starting-point of the contagious suggestion. The miraculous appearance of St. George on the walls of Jerusalem to all the Crusaders was certainly perceived in the first instance by one of those present, and was immediately accepted by all.[111] Another example of these 'collective hallucinations' had been related by Julian Felix, a naval lieutenant, and was cited by the *Revue Scientifique*. The French frigate, the Belle Poule, was cruising in search for the cruiser Le Berceau, from which she had been separated as a result of violent storm. It was daylight and in full sunshine. Everybody on board signaled a disabled vessel with many officers and sailors, who were exhibiting signals of distress. But it was nothing but a collective hallucination. When Admiral Desfosses had lowered a boat to rescue the wrecked sailors, they saw masses of men in motion, stretching out their hands and screaming. Finally, they discovered that it was only a few branches of trees covered with leaves, which had been carried from the neighboring coast.[112] Le Bon mentioned another example, which he read in the newspapers about the story of two little girls, who had been found dead in the Seine. Half a dozen witnesses recognized both of them. On the basis of these affirmations, the *juge d'instruction* had the certificate of death drawn up. During the procession of their burial, people discovered that the supposed victims were alive. They also had remote resemblance to the drowned girls.[113]

Riḍā argued that if it were possible in the opinion of those psychologists (which he called philosophers) that people can be affected by their imagination to this extent, it should be accepted that those who witnessed the crucifixion and resurrection (such as Mary Magdalene and others) were also affected by this kind of illusions.[114] Some Sufis whom Riḍā personally knew claimed many times to him that they visioned the spirits of many prophets. One of these acquaintances was an *a'jamī* (non-Arab Western) Sufi, who confessed to Riḍā

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[108] Ibid., p. 66.
[109] G. Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, various editions, Paris. Riḍā used the translation by A. Fathī Zaghlūl, *Rūh al-Ijtimā'*, Matba'at al-Sha'b, Cairo, 1909.
[110] See, Jaap van Ginneken, *Crowds, Psychology, and Politics, 1871-1899*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 130ff.
[111] Riḍā-Ṣidqī, *'Aqīda*, pp. 66-67. Zaghlūl, ibid., pp. 28-29.
[112] Ibid., p. 30.
[113] Ibid., pp. 31-32.
[114] Riḍā-Ṣidqī, *Aqīda*, pp. 73-74.

the same thing, and that these prophets who came to him used to read with some religious sciences in Arabic.[115] Parallel to the appearance of St. George on the walls of Jerusalem, Riḍā again mentioned the story of Sheikh al-Matbūlī of Cairo and another analogous account reported about a certain Rāghib from Syria. This Rāghib was training himself in mystical disciplines to the degree that he was overpowered by numerous imaginations. It was said that he memorized many parts of the Gospels after having lived among the Christians in Damascus. As a result, he started to imagine the story of the crucifixion. Once he claimed that he envisioned Jesus as nailed in accordance with the image mentioned in the Gospels. After having told his Christian fellows about that, they believed him and declared him a saint. The famous Syrian reformer Ṭāhir al-Jazā'irī (d. 1920)[116] visited him and began to discuss with him the story from an Islamic point of view without any direct reproach about his mistake until he established another vision in his mind. Rāghib consequently stated that he envisioned Jesus once again standing in front of him, but without any trace of the crucifixion whatsoever. In his vision, Rāghib began to ask Jesus about the reality of his crucifixion. Jesus informed him that his image was placed upon Judas; and they therefore had crucified him. When telling them his new vision, his Christian fellows declared him to be a lunatic.[117]

6.6. Conclusion

We have provided a detailed synopsis of the contents of Ṣidqī's polemical treatises. Like his missionary counterparts polemicizing against Islam, Ṣidqī was not very charitable in his criticism of the Bible. His approach was typical of the Muslim response to missionary work in its spirit of combativeness. We have seen that he attached great value to the European rationalistic attacks on the credibility of the miracles of the Bible and its supernatural ethical authority. On the other hand, he paid little attention to the classical Islamic sources. It was clear that he agreed with earlier Muslim polemicists that the Jewish and Christian sacred texts cannot boast any prophetic authorship even though they were supposedly based on the life stories of their prophets. At almost every point, Ṣidqī established the principal lines of his inquiry by sorting out various ideas already accepted in some Western circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We have also noticed that his choice of words and tone was bolder and more startling than that of Riḍā. Though not a specialist, he tried to enter upon the province of Biblical criticism giving it an Islamic flavour. His zealotry in defending Islam against missionary attacks made his arguments

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[115] Ibid., p. 76.
[116] About his life, see, Joseph H. Escovitz, 'He Was the Muḥammad Abduh of Syria" a Study of Tahir al-Jazairi and His Influence', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 18/3 (August 1986), pp. 293-310; Itzchak Weismann, 'Between Sufi Reformism and Modernist Rationalism: A Reappraisal of the Origins of the Salafiyya from the Damascene Angle', *Die Welt des Islams*, New Ser., vol. 41/2 (July, 2001), pp. 206-237.
[117] Riḍā-Ṣidqī, *Fidā*, pp. 74-75.

an impoverished imitation of these Western writings. His medical knowledge was one of the most salient features of his polemics.

In his joint contribution to *ʿAqīdat al-Ṣalb wā al-Fidā*, Riḍā generally set forth his ideas on the basis of his religious knowledge. Riḍā's attitude towards the crucifixion was, to say the least, surprising. He was clearly not concerned with analyzing the wide range of narratives developed by early Muslims. In the course of his arguments, he stepped sometimes outside the established Muslim interpretations, squarely mentioning many stories related in Sufi traditions of visionary occurrences, and comparing them to the Christian narratives. The story of the Egyptian old man playing the role of al-Matbūlī, who was envisioned by people in the sky above the Greek Church, was one of the favorite stories quoted by Riḍā and Ṣidqī. As Riḍā was known for his heavy critique of the extreme forms of Sufism, we can plausibly conclude that his comparison of these stories with the crucifixion was an indication of his belittling of their miraculous aspects as 'illusive'. These interpretations took a new turn in the force with which they insisted on the understanding of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as illusive events, which had nothing to do with the reality of his last moments on earth. Riḍā replicated many of his arguments from the same Western rationalist sources, which had been mentioned by Ṣidqī. Besides, he tallied many examples of comparable 'illusions' in some of the available Western works on 'Crowd Psychology', such as the ideas of his favourite French physician, Gustave Le Bon.