HOW COULD EARLY CHRISTIANS BE WRONG? THE ROLE OF *FAHM AL-SALAF* IN THE BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS OF IBN TAYMIYYAH AND MICHAEL SERVETUS

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Abstract

This study comparatively examines the centrality of the argument about early authorities' understanding of scripture within the biblical hermeneutics of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) and Michael Servetus (d. 1553). It concludes that both figures aimed to examine mainstream Christianity through similar ante-Nicene biblical hermeneutics. The topics of this hermeneutics include linguistic analysis, scriptural usage of a term, historical contexts of a term, scriptural harmony, and early authorities' understanding of scripture. However, they had different interpretations of the whole Christian tradition for two main reasons. First, they had two different faith commitments, namely, Ibn Taymiyyah was a Muslim and Servetus was a Christian. The second reason is their different scopes of examining the Christian tradition when approaching the testimonies of the ante-Nicene fathers, which is understood in this study as *fahm al-Salaf*. Accordingly, the study argues for three conclusions. First, the logical conclusions of Servetus's hermeneutics should have led to Joseph Priestley's concept of God. Second, if Ibn Taymiyyah had access to the writings of the

ante-Nicene fathers, then he would have argued for the Ebionites. Third, that a critical question could be presented by Christians to the Muslim audience regarding the divinity of Jesus is the argument from *tawātur maʿnawī* (thematic recurrent mass transmission).

Key Words: Hermeneutics, philosophical theology, *fahm al-Salaf*, ante-Nicene fathers, Ibn Taymiyyah, Michael Servetus.

I. Introduction

Across the intellectual history of the three Abrahamic faiths, the Abrahamic theologians have applied various methods to understand their scriptures. One of the turning points across this fruitful history started at the time of the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (d. 50) whose legacy is being known as the first to attempt to unite human knowledge and divine revelation, and he can legitimately be called "the first theologian"[1] since he aimed at proving that the Bible is congenial to contemporary philosophy.[2] In other words, this was the reason behind creating the field of theology as we know it today. David Aaron writes, "I would argue that theology, in the sense that it would come to be known in Judaism and Christianity, was quite specifically a creation of the late Hellenistic Era."[3] This did continue through the writings of Muslim philosophers, including the theologians known generally as adherents of *kalām* or *mutakallimūn*, who are overlooked by some modern philosophical writings due to the lack of comprehensive study of the Muslim philosophical theology, such as the writings of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233). Peter Adamson

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[1]   Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 32. Harry Wolfson argues that Philo is the founder of the classical view of the relationship between reason and revelation "that both are the gift of God, and that therefore there can be no conflict provided reason is properly used and revelation properly interpreted." See Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), I, 141-143.

[2]   Maren R. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2018), 85, 189.

[3]   David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics and Divine Imagery* (Leiden, Boston & Köln: Brill, 2001), 18.

states that "if history had gone differently and there had been no hard-line Aristotelians writing in Arabic, I have no doubt that historians of philosophy would consider the output of the *mutakallimūn* to be the 'philosophical' tradition of the Islamic world."[4]

This rereading of the Abrahamic scriptures has its place due to the various factors that have been shaping biblical exegesis for a long-standing period, such as engaging scripture with the dominant philosophical approach of that era. For instance, both Philo of Alexandria and Rudolf Bultmann (d. 1976) share the notion that we cannot simply reject the authority of Greek philosophy or modern science if it contradicts the apparent meaning of scripture, and thus the first step, according to them, is to accept that there could be further meanings meant by scriptural text using allegorical or figurative interpretation.[5] That is why one of the most influential factors that has played a significant role in shaping exegetical methods is the intellectual background from which the thinker is coming. That is, most thinkers who have engaged intellectually with various philosophical and theological traditions will face an intellectual challenge while approaching scripture since there could be conflicting views on one topic with two sources of knowledge, such as the concept of God. For instance, both Origen of Alexandria (d. 253) and Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128/745-746) come from the same

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[4] See Peter Adamson, "If Aquinas is a Philosopher then so are the Islamic Theologians" (published in association with Oxford University Press an Aeon Strategic Partner, ed. Nigel Warburton, https://aeon.co/ideas/if-aquinas-is-a-philosopher-then-so-are-the-islamic-theologians, accessed February 10, 2017).

