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The Relationship Between the Qur'an and the Bible

There seems to be an apparent contradiction within the Qur'an, when one views traditional exegesis of the Qur'an from classical exegetes (*mufasssirrūn*) in their attempt to interpret the relationship between the Qur'an and the Bible. The assumption is that since Muḥammad's state of mind allows him to make creative associations, he not only made such associations within the Qur'an, but also between the Qur'an and the religious milieu of his time. In some instances, the Qur'an talks well of the Bible, including the Gospel[s]¹ (e.g., Qur'an 5:47, 5:66, 5:68), while apparently attempting to have a distinct theology from Christianity, such as the notion of Jesus Begotten of God, according to the Gospel of John. Although this book argues that Muḥammad had experienced an abnormal psychological state of mind, his high intelligence protected him from mental illness so he would not have changed his ideas frantically. There does seem to be a change of style as the Qur'an progressed, as can be seen between early Makkan, later Makkan, and Madinan sūrahs. Also, the topics might have changed. However, there is no reason to think, in understanding its themes, that the Qur'an is not homogeneous. What I mean is that it seems if there was an intelligent Muḥammad, then he would not have had included contradictory statements. If there is an apparent contradiction, we might need to analyze these to further understand Muḥammad's intent, given his state of mind.

Why would the Qur'an ask Christians to follow the Gospel[s] (i.e., Qur'an 5:47) if the Qur'an opposes its theology? If we are to think that perhaps those were different periods of Muḥammad's message, then why did he not have the passages that speak well of the Gospel[s] struck from the Qur'an? Classical Muslims scholars attempted to make sense of this with the concept of abrogating and abrogated verses (*nāsikh wa mansūkh*), where latter verses have abrogated former verses that may contradict.² Perhaps this concept of abrogation is an easy way out of a more scholarly investigation of the apparent contradictions in the Qur'an. With an intelligent Muḥammad, who seems to be capable of making creative associations, it is highly unlikely that he would keep a Qur'an that contradicts itself. As such more investigation on these apparent contradictions needs to be made, and that is what the next chapter will show in its examples, where these apparent contradictions might be viewed with a different perspective using intertextual polysemy than that which may be obtained from classical exegetes. Perhaps Muḥammad was more creative in the precise usage of words in the Qur'an in an attempt to fully engage with the Bible.

Moch Ali shows some examples of how intertextuality in the polysemous and etymological usage of Abrahamic scriptures provides a linguistic understanding of the intended meanings of the words.³ He has mainly used the Hebrew Bible and Aramaic Gospel for intertextuality and literary criticism with the Arabic Qur'an to identify the Semitic roots in the verses of the Qur'an that appear to be citing other scriptures. He considers the linguistic criticism of scriptures as a reference of their common origin and heritage of their sacred discourses. Gabriel Reynolds argues in *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext* that the Qur'an should not be interpreted through medieval commentaries (*tafsir*) and biography (*sirah*) of Muḥammad, but it should be interpreted through Jewish and Christian sources that pre-date the Qur'an.⁴ Reuven Firestone also argues the same concept by stating, "In fact, it [the Qur'an] contains so many parallels with the Hebrew Bible and New Testament that it could not possibly exist without its scriptural predecessors as subtexts."⁵ However these contemporary scholars are not unique in their view. Before them, John Wansbrough considered the Qur'an as a literary text independent from the historical context given to it by Islamic tradition.⁶

Other Western scholars such as Theodor Nöldeke, Tor Andrae, and Karl Ahrens examined influences of other religions on the Qur'an, and did not completely reject the use of historical literature from traditional medieval Muslim scholars. On the other hand, Wansbrough considered Islamic history as mentioned in traditional Qur'anic commentaries and biography (*sirah*) of Muḥammad to be a reconstruction that evolved in post-Qur'anic Islam.⁷ Hence, Islamic history is a later literary development. Wansbrough suggests that the Qur'an uses Biblical allusions and imagery for homiletical purposes, something that Reynolds argues fervently.⁸ As a matter of academic debate, it does seem highly likely that the commentators (*mufasssirūn*) attempt to fill in the gaps to make sense of the Qur'an, while this filling is plagued with assumptions and opinions rather than real facts. For example, in the Qur'anic passage of the crucifixion, the commentators (*mufasssirūn*) had to fill the gap of what the Qur'an means by "but it appeared so unto them (*shubbiha lahum*)."⁹ The *mufasssirūn* had to find stories to fill this gap by suggesting that Jesus had one of his disciples look like him and take his place in the crucifixion, or otherwise it was Judas who betrayed him taking his likeness.¹⁰ If these stories were facts, then the *mufasssirūn* would not have brought up the differing opinions among Muslim narrators of what this passage means. These stories seem to have been developed later, and since the *mufasssirūn* wrote various opinions on the subject, these are in themselves proof that the interpretations are no more than mere opinions.

Abraham Geiger revolutionized Western scholarship on Islam by looking at the various possible borrowings that Muḥammad had made from earlier faiths, mainly Judaism.¹¹ He considered Muḥammad to have had Jewish informants who reported to him Biblical narratives through the midrash, which is the reasoning that Geiger gave for why some Qur'anic narratives deviate from the Biblical ones. Geiger was not the first orientalist to show the mentorship Muḥammad had from Jewish informants who narrated to him Biblical stories via the midrash. Petrus Alfonsi (d. 1140) also credited the Talmud as a likely source of the Qur'an and said that Muḥammad regarded the work of sectarian Jews and Christians, such as Samaritans, Nestorians, and Jacobites, to etch together the Qur'an.¹²

According to Geiger's ideology, Christianity and Islam have the concept that they supersede previous religions, while Judaism is original and was not influenced by previous faiths. Nonetheless, there might have been Ancient Egyptian influence in shaping Judaism, such as in the establishment of priesthood, circumcision,¹³ and the prohibition of pork.¹⁴ Therefore, one might say that Judaism borrowed from Ancient Egyptian religion in the way that Muḥammad borrowed from Judaism and Christianity. However, Steven Wasserstrom convincingly shows that the relationship between Judaism and Islam is far too complex to be simply called mere borrowing.¹⁵ As Wasserstrom puts it, "The model of 'influence and borrowing,' by means of its over-emphasis on genetic origination, may in fact obscure insight into a mature interreligious sharing."¹⁶ Zayd ibn Thābit, who traditionally is considered one of the Prophet's scribes and who wrote down the Qur'an, did, according to one tradition cited by Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845), study Hebrew and/or Syriac, as well the Jewish texts,¹⁷ thereby making this kind of interwoven textual allusion to Jewish literature in the Qur'an a possibility.¹⁸

Ever since Geiger, the main position that Western scholars have taken on Islam is that Muḥammad had borrowed concepts from earlier faiths and sewed them together into a new religion and jurisprudence. Western scholars became obsessed with the so-called borrowing that Muḥammad had allegedly made from earlier religions. Torrey continued to argue the borrowing of Muḥammad from Judaism.¹⁹ Jeffery, for example, gives us the view that it is not only the concepts that were possibly borrowed, but that the Arabic terms in the Qur'an are actually borrowed from Hebrew or Aramaic terms.²⁰ Nonetheless, to assume that the Arabic language uses Hebrew or Aramaic loanwords is in itself naïve. Arabic, along with its sister languages, descend from a common Semitic ancestor. Hence, the similarities between the Arabic and Hebrew or Aramaic words should not always be viewed as a case of borrowing from one another, but that the terms evolved independently in each respective language. It is as if saying that the French *bonjour*, meaning good morning, is borrowed from the Italian *buongiorno*. Such a claim would be absurd. Since both French and Italian are Latin based, the terms evolved in each language independently from the common Latin ancestor. Catherine Pennacchio makes a note of the Arabic borrowing from Syriac, in which Jeffery's borrowing concept cannot be taken for granted without first applying modern linguistic analysis of the terms.²¹

Gordon Newby argues that Muḥammad's companions do occasionally ask for clarifications on the meaning of some terms, but when it comes to typical terms such as prayer (*ṣalāt*) they do not ask what the term means, but they are more prone to ask how to perform them.²² Thus, it proves that the terms were understood by the Arab companions of Muḥammad, and therefore they cannot be considered as foreign words. Even if Muḥammad was aware of Hebrew and Aramaic, he nonetheless preached in Arabic. Since the Qur'an is a unique Arabic text, in which earlier Arabic literature or manuscripts are rare, then it is difficult to identify which terms were used in pre-Qur'anic Arabic; however, that does not necessarily mean that the Qur'an borrowed terms from other languages, where it can be more adequately considered that such terms may be in engagement with terms used in other religions. Richard Bell (d. 1952) described the possible influences that the religious communities in Arabia had on Muḥammad and the Qur'an.²³

To call the similarities between Islam and other religions as mere borrowings is naïve. They can be more appropriately called engagement. It seems more likely that the Qur'an is engaging with other religions and part of their receptive audience. As such, the intertextuality does not mean borrowing but engagement. The Qur'an is not repeating like a parrot what is found in other religions, but it is part of the reception literature of the Bible. As Pregill puts it, "we cannot justifiably claim that the Quran [*sic*] is the product of a simple, direct dependence on narratives from the canonical Bible slavishly copied in a straightforward and unsophisticated fashion."²⁴

There is no doubt that earlier religions influence a new one. The reason could be that a new religion must develop some sort of legitimacy in persuading followers from different backgrounds to convert. Judaism might have been influenced by Ancient Egyptian religions, as well as Sumerian myths, to name just two sources.²⁵ During the Israelite exile in Babylon, it seems likely that Judaism became influenced by Zoroastrianism in ideas such as dualism and eschatology, which did not necessarily exist in the Torah.²⁶ Hence, the Hebrew Bible evolved based on the various influences it had from the diverse religions that surrounded it. Christianity was heavily influenced by Judaism, in such a way that it could be considered an offshoot of it, while at the same time the early Church might have been also influenced by pagan folklore.²⁷ It would not at all be surprising that influences might have helped shape the Qur'an, but that would not necessarily constitute borrowing materials, as it would be more precisely portrayed as engaging with them.

Using other scriptures for Qur'anic exegesis may seem unconventional to a confessional audience, but it is not truly unwarranted. There are reasons to make such an argument, which would include the following:

1. The Qur'an refers to earlier scriptures and explicitly engages with them. Sometimes the Qur'an even requests that other scriptures be read while engaging with it, as in Qur'an 3:93 and 10:94. Therefore, to better understand what the Qur'an is referring to, it is imperative and intuitive to use the references from other scriptures to fully comprehend the meanings that the Qur'an attempts to convey.
2. Early Muslim scholars and exegetes, such as Muqātil ibn Sulaymān,²⁸ al-Tha'labī,²⁹ and others have used what is known as Israelite traditions (*isrā'iliyyāt*), which would include Jewish and Christian sources.³⁰ Although there is criticism in using those traditions by exegetes,³¹ such as Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), it is not a shared criticism among all exegetes. Many exegetes have used traditions narrated by Wahb ibn Munabbih and Ka'b al-Aḥbār, who could be considered the earliest Muslim Biblical scholars.³² Also, the Bible had been heavily used for Qur'anic exegesis by al-Biqā'ī (d. 885/1480), which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.
3. The Qur'an considers itself verifying earlier scriptures (*muṣaddiq*) and a witness (*muhaymin*) to them (e.g., Qur'an 5:48). It is important to further understand the other scriptures and their relation to the Qur'anic engagement with them.

Although the method of interpreting the Qur'an not only through itself, but also through other scriptures may be nontraditional in some sense to Muslims, it is not without merit. Many of the Muslim exegetes, such as al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and Ibn

Kathīr have utilized Israelite traditions (*isrā'iliyyāt*) in their interpretations of the Qur'an, though not without self-criticism in doing so.³³ The Israelite traditions used by traditional Muslim commentators include the usage of Biblical stories or other sources of Jewish traditions, such as the Oral Law or Jewish and Christian pseudepigrapha and apocrypha.³⁴

One of the earliest examples of the usage of "*isrā'iliyyāt*" are the narrations of Ka'b al-Aḥbār and Wahb ibn Munabbih. Ka'b was a Jewish religious teacher who converted to Islam within a decade of the death of Muḥammad, and therefore, naturally narrated many of the Jewish views that are discussed by the Qur'an. He was a contemporary of many of Muḥammad's companions. As such, many of the earlier commentators of the Qur'an have used his narrations about the Bible and Jewish traditions, such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr.

Although Ka'b al-Aḥbār and Wahb ibn Munabbih are celebrated for being two of the first Biblical scholars in Islam, their introduction of "*isrā'iliyyāt*" has brought a wide range of criticism.³⁵ Some Muslim scholars believe that the introduction of Jewish traditions into Islam undermines the purity of the Islamic message.³⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah has been suspicious of Qur'anic interpretation through "*isrā'iliyyāt*."³⁷ Comprehensive literature in the usage of "*isrā'iliyyāt*" in Qur'anic interpretation has been compiled by Na'nā'ah³⁸ and al-Dhahabī.³⁹

Meir Kister has compiled a study of the prophetic tradition, "Narrate from the Children of Israel and there is no objection,"⁴⁰ as a permission to use "*isrā'iliyyāt*."⁴¹ He states that the main arguments against "*isrā'iliyyāt*" among Muslim scholars are the credibility and reliability of the source, as scholars such as Zayn al-Dīn al- Irāqī and Ibn al-Jawzī presume that many Jewish sources of "*isrā'iliyyāt*" are storytelling that, while providing good morals in their preaching and teaching styles, are fiction or caused by fabrication, and therefore they should not be used in the interpretation of the Qur'an.⁴² However, these kinds of arguments shed some required understanding on the study of "*isrā'iliyyāt*." It is imperative to know the sources of such traditions, as to whether or not they are from earlier scriptures, Talmud, apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, or other sources.⁴³ In other words, not all of "*isrā'iliyyāt*" are supposed to be given equal weight for their credibility. To Muslims, a story from Jewish pseudepigrapha should not be considered equal in importance to a story found in scriptures. However, it is apparent that early and medieval Muslim scholars were perhaps not using the same methods on "*isrā'iliyyāt*" as they used in prophetic tradition to discern the chain of transmission (*sanad*) and content (*matn*) of *ḥadīth* to understand whether it is strong or weak.

Ibn Kathīr has utilized "*isrā'iliyyāt*" in his exegesis of the Qur'an, but not without any critical comments, following in the footsteps of his mentor Ibn Taymiyyah. As such, even when he brings forth the prophetic tradition that permits the usage of "*isrā'iliyyāt*," he continues to say that the "*isrā'iliyyāt*" are only meant to bear witness to the credibility of other Islamic sources, but they are not meant to be used independently as a reliable source.⁴⁴ In general, Ibn Kathīr categorizes "*isrā'iliyyāt*" into three classes, (i) those that attest the validity of the Islamic sources, (ii) those that contradict the Islamic sources, and (iii) those that neither attest nor contradict the Islamic sources.⁴⁵

Abd Alfatah Twakkal shows that Ibn Kathīr's stance against "*isrā'iliyyāt*" not only displays his prejudice against what he believes are Jewish sources, but his belief that

some earlier Islamic sources from Muḥammad's companions have been corrupted by Jewish influences.⁴⁶ An example of this is given in Ibn Kathīr's exegesis on Abraham's sacrificial son (i.e., Qur'an 37:102–107). As is evident from Ibn Kathīr's commentary, the debate within the Muslim community as to whether Abraham's sacrificial son was Ishmael or Isaac is an old one. He attempts to affirm that it was Ishmael.⁴⁷ Although he states that some Muslims, including prominent companions of Muḥammad, such as 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd, Ibn 'Abbās, and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, state that Isaac was the sacrificial son, he dismisses the companions' understanding as the effect of Jewish influences through Ka'b al-Aḥbār, without sufficient evidence to support his own claim. Therefore, it remains his opinion to circumvent any sort of possible "*isrā'iliyyāt*" in his assumptions. Al-Ṭabarī, on the other hand, shows in his exegesis that the sacrificial son is Isaac, with only few references to the possibility of him being Ishmael.⁴⁸ Since Ibn Kathīr is a later exegete, one might question whether the story relating Isaac as the sacrificial son is a possible Jewish influence or if Ishmael as the sacrificial son is a possible later Muslim addition that did not necessarily exist in early Islamic thought. This is especially important since the majority of the companions affirmed that it was Isaac, such as 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd, al-'Abbās, Ibn 'Abbās, and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib according to majority of commentators,⁴⁹ including Abū Hurayra according to al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983)⁵⁰ and 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb according to al-Rāzī,⁵¹ al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273),⁵² and al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/970).⁵³ Reuven Firestone suggests that the early Islamic community understood the intended sacrificial son to be Isaac, but the later Muslim community wanted to distinguish themselves from Judeo-Christian influences.⁵⁴ We will come back to this point in the next chapter.

Twakkal continues to provide examples wherein Ibn Kathīr does not accept Ka'b al-Aḥbār's interpretation due to its possible Jewish sources (*isrā'iliyyāt*) in favor of his opinion.⁵⁵ In another example, Twakkal shows that Ka'b was criticized by Ibn Mas'ūd or Ibn 'Abbās for saying that the heavens revolve around the shoulder of an angel, when he should have rightly said that it is God that revolves the heavens.⁵⁶ However, this brings forth a very important aspect in the study of "*isrā'iliyyāt*." As stated earlier, it is important to understand further the source of "*isrā'iliyyāt*," on whether the criticism is against Biblical literature or other forms of Jewish literature. The revolution of the heavens on the shoulder of an angel is neither based on Jewish scriptures nor is it from the Talmud or the Oral Law. However, there is a possibility that this tradition is from the Book of Enoch (i.e., Enoch 82), which does describe the revolution of the heavens and the stations of angels who are entrusted with the heavenly motions.⁵⁷ Evidently, Muslim commentators did consider "*isrā'iliyyāt*" as a possible mode for Qur'anic interpretation and as such started the whole concept of using other scriptures to interpret the Qur'an.