[5] Bobby Jang Sun Ryu notes regarding Philo's rationale to apply the allegorical interpretation: "The driving force behind the Allegorical Commentary, concatenative exegesis aids Philo in his desire to apply Mosaic material to a wider range of ideas and issues not necessarily implicated – at least in the first instance – by the primary biblical text under review." See Bobby Jang Sun Ryu, "Knowledge of God in Philo of Alexandria with special reference to the *Allegorical Commentary*," (PhD diss., Oxford: University of Oxford, 2012), 71. As for Bultmann, Brent A. R. Hege states that he "recognizes the impossibility of simply repristinating the mythical world-picture of the New Testament because the modern scientific age has no room within it for recourse to the spirit world of the New Testament." See Brent A. R. Hege, *Myth, History, and the Resurrection in German Protestant Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 43.

intellectual background, that is, Neoplatonism, which apparently contradicts the apparent scriptural concept of God, and thus, because they integrated Neoplatonism with Christianity and Islam, respectively, through figurative interpretation, anthropomorphism was banished from the two religions.[6]

Such methods developed through the writings of theologians are considered as established ways of understanding scripture and thus to be the reason behind the emergence of systematic creeds concerning the theological verses relying on the ecumenical councils through the Christian context or the concept of *ijmāʿ* (the consensus of Islamic scholars) through the Muslim one. In other words, they became the appropriate understanding of scripture according to the mainstream Christian and Muslim theologians. Therefore, the one who goes beyond this understanding could be considered as a heretic within the Christian tradition or *mubtadiʿ* (innovator) within the Muslim tradition. One of the mentioned established creeds in the Christian context is the Nicene Creed, which is the official expression of Trinitarian doctrine across the Christian world after the first council

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[6]   See *Richard M. Frank, "The Neoplatonism of Ǧahm ibn Ṣafwân," Le Muséon: Revue d'Études Orientales* 78, no. 3-4 (1965), 395-424; Morris S. Seale, *Muslim Theology: A Study of Origins with reference to the Church Fathers* (London: Luzac, 1964), 58; W. R. Inge, "The Permanent Influence of Neoplatonism upon Christianity," *The American Journal of Theology* 4, no. 2 (1900), 334. Interestingly, both thinkers had seen this integration of Neoplatonism into their tradition as a reaction to the pagan polemics. John M. Dillon notes that "Origen begins abruptly, not with a positive statement of God's nature, but with an answer to an accusation, plainly from a Platonic source, that Christians regard God as having a corporeal nature. In combating this accusation, he has to face a series of passages of Scripture which seem to attribute to God material substance or characteristics." See John M. Dillon, "The Knowledge of God in Origen," in *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Roel van den Broek, Tjitze Baarda, and Jaap Mansfeld (Leiden, New York, København & Köln: E. J. Brill, 1988), 220-221. As for Jahm, it did happen because of his well-known story about the debate with the Indian philosophical school of thought known as al-Sumaniyyah. See Abū ʿAbd Allāh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Radd ʿalā l-zanādiqah wa-l-Jahmiyyah fī-mā shakkat fīhi min mutashābih al-Qurʾān wa-taʾawwalathu ʿalá ghayr taʾwīlihī*, ed. Daghsh al-ʿAjmī (Kuwait: Ghirās li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ wa-l-Diʿāyah wa-l-Iʿlān, 2005), 194-199; Dong Xiuyuan, "The Presence of Buddhist Thought in Kalām Literature," *Philosophy East and West* 68, no. 3 (2018), 944-948, https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.2018.0080.

of Nicaea in 325 AD, which was a response to Arianism. Arianism examined central Christian doctrines about the divinity of Jesus, and thus, the Nicene apologists turn Arianism into "a self-conscious sect," as Rowan Williams notes.[7] In the Islamic context, the same case was made through the topic of the transcendence of God being incorporeal, which is the main implication of Kalām to demonstrate it relying on the hermeneutical approach known as *al-Qānūn al-kullī fī l-taʾwīl* (The comprehensive law of interpretation), developed by al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and applied comprehensively by al-Rāzī, which states that resolving conflicts between reason and the literal wording of revelation is by interpreting revelation in a figurative way, namely, how it is related to the anthropomorphic verses.[8]

Both creeds have dominated Christian and Islamic thought.[9] However, there have been significant attempts to re-examine their authority, and one of these attempts was made by two influential medieval thinkers, Ibn Taymiyyah[10] and Michael Servetus;[11] Ibn

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7   Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 83.

8   Frank Griffel, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy between 500 and 1500*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer Verlag, 2011), I, 344. The influential philosophical theologian Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī states while discussing the definition of being a believer in the Muslim context that the vast majority of the apparent meanings of scripture is "*mukhālif*" (not meant). See Abū l-Ḥasan Sayf al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Āmidī, *Abkār al-afkār fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Mahdī, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyyah, 2004), V, 19.