Muḥammad and the Bible

The relationship between Muḥammad and the Bible is interesting to note. We understand this relationship mainly based on the Qur'anic passages that engage with the Bible, whether through reference or allusion. Since Muḥammad, in his psychological

state of mind at the time, wanted to prove his legitimacy as a prophet of the same God as the Bible's, then it seems natural that he would talk about the Bible and allude to it. Along with his state of mind in making creative associations, we perhaps may be able to see Biblical allusions in the Qur'an. However, what is the Qur'an's main stance on the Bible? Is it positive as some Qur'anic passages state (e.g., Qur'an 5:66, 5:68) or is it negative, as some medieval Muslim scholars have argued on the concept of corruption (*taḥrīf*).⁵⁸ This would be a contradiction, and instead of taking the easy way out by arguing that the latter passages abrogated the former (assuming we even know the chronological order of the Qur'an), we need to further analyze such a contradiction.

The corruption of scriptures has always been a debatable topic among Muslim scholars, whether it involves the changing of the words of scriptures or altering the meanings (*taḥrīf al-ma'na*).⁵⁹ On the issue of "*taḥrīf*," a tradition attributed to Wahb ibn Munabbih relates, "The Torah and Gospel as revealed by God did not change a single letter, but they go astray in meaning and exegesis and books they were writing from themselves and saying this is from God and it is not from God. However, God's books are preserved and do not change."⁶⁰ Al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) says in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* on the issue of "*taḥrīf*," "and not a person can remove a wording in a book of God's books, but they *yuharrifūnahu*, change its meaning to something other than its meaning."⁶¹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350), on his remark regarding Qur'an 3:93, suggests that the verse of stoning in the Torah would have been changed if the Jews could have changed it.⁶² This is evidence not that the Torah is changed, but that its meanings might have been changed.⁶³ The idea that the Jews and Christians corrupted the text of scriptures is possibly a misunderstanding and a misreading of the Qur'anic intention.

At times the Qur'an states that Jews or the People of the Book make statements that may not necessarily be found in Biblical scriptures but rather in the Talmud (e.g., Qur'an 5:32).⁶⁴ The Talmud gives a rabbinic commentary on Biblical scriptures, and it may further allow an understanding of Qur'anic statements and arguments about Jews or the People of the Book.⁶⁵ Besides, the use of the Bible to further understand the Qur'an is not simply based on the prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) that permits it, "*Ḥaddithū 'an banī Isrā'il wa la ḥaraj* (Narrate from the Children of Israel and there is no objection),"⁶⁶ but it is also stated clearly in the Qur'an in two separate but identical verses: "We sent no messengers before thee, save men unto whom We revealed—ask the people of the Reminder, if you know not. . ."⁶⁷

Some medieval Muslim scholars have used the above verses as an indication by the Qur'an that they should seek the opinions of Islamic scholars on issues that they do not understand.⁶⁸ However, it seems that it actually requires people to ask the People of the Book if they do not have knowledge about the stories of the prophets that came before Muḥammad. This seems a possibility in Qur'an 16:43–44, as it describes the term "*dhikr*" to be the "*bayyināt*" and "*zūbur*," which would mean that "*al-dhikr*" would also include the Psalms. The consensus of Muslim exegetes of various sects, such as al-Ṭabarī,⁶⁹ Ibn Kathīr,⁷⁰ al-Qurṭubī,⁷¹ al-Rāzī,⁷² al-Ṭabarsī⁷³ and many others, is that these verses provide an indication that one should ask the People of the Book about the prophets that came before Muḥammad. Therefore, it is not simply a prophetic tradition that permits it, but the Qur'an itself also expects it from its audience to use Biblical literature to further understand the Qur'an.

Burhān al-Dīn Al-Biqā'ī, a fifteenth-century CE Muslim scholar, used the Bible to interpret the Qur'an and wrote an extensive treatise in defense of his approach called *al-Aqwāl al-qawīmah fī ḥukm al-naql min al-kutub al-qadīmah* (*The Just Sayings in the Ruling Regarding Quoting from Ancient Books*).⁷⁴ Walid Saleh has made a study of al-Biqā'ī's defense of using the Bible to interpret the Qur'an.⁷⁵ In al-Biqā'ī's time, his thought on using the Bible to interpret the Qur'an was a revolutionary idea that was controversial among his contemporary scholars.⁷⁶ Many Muslim scholars have quoted the Bible in an attempt to prove it wrong or to prove the prophecies in favor of Muḥammad.⁷⁷ However, al-Biqā'ī did not use it as such polemical perspective. He extensively quoted the Bible as part of his Qur'anic exegesis, which is perhaps the first time that a Muslim scholar used the Bible extensively for exegesis,⁷⁸ beyond those done by Wahb ibn Munabbih and Ka'b al-Aḥbār. Not only did he quote the Bible, but he did so without paraphrasing, which was the usual method used by other Muslim scholars in their polemic writings.⁷⁹ Many of his opponents considered the usage of the Bible to interpret the Qur'an to be sacrilegious. However, al-Biqā'ī was able to get the support of *muftīs* and judges of Cairo,⁸⁰ where he lived.⁸¹

Although al-Biqā'ī extensively quotes the Bible in his interpretation of the Qur'an, he was not very sympathetic to the Jewish and Christian faiths.⁸² However, he did not find it paradoxical to use the Bible, while not necessarily accepting Jewish and Christian dogmas. In al-Biqā'ī's first defensive argument for using the Bible to interpret the Qur'an, he uses the Qur'anic text that sanctions such actions:⁸³ "All (*kul*) "*al-ṭa'ām*" (food)⁸⁴ was lawful unto the Children of Israel, save what Israel had forbidden for himself, before the Torah was sent down. Say, 'Bring the Torah and recite it, if you are truthful.'"⁸⁵

Al-Biqā'ī continues to argue that just as polemics quote the Bible, the interpreter could also do the same.⁸⁶ As is evident from the preface of his treatise, al-Biqā'ī did not want to defend his usage of the Bible to interpret the Qur'an, because he found it unnecessary. Al-Biqā'ī believes that the legitimacy of this use is obvious from the Qur'an and early Islamic history, in which the Bible was quoted.⁸⁷

In his arguments, al-Biqā'ī shows how his works were well received by many contemporary scholars. He also compares his works with other very controversial works, such as the commentary on the Qur'an of al-Zamakhsharī, who was a Mu'tazalite, Ismā'īlī works like the *Epistles of the Pure Brethren* (*Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā'*), and Ibn 'Arabī's *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*), which he considers were not as severely attacked as his own, though may be considered heretical in nature.⁸⁸ He finds it unfair, therefore, that his works are attacked, which he believes is based purely on personal grudges against him. Besides using the Qur'anic verse in his argument against those who opposed him, he even cites prophetic tradition, in which Muḥammad requested the Jews to bring forth the Torah and judged them in accordance with the Torah, such as the dispute case of the punishment for adultery, as recorded by many of the prominent commentators of the Qur'an for the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) of the following Qur'anic verses:⁸⁹ "And how is it that they come to thee for judgment, when they have the Torah, wherein is God's Judgment? Yet even after that, they turn their backs. . ."⁹⁰

Al-Biqā'ī considers that since the Qur'an ordains using the Bible, and Muḥammad practiced that which is ordained in the Qur'an, then the primary sources of the legal

texts of Islam have made such a method legally binding.⁹¹ Therefore, he argues that it is not up to any scholar to shed doubt on the legality of quoting the Bible. Al-Biqā'ī continues to use arguments from other scholars that support his use of the Bible, as Walid Saleh states:

The first scholar whom al-Biqā'ī quotes is Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Kirmānī (d. 786/1384), one of the commentators on the collection of ḥadīth by al-Bukhārī (the most authoritative ḥadīth collection in the Sunnī tradition). Al-Kirmānī is quoted as saying that Muslims were simply in no position to determine what was corrupted of the Jewish and Christian scriptures and what was not. Thus Muslims should not reject them for fear they might be rejecting the Word of God.⁹²

Al-Biqā'ī continues to argue in favor of Muslims using the Bible, because from a legalist perspective there are definitely parts of the Bible that are not corrupted; at the very least, the Qur'an can be used as a comparative tool to judge the authenticity of the Bible. He also brings up the subject of the authenticity and corruption of the Bible. He states that there exists a wide range of debate that can be divided into four camps, (i) all of the Bible is corrupt, (ii) the majority of the Bible is corrupt, (iii) a few parts of the Bible are corrupt, and (iv) none of the Bible is corrupt, but the followers simply misinterpreted parts thereof (*tahrīf al-mā'na*).⁹³ Al-Biqā'ī states that followers of the first camp are arrogant and excessive and in obvious contradiction of the Qur'an and Sunnah.⁹⁴ He argues against the second camp in a similar manner.⁹⁵ He finds himself in the third camp in which he states that al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) also belongs to, as well as the prominent scholar Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064).⁹⁶ As many of his contemporary opponents argued in accordance with jurist consensus (*ijmā'*) to prohibit reading the Bible, he argues that because many of the prominent early and contemporary Muslim scholars of his time used the Bible, especially in their polemic treatises, then using the Bible should be permissible.⁹⁷ He even states that although the Qur'an is used as the criterion to compare the authenticity of the Bible, on matters of which the Qur'an is silent it would still be permissible to accept the Biblical text, as denying it could bring an error against the Muslim, who might be denying the words of God.⁹⁸ He categorizes Biblical texts into three groups (i) those that are confirmed by the Qur'an may be quoted as proof (*ḥujjah*) of the Qur'an, (ii) those whose status cannot be determined may be quoted for purposes of exalting (*targhib*) the wisdom of the Bible, and (iii) fabricated materials, which may be quoted to caution people against it.⁹⁹ In actuality, al-Biqā'ī states that he avoided Jewish and Christian lore (*isrā'iliyyāt*) in his method of Qur'anic interpretation, which many others before him had actually introduced. He limited himself only to the use of the Bible. Al-Biqā'ī confirms that he quotes God whenever he quotes from the Bible. He compares the Bible with divine traditions (*ḥadīth qudsī*) that have come through narrations (*tawātur*).¹⁰⁰ He even mentions that the whole prophetic tradition cannot be considered fully reliable, and yet jurists use it to obtain legal edicts. Therefore, Saleh deduces that al-Biqā'ī may have considered the Bible to be as reliable as prophetic tradition, which is not without corruption, though still a basis of Islamic legal rulings.¹⁰¹

Besides al-Biqā'ī's controversies with contemporaries in using the Bible to interpret the Qur'an, he was a very controversial figure who was critical of many of the Sufi works, especially in his statements against the Sufi poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235), which caused him to go into self-exile in Damascus. Similarly, he was very critical of al-Ghazālī's works and philosophy, while al-Ghazālī also belonged to the Shāfi'ī school of jurisprudence.¹⁰² Guo has discussed more controversies between al-Biqā'ī and Sufis in his chronicle of al-Biqā'ī.¹⁰³ Chodkiewicz has also portrayed al-Biqā'ī's strong opposition against Ibn 'Arabi.¹⁰⁴

Muḥammad and exclusivism and corruption (*tahrīf*)

Exclusivism or not?

The major proof within the Qur'an that exclusivists use is the passage that states that God only accepts "*islām*" as a religion.¹⁰⁵ This verse, which apparently preaches exclusivism, is actually quite interesting because it is explicitly instilled with the belief of other scriptures:

⁸³ Do they seek other than God's religion, while whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth submits (*aslām*) to Him, willingly or unwillingly, and unto Him they will be returned? ⁸⁴ Say, "We believe in God and what has been sent down upon us, and in what was sent down upon Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what Moses, Jesus, and the prophets were given from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and unto Him we submit (*muslimūn*)."
⁸⁵ Whosoever seeks a religion other than *islām* (submission), it shall not be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he shall be among the losers.¹⁰⁶

Although these passages seem explicit in believing in other scriptures, and therefore, we can infer the ability to use them for Qur'anic interpretation, exclusivists will argue the concept that other scriptures have been corrupted (*tahrīf*). Hence, I will first argue the definition of "*muslim*" in the Qur'an, and then I will argue the concept of corruption (*tahrīf*) to make my case that the use of other scriptures to interpret the Qur'an is not only allowable, according to the Qur'an, but it expects it from its audience.

Many Muslim scholars and Qur'anic commentators, as shown earlier, understand the term "*islām*" in the Qur'an, as the religion known today as "Islam," which is an understandably obvious interpretation. However, is the Qur'an defining "*islām*" as the message and dispensation of the religion known as "Islam," or does the Qur'an provide a different understanding for the term "*islām*?"¹⁰⁷ Ibn Ḥazm brings the interpretation of "*islām*" in Qur'an 3:85 as the rituals and beliefs that are associated with the religion known as Islam.¹⁰⁸ On defining "*islām*," he states that it requires complete submission to God.¹⁰⁹ He assumes that the term "*islām*" in the Qur'an may hold various meanings, where sometimes it is different than "*īmān*" (faith),¹¹⁰ which is based on Qur'an 49:14, while at other times he suggests that it is the same as "*īmān*" (faith), which is based on Qur'an 49:17.¹¹¹ However, to think that the Qur'an uses different meanings for the

same term only two verses apart may seem unusual, unless Ibn Ḥazm is actually extrapolating the meaning even though it should not be so.

The term “*islām*” is mentioned in several places in the Qur’an (e.g., Qur’an 3:19, 3:85, 5:3, 6:125, 39:22, 61:7). The Qur’an also uses terms that are rooted in the word “*islām*,” such as “*muslim*,” “*aslam*,” or other words from the same root while not necessarily being interpreted as the followers of the religion known today as Islam. Scholars, such as Robson, define the term “*islām*” from a broader sense as the resignation to God, and not simply the religion known today as Islam.¹¹² Izutsu defines the terms “*islām*” and “*muslim*” in the Qur’an as the surrender to God.¹¹³

The Salafist viewpoint of exclusivism may be traced back to Ibn ‘Abdulwahhāb’s (d. 1206/1792) writings on Qur’an 3:85. In one of his letters, Ibn ‘Abdulwahhāb states that the meaning of “*islām*” in this verse is the religion known today as Islam, which has five main pillars:¹¹⁴ to witness there is only one God and that Muḥammad is His messenger, to pray five times a day toward Makkah, to give alms, to fast during the month of Ramadan, and to make the pilgrimage once in a lifetime, if capable. Ibn ‘Abdulwahhāb, in *Kashf al-Shubuhāt*, defines the term “*islām*” in Qur’an 3:85 as monotheism (*tawḥīd*).¹¹⁵ This definition is even more disturbing because according to Ibn ‘Abdulwahhāb’s theology, he usually refers to his form of Islam as “*tawḥīd*,” which brings any other Islamic form outside his definition of “*islām*.” His writings make his followers exclusivists to the point that they may reject any other interpretation of Islam.¹¹⁶

The term “*islām*” has various meanings.¹¹⁷ Among the various meanings, it means to submit and to surrender.¹¹⁸ It also means stairways and peace.¹¹⁹ The Qur’an calls Abraham a *muslim*, and that Abraham taught that to his children and his children’s children (e.g., Qur’an 2:127–133, 4:125, 22:78, 37:103). What made Abraham a *muslim*? Was it that he had done all the five pillars of Islam that would have made him a *muslim*? It cannot be. He was a *muslim* even before he knew where the Ka’bah in Makkah is. Therefore, the criteria that made him a *muslim* does not necessarily move in parallel with the religion known today as Islam.

Noah is considered a *muslim*, according to the Qur’an (i.e., Qur’an 10:72). The Qur’an also notes that the sorcerers of Moses, once they were defeated in a contest with him, became *muslims* (i.e., Qur’an 7:126). The Qur’an says that Moses requested the Children of Israel to become *muslims* (i.e., Qur’an 10:84). The Qur’an also shows that when Pharaoh was drowning, he too declared to have become a *muslim*, while the Qur’an then shows that it was only when his drowning was imminent did he realize the true God (i.e., Qur’an 10:90–92). Even when Solomon sends a message to the Queen of Sheba, he requests her and her people to become *muslims* (i.e., Qur’an 27:31, 27:38, 27:42, 27:44). Lot’s household is even called by the Qur’an a *muslim* household (i.e., Qur’an 51:36). According to the Qur’an, Jesus’ disciples call themselves *muslims* (i.e., Qur’an 3:52, 5:111). The Qur’an also shows that the religion of God is for people to become *muslims*, since everyone in the heavens and the earth is a *muslim*, willingly or unwillingly (i.e., Qur’an 3:83). The Qur’an also calls all the prophets to the Children of Israel *muslims* (i.e., Qur’an 5:44). Ibn Taymiyyah, in his statements on Qur’an 3:85, makes note that all religions and prophets were in the guise of “*islām*.”¹²⁰ He defines the term “*islām*” as sincerity to God combined with generosity and good works with faith,

in which Ibn Taymiyyah quotes a passage in Qur'an 2:62 that accepts other religions when describing the term "*islām*" in Qur'an 3:85.¹²¹ It is evident that Ibn Taymiyyah in his *al-Īmān* does not consider Qur'an 3:85 abrogating Qur'an 2:62.¹²² Nonetheless, Ibn Taymiyyah does state that the term "*islām*" in Qur'an 3:85 means the good works and not just faith.¹²³ It seems Ibn Taymiyyah in here agrees with the Epistle of James that faith without works is dead (i.e., James 2:14–26).