9   Oliver Leaman, "The Developed *Kalām* Tradition, Part I," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 85; Jon Hoover, "Ḥanbalī Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 634.

10   Ibn Taymiyyah is known for his significant critique of the logicians, which led to an "extraordinary potential of his empiricist methodology." See Wael B. Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyya against the Greek Logicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1. As for Servetus, he is known for being an expert in other fields such as medicine and geography. See Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A, 1978), 13; John F. Fulton, *Michael Servetus: Humanist and Martyr* (New York: Herbert Reichner, 1953), 46.

11   Both Ibn Taymiyyah and Servetus struggled through their lives because of their theological views. As for Servetus, he was standing out there as a man who could not accept changing any of his views to the last moment although it could be a

Taymiyyah's project is understood as a criticism of the intellectual perspective of al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī regarding the concept of reason since it has the main impact on the issue of God's transcendence.[12] For Servetus, his main position is insisting on the fact that the later consensus on the doctrine of the trinity, namely, the Nicene Creed, is not authoritative if it is examined through the light of the first generations of Christianity in addition to the Bible. Carl Odhner writes, "he realized that the source of the corruption was a false idea of God, introduced as early as the Council of Nicaea, when "the Godhead was divided into three persons with one nature, and Christ divided into two."[13] This commonality is the main reason behind analyzing the two thinkers since any reader of the title of this article would declare at the first sight Tertullian's well-known question, "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?!" since there is no apparent

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way for considering him as one of the leaders of the Reformed tradition due to his theological expertise which Juan de Quintana, the confessor to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles and a teacher of Servetus, describes as: "he is a young man of very great talent and a great sophist, but cannot imagine that a book so replete with Scripture knowledge and so polished in style, can really be the production of one of his years." See Alexander Gordon, *Addresses, Biographical and Historical* (London: The Lindsey Press, 1922), 22. However, as what the Bible says; "*What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?*" (Mark 8:36). Thus, his last words at the stake were his well-known prayer; "Jesus, thou Son of the eternal God, have pity on me." See Roland H. Bainton, *Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1953), 207-214. As for Ibn Taymiyyah, it is narrated that he read the Qurʾān around eighty times when he was jailed for the seventh time after they prevented him from writing anymore, and through this last one he reached the verses "*Indeed, the righteous will be among gardens and rivers, in a seat of honour near a Sovereign, Perfect in ability*" (Q 54: 54-55) which is the end of *al-Qamar* (The moon) chapter, and thus what comes after it is the chapter *al-Raḥmān* (The merciful). See Abū ʿAbd Allāh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī al-Dimashqī, *al-ʿUqūd al-durriyyah min manāqib Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah*, ed. Abū Muṣʿab Ṭalʿat ibn Fuʾād al-Ḥalwānī (Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadīthah li-l-Ṭibāʿah wa-l-Nashr, 2002), 290-291.

[12] Veysel Kaya, "Reason and Intellect", in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Science, and Technology in Islam*, ed. Ibrahim Kalin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), II, 189.

[13] Carl Theophilus Odhner, *Michael Servetus: His Life and Teachings* (Philadelphia: Press of J. B. Lippincott Company, 1910), 10-11.

rationale behind comparatively analyzing the two thinkers, as they are not contemporaries, such as the study of Muammer İskenderoğlu entitled *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Thomas Aquinas on the Question of the Eternity of the World* (Brill, 2002).[14]

The answer to this question about reading these two thinkers within the same context is the argument that they are pioneers of the notion of examining established creeds, as their projects had mainly relied on reexamining scripture based on arguments from early authorities' understanding of scripture. That is, they aimed at