Ibn Abī al-'Izz (d. 792/1390) in his famous *Sharḥ al-'aqīdah al-ṭahāwiyyah* depicts that the term "*islām*" in Qur'an 3:85 does not mean the religion known today as Islam.¹²⁴ He narrates the prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*), "We the prophets are of one religion."¹²⁵ Ibn Abī al-'Izz continues to state that the religion of "*islām*" in Qur'an 3:85 is general in every age, but the laws (revealed to each prophet) are different, in which he quotes Qur'an 5:48.¹²⁶ He states that the religion (of *islām*) are the laws given to people in the tongues of messengers.¹²⁷ Hence, he does not interpret the term "*islām*" in Qur'an 3:85 as the religion known today as Islam, but the religion of every prophet and messenger. On the one hand, we have scholars like Ibn Abī al-'Izz who prove their arguments from the Qur'an, while on the other we have scholars like Shams al-Dīn al-Safārīnī (d. 1188/1774), who state that Qur'an 3:85 refers to the religion known today as Islam. Their argument is that this passage abrogates all others that show pluralism without sufficient Qur'anic evidence for such an argument.¹²⁸

When looking at it from an overall perspective, it seems obvious that the term for *muslim* used in the Qur'an does not necessarily mean a follower of the religion known today as Islam. Fred Donner suggests that the Qur'anic terms "*islām*" and "*muslim*" are different than how they later became associated with the current distinct religion of Islam.¹²⁹ The term for *muslim* used in the Qur'an may be understood as anyone who has surrendered his soul to God and submitted to the Will of God. If the Qur'an uses the term for *muslim* so loosely to mean anyone who has surrendered to God, why would some Qur'anic scholars and commentators insist that the term "*islām*" in the Qur'an specifically refers to the religion known today as Islam? Since the terms "*islām*" and "*muslim*" come from the same root word and carry the same meanings, and since a *muslim* is one who has espoused "*islām*," then it is possible that the term "*islām*" would be applicable to anyone who surrenders to God. Therefore, it may not necessarily be defined as the religion known today as Islam.

Abraham, the patriarchs, the prophets, etc. are called *muslims* by the Qur'an, because seemingly they have all surrendered to the Will of God. Therefore, their religion may be considered as "*islām*." The Qur'an does not consider itself ushering a new religion, but it considers itself as a reformation in an attempt to resurrect the same pure religion of Abraham (e.g., Qur'an 2:130–136, 3:95, 4:125, 6:161–163, 16:123, 22:78). However, what made Abraham and the prophets *muslims*? The Islamic laws and method of prayers and fasting are not the same as those of the previous religions. The Qur'an even shows that there are differences in the divine laws prescribed to different people (i.e., Qur'an 5:48), as Ibn Abī al-'Izz argues.¹³⁰ Since the religion known today as Islam is not what the Qur'an intended to be interpreted for the term *muslim* in the Qur'an, then consequently, the term "*islām*" in the Qur'an may not necessarily be interpreted as the religion known today as Islam either. There needs to be no double standard in defining the terms "*islām*" and "*muslim*" in the Qur'an, from a grammatical and linguistic point of view.

The verses in the Qur'an that are referred to as proof of an exclusivist ideology (i.e., Qur'an 3:19, 3:85) seem to be misinterpreted by some scholars and commentators if they define it specifically as the religion known as Islam, which is a definition that perhaps was not espoused by the early Muslim community.¹³¹ The term *muslim* does not necessarily mean followers of Islam as known today, but the Qur'an uses it generally to mean those who have surrendered and resigned to the Will of God. There is no reason to define "*islām*" from a textual or contextual basis as the religion known today as Islam, when the Qur'an uses it in a more generic perspective.

If one assumes that the Qur'an preaches an exclusivist ideology, then various passages will seem to oppose such an understanding. Diversity, as a topic, is referred to in the Qur'an, such as that in the following verse: "O humankind!¹³² Truly We divided (created)¹³³ you from a male and a female, and We made you peoples and tribes that you may come to know one another. Surely the most noble of you before God are the most reverent of you. Truly God is Knowing, Aware."¹³⁴

In interpreting this verse, Asani states, "the divine purpose underlying the creation of human diversity is to foster knowledge and understanding, to promote harmony and cooperation among peoples."¹³⁵ Classical commentators (*mufasssīrūn*) interpret this verse mainly on the theme of marriage and knowing ancestral descent,¹³⁶ which is an understanding based on the verse opening with the issue that people are divided male and female. However, even if we do consider this verse to be discussing diversity, it seems more appropriate to recognize that it discusses ethnic diversity rather than religious diversity. As such, we cannot necessarily use it to portray religious pluralism in the Qur'an. However, when it comes to discuss religious issues with the People of the Book,¹³⁷ the Qur'an seems to offer a pluralist view: "And dispute not with the People of the Book, save in the most virtuous manner, unless it be those of them who have done wrong. And say, 'We believe in that which was sent down unto us and was sent down unto you; our God and your God are one, and unto Him are we submitters (*muslimūn*).'"¹³⁸

The following passage in the Qur'an seems to portray a pluralist view without espousing the notion of exclusivism. It states that some of the People of the Book are believers: "You are the best community brought forth unto humankind,¹³⁹ enjoining right, forbidding wrong, and believing in God. And were the People of the Book to believe, that would be better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are iniquitous."¹⁴⁰ In this verse, the Qur'an distinguishes between those who are believers from those who are perverted. It does not make them all equal. Classical exegetes, however, identify the believers among the People of the Book as those who convert to Islam.¹⁴¹ The exegetes are making an assumption that the Qur'an here talks about converts, when there is nothing from the text that makes such a claim. The Qur'an continues to differentiate between the believers and unbelievers from among the People of the Book:

¹¹² They shall be struck with abasement (*ḍaribat 'alayhim al-dhillah*) wherever they are come upon, save by means of a rope from God and a rope from mankind. And they shall earn a burden of wrath from God, and they shall be struck with indignance (*wa bā'ū bi-ghaḍab min Allah wa ḍaribat 'alayhim al-maskanah*). That is

because they used to disbelieve in God's signs and kill the prophets without right. That is for their having disobeyed and transgressed (*dhālika bi-annahum kānū yakfurūn bi-āyāt Allah wa-yaqtulūn al-anbiyā' bi-ghayr ḥaqq, dhālika bimā 'aṣaw wa-kānū ya'tadūn*).¹¹³ They are not all alike. Among the People of the Book is an upright community who recite God's signs in the watches of the night, while they prostrate.¹¹⁴ They believe in God and the Last Day, enjoin right and forbid wrong, and hasten unto good deeds. And they are among the righteous.¹¹⁵ Whatsoever good they do, they will not be denied it. And God knows the reverent.¹⁴²

The above passages also do not provide any hints that it is meant for converts from other faiths to Islam. Actually, it defines faith as in the belief in God and the Last Day. It does not at all show that the People of the Book need to even believe in Muḥammad per se. There is another passage with a strong relationship to the above with intertextuality of the parallel keywords and terms used in both:

⁶¹ And when you said, "O Moses, we shall not endure one food, so call upon your Lord for us, that He may bring forth for us some of what the earth grows: its herbs, its cucumbers, its garlic, its lentils, its onions." He said, "Would you substitute what is lesser for what is better? Go down to a town, and you will have what you ask for." So they were struck with abasement and poverty, and earned a burden of wrath from God. That is because they disbelieved in the signs of God, and killed the prophets without right. That is because they disobeyed, and were transgressors (*wa-ḍaribat 'alayhim al-dhillah wal-maskanah wa-bā'ū bi-ghaḍab min Allah, dhālika bi-annahum kānū yakfurūn bi-āyāt Allah wa-yaqtulūn al-nabiyyīn bi-ghayr al-ḥaqq, dhālika bimā 'aṣaw wa-kānū ya'tadūn*).⁶² Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.¹⁴³

Clearly, the keywords in Qur'an 3:112 are parallel to and almost verbatim to the same keywords in the end of Qur'an 2:61. Qur'an 2:62 shows that Jews, Christians, and the Sabians, who believe in God and the Last Day and work righteousness (parallel to Qur'an 2:114) are acceptable and will not be rejected. This passage is related to even another:

⁶⁸ Say, "O People of the Book! You stand on naught till you observe (*tuqīmū*) the Torah and the Gospel, and that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord." Surely that which has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord will increase many of them in rebellion and disbelief. So grieve not for disbelieving people.⁶⁹ Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Sabeans, and the Christians—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.⁷⁰ We indeed made a covenant with the Children of Israel, and sent messengers unto them. Whenssoever a messenger brought them what their souls did not desire, some they would deny and some they would slay.¹⁴⁴

It is clear that Qur'an 5:69 is parallel to Qur'an 2:62. There are other points of intertextuality around these two passages. For example, Qur'an 5:60 and 2:65 both talk about those who have become apes. Also, Qur'an 5:70 and 2:63 both refer to the covenant (*mīthāq*) that God had made with the Children of Israel.¹⁴⁵ Another point of intertextuality between these verses is with the passages in the Qur'an that reject exclusivism of the Jews and Christians:

¹¹¹ And they said, "None will enter the Garden unless he be a Jew or a Christian." Those are their hopes. Say, "Bring your proof, if you are truthful." ¹¹² Nay, whosoever submits his face (*aslam wajhahu*) to God, while being virtuous, shall have his reward with his Lord. No fear shall come upon them; nor shall they grieve. ¹¹³ The Jews say, "The Christians stand on nothing," and the Christians say, "The Jews stand on nothing," though they recite the Book. Likewise, did those who know not speak words like theirs. God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differed.¹⁴⁶

The above verses reject the exclusivist beliefs that some Jews or Christians may advocate. Instead, the Qur'an continues to state that anyone who submits to God using the term "*aslam*," which shares its root with the term "*islām*," and does righteousness, shall neither fear nor grieve, using the same terminology used in Qur'an 2:62 and 5:69.¹⁴⁷ Hence, one may interpolate that the believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians who surrender to God and do righteousness are within the fold of the term "*islām*," and therefore, they shall neither fear nor grieve. Qur'an 2:113 also continues to reject the notion that Christians have nothing or that the Jews have nothing. It states that those who have no knowledge agree to such a concept. This implies that those who know would not say that the Jews have nothing or that the Christians have nothing. Therefore, the Jews and the Christians are onto something when it comes to their scriptures, in which the Qur'an continues to state the following verse: "Those unto whom We have given the Book and who recite it as it should be recited are they who believe in it. And whosoever does not believe in it, they are the losers."¹⁴⁸

The above verse would not be stated if the scriptures of the Jews and Christians are corrupted. Also, another point of intertextuality between Qur'an 2:111–113 and Qur'an 5:68–70 is the terms for "nothing" (*laysat 'ala shay'*). Qur'an 2:113 shows that Christians claim that the Jews stand on nothing while the Jews claim that the Christians stand on nothing, while they both read the scripture. Qur'an 5:68 indicates that neither the Jews nor the Christians are on anything (*lastum 'ala shay'*), unless they adhere to the Torah and the Gospel[s]. It must be noted that the Qur'an here does not show any indication that the Jews and Christians must adhere to the Qur'an, but they must adhere to their scriptures respectively. Even before Qur'an 5:68, the Qur'an mentions that the Jews and Christians needed to adhere to their scriptures: "Had they observed (*aqāmū*) the Torah and the Gospel and that which was sent down unto them from their Lord, they would surely have received nourishment from above them and from beneath their feet. There is a moderate community among them; but as for many of them, evil is that which they do!"¹⁴⁹

Qur'an 5:66 and 5:68 also use the terms “*aqāmū*” and “*tuqīmū*” respectively, which will be seen as significant in the discussion in the next section that describes the term “*tahrīf*.” The significance of these terms, as will be seen, is that “*tahrīf*” means bent or crooked, as in “*inḥirāf*” or “*munḥarif*,”¹⁵⁰ while the term “*tuqīmū*” means to straighten.¹⁵¹ Hence, the terms are antonyms, and as such, the Qur'an perhaps requires the Jews and Christians not to bend and sway away from the Torah and Gospel, but instead to straighten up and stand fast upon them.

Corruption (*tahrīf*) of scriptures

Another issue that brings forth the exclusivism in Islam is due to the understanding by some early Muslim scholars that previous scriptures have been corrupted.¹⁵² Ṣāliḥ al-Hāshimī (d. 668/1269) argues incessantly on the issue of “*tahrīf*” in the Bible in *Takhjīl man ḥarraf al-tawrāt wal-injīl*, but it is filled with bias against Jewish and Christian dogma.¹⁵³ The Muslim concept of the corruption of the Bible is old. In the eighth century CE, it is reported that the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdī stated that the corruption of the Bible is common knowledge during his debate with the Nestorian patriarch Timothy I.¹⁵⁴ However, there is a clear division between what is common knowledge in the eighth century CE and what is actually based on the Qur'an, during the time of Muḥammad. There is a *ḥadīth* that is not attributed to the Prophet, but stated by Ibn 'Abbās, as follows:

O community of Muslims, how do you ask the People of the Book and your book which was revealed to His Prophet blessings and peace be upon him is a newest report about God. You read a book that has not been distorted, but the People of the Book, as God related to you, exchange that which God wrote, changing the book with their hands. They said it is from God to traffic with it for a miserable price. Would not the knowledge that has come to you stop you from asking them? No, by God we have never seen one of them asking about what has been revealed to you.¹⁵⁵

This declaration contradicts the Qur'an.¹⁵⁶ Ibn 'Abbās states that Muslims should not ask the People of the Book. In contrast, the Qur'an requires that the People of the Book be asked about previous prophets (i.e., Qur'an 16:43–44, 21:7). The context of the Qur'an is apparent: it refers to the People of the Book who need to be asked about previous prophets, and classical exegetes, such as al-Ṭabarī, agree.¹⁵⁷

There are various schools among medieval Muslim scholars on the issue of corruption (*tahrīf*) of scriptures: (i) those who believe that the whole text is corrupted, (ii) those who believe that part of the text is corrupted, and (iii) those who believe that the words remain intact and corruption is only in the meanings.¹⁵⁸ Traditionally, the term “*tahrīf*” is divided between “*tahrīf al-lafz*” (distortion in words) and “*tahrīf al-ma'na*” (distortion in meaning). Tarakci and Sayar consider that the earliest usage of the term in Islam is “*tahrīf al-ma'na*” (distortion in meaning).¹⁵⁹ *Al-Radd al-jamil*, attributed to al-Ghazālī,¹⁶⁰ uses the concept of distortion in meaning when explaining “*tahrīf*.”¹⁶¹

The concept of misinterpreting scriptures is not new with the advent of the Qur'an. Early Christians in general and particularly Syrians considered the Jews to be heretics who completely misinterpreted the Hebrew Bible.¹⁶² Reynolds suggests that Syriac Fathers were concerned with spiritual interpretations of the Hebrew Bible for purposes of typology.¹⁶³ Since the Jews did not interpret the Hebrew Bible in the same way, they would have accused them of misinterpretation. Reynolds continues with examples showing how Christians during pre-Islam accused the Jews of misinterpreting the Hebrew Bible.¹⁶⁴ Perhaps it is for that reason Qur'an 2:113 states that the Jews accuse the Christians to stand on nothing, while the Christians accuse the Jews to stand on nothing, although they are reading the same scripture. Consequently, it must be noted that the Christians did not necessarily accuse Jews of changing the words in scriptures but simply misinterpreting them, which would adhere to the definition of "*tahrīf al-ma'na*." Al-Ṭabarī implies that corruption of scriptures is more likely in the meaning of the words and not necessarily the changing of the words.¹⁶⁵

The term "*yuḥarrifūn*" is mentioned four times in the Qur'an (i.e., Qur'an 2:75, 4:46, 5:13, 5:41). According to *Lisān al-'arab*, the term "*tahrīf*" means the distortion of meaning.¹⁶⁶ From a linguistic point of view, the term "*tahrīf*" does not mean changing the words of scriptures, but being crooked like "*inḥirāf*,"¹⁶⁷ as also stated by al-Ṭabarī.¹⁶⁸ Changing the words for another is known as "*tabdīl*." The Qur'an specifically says that the words of God cannot be changed by people, and it may only be God who has such authority (e.g., Qur'an 10:15, 16:101). In neither of these Qur'anic verses does it show that God had changed the previous revelations. Some traditional exegetes do not even show that such an interpretation was considered for these two verses.¹⁶⁹

Many Muslims believe that the words of the Qur'an are preserved and cannot be changed, due to an explicit promise (i.e., Qur'an 15:9). However, even in that promise, the term used for scripture, which classical Muslim exegetes, such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Ṭabarsī, interpret as the Qur'an, is "*al-dhikr*."¹⁷⁰ Although the Qur'an uses this term many times to refer to itself, it does use this term several times to mean other scriptures as well, such as the Torah (e.g., Qur'an 16:43–44, 21:7, 21:105).¹⁷¹ According to the Qur'an, no one can change (*tabdīl*) God's words.

Surely messengers were denied before thee, and they bore patiently their being denied and persecuted till Our help came to them. None alters (*mubaddil*) the Words of God, and there has already come unto thee some tidings of the messengers.¹⁷²

The Word of thy Lord is fulfilled in truth and justice. None alters (*mubaddil*) His Words, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing.¹⁷³

For them are glad tidings in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. There is no altering (*tabdīl*) the Words of God. That is the great triumph.¹⁷⁴

Recite that which has been revealed unto thee from the Book of thy Lord. None alters (*mubaddil*) His Words. And thou wilt find no refuge apart from Him.¹⁷⁵

The Qur'an even shows that there were attempts to change the words of God, but those attempts have met with failure. "Those who stayed behind will say when you set out to capture spoils, 'Let us follow you.' They desire to change (*yubaddilū*) the Word of

God. Say, 'You will not follow us; thus has God said before.' Then they will say, 'Nay, but you are jealous of us.' Nay, but they have not understood, save a little."¹⁷⁶

Since the words of God cannot be changed (*tabdīl*), when the Qur'an speaks of the People of the Book, it uses the term "*tahrīf*." Linguistically, the term "*tahrīf*" does not mean changing the words, but more precisely, it is the antonym of being upright, which is being crooked (*munḥarīf*). Perhaps this means that the words are kept unchanged, but their meanings are interpreted in a crooked manner. Also, when the Qur'an speaks of Jews "*yuharrifūn*," it does not generalize it to all the Jews, but specifies that some of the Jews resort to that:

Do you hope, then, that they will believe you, seeing that a party of them would hear the Word of God and then distort it (*yuharrifūn*) after they had understood it, knowingly?¹⁷⁷

Among those who are Jews are those who distort (*yuharrifūn*) of the word, and say, "We hear and disobey," and "Hear, as one who hears not!" and "Attend to us!" twisting their tongues and disparaging religion. And had they said, "We hear and obey" and "Listen" and "Regard us," it would have been better for them and more proper. But God cursed them for their disbelief, so they believe not, save a few.¹⁷⁸

Then for their breaking of their covenant, We cursed them and hardened their hearts. They distort (*yuharrifūn*) the Word, and have forgotten part of that whereof they were reminded. Thou wilt not cease to discover their treachery, from all save a few of them. So pardon them, and forbear. Truly God loves the virtuous.¹⁷⁹