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[14] It is worth mentioning here for those interested in Christian-Muslim studies that Muammer İskenderoğlu, the author of the section on al-Rāzī's views on Christianity through the encyclopaedia. *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 4 (1200-1350)* had presented several works of al-Rāzī for his views on Christianity except his work *Nihāyat al-ʿuqūl fī dirāyat al-uṣūl* (The pinnacle of the Intellects through Understanding the Principles). İskenderoğlu argues that al-Rāzī's "most detailed discussions of issues related to Christianity come in his commentary, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*." See Muammer İskenderoğlu, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 4 (1200-1350)*, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallett (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009), IV, 61-62. I argue that the only work in which al-Rāzī presents a systematic detailed discussion of Christianity is his work *Nihāyat al-ʿuqūl*, since he had done his best to put forth all possible understandings of the problematic topics in Christianity, such as the trinity, and even tried to defend some of its aspects against some Muslim polemics. In addition, he had "Kalamized" the trinity, which means to interpret this concept through one of the widely accepted Muslim philosophical-theological notions in which he concludes by saying "And I likely see that the Christian concept of the Hypostases is similar to Abū Hāshim's *aḥwāl* (modes)." See Abū ʿAbd Allāh Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-ʿuqūl fī dirāyat al-uṣūl*, ed. Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Fūdah (Beirut: Dār al-Dhakhāʾir, 2015), I, 541. Abū Hāshim's *aḥwāl* (singular, *ḥāl*, translated as "mode" or "state") is a theological theory invented by the notable Muʿtazilī scholar, Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī (d. 321/933) as an interpretation of God's attributes. Harry A. Wolfson writes, "Once he (Abū Hāshim) had developed this theory of modes as a general theory of prediction, he applied it to the problem of divine attributes, arriving at a new view opposed at once to that of the Attributists and to that of the Antiattributists." See Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 168; Rukn al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad al-Malāḥimī, *Kitāb al-muʿtamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Martin J. McDermott and Wilferd Madelung (London: al-Hudá, 1991), 277.

answering a critical question: If you have such consensus on a given creed across the vast majority of theologians through these two traditions, then how could someone re-examine them? In other words, what is the central argument that could compete with the consensus of later theologians on a certain issue?[15] Here comes the role of *fahm al-Salaf* (early authorities' understanding), which includes both the original – ordinary – audience and early theologians. This is found clearly through the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah and Servetus. Herman J. Selderhuis notes that "all of Servetus's writings rely very heavily on the Bible. It could be said that the Bible, together with a detailed knowledge of the ante-Nicene fathers, was at risk of turning into a lethal weapon in Servetus's hands."[16] For Ibn Taymiyyah, it is hard to find one page through his works that does not refer to at least one figure of the first three generations of Islam, as relying on these figures is one of his central arguments in addition to his reliance on the later dispute among the adherents of Kalām, especially the notion that "we necessarily know it by reason" to indicate it is relative and thus it could not be an authority as he regarded it.[17] Thus, this argument has both theological and philosophical implications, namely, what is related to the philosophy of language in which the text is necessarily understood through the terminology used by the original audience. These early readers serve as the departure point for any further interpretation of scripture and a gate to the limits of meaning in the context of their terminology in addition to the fact that in some cases, they "could

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[15]   This is a dispute among the Muslim thinkers regarding the issue of having a later consensus regarding a certain topic, although there was a dispute regarding it in early Islam. See Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Shawkānī, *Irshād al-fuḥūl ilá taḥqīq al-ḥaqq min ʿilm al-uṣūl*, ed. Abū Ḥafṣ Sāmī ibn al-ʿArabī al-Atharī (Riyadh: Dār al-Faḍīlah li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2000), IV, 539.

[16]   Irena Backus, "Theological Relations: Calvin and the Church Fathers," in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis, trans. Henry J. Baron et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich. & Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 133.

[17]   See Binyamin Abrahamov, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Agreement of Reason with Tradition," *The Muslim World* 82, no. 3-4 (1992), 257, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1992.tb03556.x; Carl Sharif el-Tobgui, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Incoherence of the Theologians' Universal Law: Reframing the Debate between Reason and Revelation in Medieval Islam," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 18 (2018), 69, https://doi.org/10.5617/jais.6521.

dialogue with the author to find out what he or she meant"[18] if there are sources of their writings available, and thus to avoid the rejection of the meanings of the whole scripture through allegorical interpretation.[19]

Accordingly, this is the first study to examine the two figures in order to have a comparative analysis of the two contributions through the context of the Christian tradition specifically because Servetus does not have expertise on the Islamic tradition beyond his brief reference to the Qurʾān to support his views that the trinity is not found elsewhere.[20] Noel Malcolm states that "only at the beginning of the modern anti-Trinitarian tradition had there been a serious attempt to draw on the evidence of Islam itself. In 1533, Miguel Servet (Servetus) had quoted from the Koran to suggest that Muhammad had preserved an authentic, non-Trinitarian belief about the nature of Jesus."[21] This could be understood in a broader sense through the use of Islam in Christian intrafaith dialogue, namely, the Reformed tradition of using Islam as a "foil to critique Christians," which is the method Calvin employed as Joshua Ralston notes[22] or generally comparing the prophet Muḥammad with the Pope negatively, which

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[18] David B. Frank, "Do We Translate the Original Author's Intended Meaning?," *Open Theology* 2, no. 1 (2016), 665, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2016-0051. In my view, accepting the argument from the original readers' understanding is essential, as it will prevent the ambiguity of having no criterion for examining the readings, which E. D. Hirsch calls the "chaotic democracy of readings". See E. D. Hirsch, Jr. *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 5.