O Messenger! Let them not grieve thee, those who hasten unto disbelief, those who say, "We believe" with their mouths, while their hearts believe not, and those who are Jews, who listen to lies and to others who have not come to thee. They distort (*yuharrifūn*) the word, saying, "If you are given this, then take it, but if you are not given this, then beware!" For whomsoever God desires that he be tried, thou hast no power to avail him aught against God. They are those whose hearts God desired not to purify. Theirs is disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter they shall have a great punishment.¹⁸⁰

In all of the above instances, the Qur'an speaks of some of the Jews and not the Christians. Haggai Mazuz suggests that perhaps the Qur'anic accusation against some Jews is a reference to some sort of homiletic Talmudic interpretation of scriptures.¹⁸¹ He states that there are at least seventy instances in which the Talmudic sages change one word or more to interpret Biblical verses in the Babylonian Talmud by changing the vocalization of a word to arrive at a specific interpretation.¹⁸² Mazuz gives as an example how the word "these" (*elleh*) in Leviticus 26:23 is changed to "*alah*" a curse associated with oaths.¹⁸³ In other cases the Talmudic sages sometimes split a word into two, with Mazuz giving an example the word "delayed" (*bōshesh*) in Exodus 32:1 to become "the sixth [hour] had come" (*bāū shesh*).¹⁸⁴ The Talmudic sages also sometimes change a word by adding, subtracting, or moving a letter, with Mazuz giving an example the word "roses" (*shōshanīm*) changed to "they that learn" (*she-shōnīm*).¹⁸⁵ Mazuz suggests that perhaps the Qur'an rejects these kinds of homiletic interpretations.¹⁸⁶

Also, the term “*ḥ r f*” may be seen to mean language (or dialect).¹⁸⁷ This meaning is perhaps attested by the prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) that states, “Gabriel recited me [the Qur'an] on a dialect (*ḥarf*), and I continued to ask for more until he finished to seven dialects (*ahruf*).”¹⁸⁸ There is a possibility, therefore, that the term “*yuharrifūn*” could mean translating the words from one language (or dialect) to another,¹⁸⁹ which would perhaps point to rabbinic targums.¹⁹⁰ The rabbinic targums were explanations of the Hebrew Bible usually in the spoken language of the people, such as Aramaic, which at the time was replacing Hebrew.¹⁹¹ However, the dating of written targums is a highly debatable matter.¹⁹² Martin McNamara notes several examples, in which the Biblical text is changed in the targum. In one example about the respect due to the Elders of Israel, he states: “According to a later rabbinic dictum one should not speak disparagingly of the righteous, meaning by this the worthies of Israel. The tendency to change the biblical [*sic*] text itself, or rewrite it in translation, in order to remove or tone down passages detrimental to the reputation of the elders of Israel is already attested in pre-Christian times.”¹⁹³

The root “*ḥ r f*” also means an edge or to sharpen.¹⁹⁴ It is perhaps from this etymological root that the term has taken to mean a craft (*ḥirfah*).¹⁹⁵ However, it might also be caused by its etymological root meaning to bend, as a craftsperson bends things to create or build something.¹⁹⁶ In Hebrew and Aramaic, the term is sometimes used to mean insult, abuse, or slander (e.g., Psalm 57:3, 74:10, Proverbs 14:31, 2 Kings 19:4, Nehemiah 5:9, Isaiah 51:7, Daniel 11:18).¹⁹⁷

The term “*yuharrifūn*” used by the Qur'an could also mean that some Jews are bending the words by having a crooked (*munḥarif*) interpretation of the words or turning away (*inḥirāf*) from the words, not necessarily changing the words themselves. The term “*taharraḥ*” can mean to turn aside.¹⁹⁸ Hence, if there is corruption in scriptures, it means that the interpretation of the words might have been corrupted but the words of God remain intact. However, there is also a possibility that the term “*yuharrifūn*” does not even mean changing the interpretation, but simply going back to the root meaning of the word, which is to turn away or to be crooked (*inḥirāf*). Some Qur'anic commentators such as al-Ṭabarī have debated the circumstances of revelation in Qur'an 5:41: was it revealed on the penalty for murder or that it was revealed on the penalty for adultery?¹⁹⁹ If we take these issues for a moment and identify whether or not the Jews have changed the meaning or the words of the Torah, it would give us few insights. Al-Ṭabarī says that the circumstance of revelation is perhaps when a Jew wanted to ask Muḥammad about the penalty for murder. If Muḥammad concluded that it is capital punishment, then the Jews would not accept it.²⁰⁰ However, the penalty for deliberate murder, according to the Torah (i.e., Exodus 21:12–14), is death. Hence, if the term “*yuharrifūn*” in Qur'an 5:41 was meant for this issue, then it is apparent that the text of the Torah is not changed, but that some Jews hoped for a different outcome from Muḥammad.

If the issue is on the penalty for adultery, then we also arrive at the same conclusion. Al-Ṭabarī states that another opinion of the circumstance of revelation is that some Jews went to Muḥammad to ask him about the penalty for adultery.²⁰¹ They decided that if Muḥammad says that the penalty is that the adulterers are lashed and carried on donkeys, they would accept it. However, if otherwise he issues the penalty of stoning,

then they would not accept it. According to classical exegetes, such as al-Ṭabarī, they state that Muḥammad eventually asks what the penalty is according to the Torah, and at the end it was found to be stoning.²⁰² Perhaps Muḥammad was referred to Deuteronomy 22:23–27.

If we do accept the circumstance of revelation of Qur'an 5:41, then we find that the Jews neither changed the texts of the Torah, nor even interpreted it differently. What they did was simpler than all that. They simply did not want to adhere to the rules outlined in the Torah. However, they neither changed the words in the texts nor attempt to change its meaning. Consequently, we conclude from this discussion, if we accept the stories on the circumstances of revelation, then "*taḥrīf*" in here means something different. It simply means that some of the Jews are not adhering to the Torah with neither changing the text nor meaning. We can always question the reliability of the circumstances of revelations as narrated by classical Qur'anic commentators. However, if we do accept its reliability, then we find the term "*taḥrīf*" in the Qur'an means something completely different than what is even assumed in *Lisān al-ʿarab* (i.e., the change in meaning). It means exactly what its root meaning is, which is crooked (*inḥirāf*). That instead of adhering to (*tuqīmū*) the Torah, as according to Qur'an 5:66 and 5:68, they are moving away (*yuharrifūn*) from it, neither changing the text nor its meaning.

If we do not accept the reliability of the circumstances of revelation of Qur'an 5:41, then we would need to look closely at the Qur'an for clues to see what it could possibly mean by the term "*yuharrifūn*." The clue in the Qur'anic usage between "*tuqīmū*" and "*yuharrifūn*" seems highly likely, as both are even used within the same chapter, and therefore, it provides the possible context for the vocabulary. Moreover, in the second verse coming after Qur'an 5:41 it states: "And how is it that they come to thee for judgment, when they have the Torah, wherein is God's Judgment? Yet even after that, they turn their backs, and they are not believers."²⁰³

From the context, it seems likely that Qur'an 5:43 refers to the same issue as Qur'an 5:41. In other words, although Qur'an 5:41 says that some Jews "*yuharrifūn*," Qur'an 5:42 says that if they do come for a ruling, then they are to be judged justly. Qur'an 5:43 states with a seemingly surprised tone that why would they (the Jews) come for a ruling, when they have the Torah with them with God's rules? If the term "*yuharrifūn*" means that the Jews changed either the text or the meaning, then why would the Qur'an almost immediately later require them to use the Torah? Also, Qur'an 5:43 states that although they have God's ruling in the Torah, they would still turn away. This may imply that the term "*yuharrifūn*" means that the Jews are turning away from the text, and not that they either changed the text or meaning. The phrase, "*yuharrifūn al-kalim min ba'd mawāḍi'ih*," might mean that they turn away from the words after they are placed. Others have suggested that they take them out of their context (*mawḍū'*).²⁰⁴ Reynolds argues that the Qur'an is very specific in that sense of "*taḥrīf*," in which words are taken out of context.²⁰⁵ Due to the rhetoric, there is always a possibility that a plurality of meanings might be intended, especially when using polysemous terms, such as (*ḥ r f*).

Another keyword that one needs to take into consideration in attempting to understand the meaning of "*taḥrīf*" in the Qur'an is the term "*yalwūn*." In Qur'an 4:46,

after it accuses that some Jews “*yuharrifūn*,” it states that they twist (*layyan*) their tongues. In Qur'an 3:78, it states that some of the People of the Book twist (*yalwūn*) their tongues so that it would appear as if it were from scriptures, but that it is not from scriptures, and that they say it is from God, when it is not from God. If the term “*yuharrifūn*” is related to the term “*yalwūn*,” then it means that the text is kept unchanged. The reason is because it does not associate changing the writings of scriptures with the term “*yuharrifūn*,” but that tongues are twisted. If tongues are twisted, it means they say things not from scriptures and not that they changed the text of scriptures, a conclusion also arrived by Tarakci and Sayar.²⁰⁶

The Qur'an does show that there are some people who used to write books with their own hands and then claim that they are from God (i.e., Qur'an 2:79). However, there is no evidence that this verse is talking necessarily of the Bible. It could be talking about apocrypha or pseudepigrapha texts that were asserted to be divinely inspired. I am not stating that the Qur'an is accusing these texts of not being divinely inspired, but perhaps the Qur'an is referring to some of them or even perhaps others, but not the Bible.²⁰⁷ In describing this verse, Reynolds suggests, “it [the Qur'an] argues against those who treat the words of humans as revelation, while neglecting the words of God.”²⁰⁸ As such, Qur'an 5:66–68 requires them to return to God's words in the Torah and Gospel instead. If the Bible had been changed or rewritten, then it would not at all request the People of the Book to turn back to their scriptures. Qur'an 5:68 shows that at least at the time of Muḥammad, Jews and Christians should adhere to their own books, implying that the original scriptures were still in their hands.²⁰⁹ Fred Donner also suggests that Muḥammad and the Believers movement included Jews and Christians who were not asked to change their identities and were expected to adhere to their revealed books.²¹⁰

A verse in the Qur'an suggests that the prophecy of the coming of a prophet (without revealing his name) is mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel (i.e., Qur'an 7:157). Not finding such an explicit mention in either the Torah or the Gospel has made some medieval Muslim scholars suggest that it was deleted from the Bible.²¹¹ However, the Qur'an here may suggest that there were allusions to the coming of a prophet as in a prophet like Moses mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:14–22 and the Jews waiting for the Prophet as mentioned in the Gospel of John 1:19–24. If the Qur'an refers to these verses as references to a prophet to come, then it does not prove that there have been any corruptions.

There is a Qur'anic reference, in which Jesus told his disciples that a messenger named Aḥmad would come after him (i.e., Qur'an 61:6), that Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) considers proof that the Gospel is corrupted.²¹² I will not delve into the debate on whether Aḥmad is a proper name and a reference to Muḥammad or not. Nor will I delve into whether the term “*aḥmad*” is a reference to the Paraclete mentioned in the Gospel of John (i.e., John 14:16, 14:26).²¹³ The Qur'anic text does not state that this saying of Jesus is in the Gospels. Hence, whether or not it is in the New Testament is also in no way proof that the text is corrupted. The corruption of scriptures to mean changing the words of God has no indisputable evidence in the Qur'an. Some Muslim scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, also believe that the Qur'an, as the final revelation from God, suspends the laws in the scriptures that have come

before it and supersedes it, although Ibn Taymiyyah argues that a later revelation does not abrogate (*naskh*) its preceding one.²¹⁴ However, the Qur'an does not necessarily agree with that concept, as will be shown later in this section.

Qur'an 2:113 states that Jews and Christians argue against each other, each claiming that the other is wrong, even though they read the same scripture, which is the Hebrew Bible. Later Muslims also made a similar claim that both Jews and Christians are wrong.²¹⁵ Actually, the Qur'an specifically denounces such claims from anybody and calls those who make such claims people without knowledge: "The Jews say, 'The Christians stand on nothing,' and the Christians say, 'The Jews stand on nothing,' though they recite the Book. Likewise, did those who know not speak words like theirs. God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differed."²¹⁶

Also, the Qur'an steadfastly states that Jews and Christians stand upon nothing unless they resurrect and uphold their scriptures, which proves that their scriptures are not corrupt in the sense that the words have changed. Interestingly, from a linguistics point of view the term "*taḥrīf*" means to bend, as in "*inḥirāf*,"²¹⁷ and for that reason the Qur'an requests the Jews and Christians to uphold their scriptures using the term "*tuqīmū*," which means to straighten, to uphold, and to resurrect, in contrast to bending. Hence, the Qur'an may seem to state that some would like to bend (*yuḥarrifūn*) the rules of God in scriptures, when they actually need to uphold (*tuqīmū*) them.

⁶⁸ Say, "O People of the Book! You stand on naught till you observe (*tuqīmū*) the Torah and the Gospel, and that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord." Surely that which has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord will increase many of them in rebellion and disbelief. So grieve not for disbelieving people.

⁶⁹ Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Sabeans, and the Christians—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.²¹⁸

From the above verse, a relationship between the terms "*tuqīmū*" and "*yuḥarrifūn*" is established, as "*tuqīmū*" means to straighten as opposed to "*yuḥarrifūn*," which means to bend. This would be one of the creative associations that Muḥammad was capable of doing, given his state of mind. If anything, the Qur'an actually attempts to uphold the veracity of the Torah.

⁴³ And how is it that they come to thee for judgment, when they have the Torah, wherein is God's Judgment? Yet even after that, they turn their backs, and they are not believers. ⁴⁴ Truly We sent down the Torah, wherein is a guidance and a light, by which the prophets who submitted (*aslamū*) [unto God] judged those who are Jews, as did the sages and the rabbis, in accordance with such of God's Book as they were bidden to preserve and to which they were witnesses. So fear not mankind, but fear Me! And sell not My signs for a paltry price. Whosoever judges not by that which God has sent down—it is they who are disbelievers.²¹⁹

These verses, at least at the time of Muḥammad, request the Jews to judge in accordance to the Torah (e.g., Qur'an 3:93, 5:43). In actuality, the same is also requested

for the Christians to judge in accordance to the Gospel (i.e., Qur'an 5:47), where the Qur'an later states that it has been revealed to confirm the truth (*muṣaddiqan*) of the scriptures that have come before it (e.g., Qur'an 2:101, 3:3, 4:47, 5:48, 6:92, 10:37, 12:111, 46:12, 46:30), neither falsifying them nor abrogating them, but guarding them in safety.

⁴⁷ Let the people of the Gospel judge by what God has sent down therein. Whosoever judges not by that which God has sent down—it is they who are iniquitous. ⁴⁸ And We have sent down unto thee the Book in truth, confirming the Book that came before it, and as a protector over it. So judge between them in accordance with what God has sent down, and follow not their caprices away from the truth that has come unto thee. For each among you We have appointed a law and a way. And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ. ²²⁰

Tarakci and Sayar also present the concept that the Bible may contain indecent stories, such as Lot lying with his daughters as a reason why some Muslims may find the Bible corrupt.²²¹ However, Tarakci and Sayar argue that not finding these stories in the Qur'an does not imply that they had not happened. Besides, the concept that prophets are infallible (*iṣmah*) is not even found in the Qur'an.²²² If there exist any apparent contradictions between the Bible and the Qur'an, perhaps it opens a dimension for us to examine the intended meanings in both, and not necessarily that the Qur'an is attempting to undermine the validity of the Bible, especially since it explicitly states that it defends the veracity of the Bible. Perhaps we can use Averroës' principle of allegory in that if the apparent literal senses contradict, then we will need to reconcile them allegorically.²²³ As such, if there are apparent literal contradictions between the Bible and the Qur'an, then it may be necessary to resort to allegorical meanings to reconcile them. Besides, with Muḥammad's state of mind giving double meanings in his sayings and precise use of words, allegorical meanings may be highly plausible.

In this section, in brief, the term "*yuharrifūn*" brings up three theories, and not one of them has the notion of altering the actual words in the Bible. The first is Mazuz's proposition that it might be referring to some homiletic interpretations by rabbis in the Talmud, when word vocalizations are changed or split to arrive to a different meaning. The second is the proposition that the term might be referring to changing words intentionally by rabbis while translating them in targums. The third is the possible reference of its root meaning, to bend (*inḥirāf*), as some Jews wish to bend the rules laid down by the Torah or turn away from them, when they are being asked to uphold (*tuqīmū*) them instead. As all may provide us with plausible explanations, I lean more toward the last theory given the contrast that the Qur'an makes between the terms "*yuharrifūn*" and "*tuqīmū*" within the same chapter. However, due to the polysemous nature of the term, perhaps multiple meanings were equally intended, especially given the state of mind of Muḥammad to convey double or more meanings.

Intertextuality between the Qur'an and the Bible

As seen in this chapter, I had to tackle two issues to prove that intertextuality between the Qur'an and the Bible is expected. The first issue is the exclusivity of Islam from a Qur'anic perspective. It has been shown that exclusivism has no Qur'anic basis. The second issue is the notion of the corruption (*taḥrīf*) of scriptures, which is perhaps found to mean turning away from scriptures. Hence, it does not mean that the text of scriptures has been changed. Since it does not mean the text has been changed and that the Qur'an accepts the veracity of the Bible, then it would seem natural to allow for intertextuality between the Qur'an and the Bible. In the medieval age, this conclusion is reached by Al-Biqā'ī in his *al-Aqwāl al-qawīmah fī ḥukm al-naql min al-kutub al-qadīmah*. A number of scholars in recent years have argued that the Qur'an is best read in conversation with the Bible and Biblical literature.²²⁴ To adhere to a good epistemology, one needs to look at it from a Qur'anic perspective devoid of the opinions of post-Qur'anic literature. I hope I have shown in this chapter that the Qur'an accepts other scriptures and at times even requires that other scriptures are read (e.g., Qur'an 3:93). The Qur'an seems to expect its audience to have a good knowledge of the Bible, as will be shown in a few examples in the next three chapters.