[19] Even Philo himself was afraid of allegory; Montgomery J. Shroyer notes that Philo "warns against the extreme allegory which forsakes laws entirely and accepts only the spiritual values involved." See Montgomery J. Shroyer, "Alexandrian Jewish Literalists," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 55, no. 4 (1936), 265, https://doi.org/10.2307/3259122.

[20] Michael Servetus, *The Restoration of Christianity: an English translation of Christianismi restitutio, 1553 by Michael Servetus (1511-1553)*, trans. Christopher A. Hoffmann and Marian Hillar (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 48-51.

[21] Noel Malcolm, *Useful Enemies: Islam and the Ottoman Empire in Western Political Thought, 1450-1750* (Oxford & New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 317.

[22] See Joshua Ralston, "Islam as Christian Trope: The Place and Function of Islam in Reformed Dogmatic Theology," *The Muslim World* 107, no. 4 (2017), 758, https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12220.

is found through the Reformed writings.[23] On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyyah was approaching this topic as an intellectual historian by tracking the impact of such methods on religions generally. For instance, he expands his attitude towards the scholastic creed in the Islamic context to be applied to the Nicene Creed in the Christian one by saying through the introduction to his voluminous work *Darʾ taʿāruḍ al-ʿaql wa-l-naql*, "And this theological law is similar to the one invented by Christians – Nicene Creed – who have altered the Torah and the Gospel to be compromised with it."[24] He further expands this to include the Jewish context, of which he writes, "The same as the Muʿtazilites, the Jewish theologians are found interpreting the Torah figuratively through Kalām."[25] Therefore, analyzing the case through the Christian tradition is more credible because of Ibn Taymiyyah's expertise on the Christian tradition compared with Servetus's lack of information regarding the Islamic, as he did not write a work on Islam as Ibn Taymiyyah did on Christianity, namely, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*, which is the largest refutation of Christianity in the Islamic tradition.[26] Servetus's work *Christianismi Restitutio* (The restoration of Christianity)[27] is not written for a Muslim audience but for Christians, and it was the reason for his death because it opposes the "Romish

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[23]   Andrew Colin Gow and Jeremy Fradkin, "Protestantism and Non-Christian Religions," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 286.

[24]   Abū l-ʿAbbās Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ḥarrānī, *Darʾ taʿāruḍ al-ʿaql wa-l-naql*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmiyyah, 1991), I, 7.

[25]   Ibn Taymiyyah, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyyah fī taʾsīs bidaʿihim al-kalāmiyyah, aw naqḍ taʾsīs al-Jahmiyyah*, ed. Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Qāsim (Mecca: Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥukūmah, 1971), II, 9.

[26]   Hoover, "Ibn Taymiyya," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 4 (1200-1350)*, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallett (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009), 839.

[27]   All the copies of *Christianismi Restitutio* have perished except three copies in Vienna, Paris, and Edinburgh. See David Cuthbertson, *A Tragedy of the Reformation: Being the Authentic Narrative of the History and Burning of the "Christianismi Restitutio," 1553* (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1912), 33.

Church[28] and the reforms of the Protestant doctor" as William K. Tweedie states.[29]

Having mentioned this introduction for the rationale of this study, I further argue that its importance could be understood as an addition to Martin Whittingham's article[30] in the field of Christian-Muslim studies. The reason behind mentioning this article is that both articles share one notion that is usually overlooked through the comparative study of Christianity and Islam, which is the engagement of the classical Muslim intellectual arguments that have been used by Muslim theologians to understand Islam with the Christian tradition to conclude various understanding of both traditions. While Whittingham aims at analyzing a case that is usually found in the works of Kalām and *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), which is the concept of *tawātur*, and applies it to the crucifixion of Jesus, I aim through my study to engage a Muslim intellectual argument, that is, *fahm al-Salaf*, with the Christian tradition since it has been used by the Christian thinkers, as Michael Servetus mentioned before. This would lead to presenting new discussions regarding central issues between Christians and Muslims regarding the divinity of Jesus, as both the new information found in the Christian tradition made availability of the writings of the ante-Nicene fathers and the classical Muslim intellectual arguments will be combined in order to present a new challenge for the intellectuals of both traditions to contend. Therefore, the question "How could early Christians be wrong?" will be examined through three perspectives: those of Ibn Taymiyyah, Servetus, and Christian-Muslim researchers.

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[28] Note that the term "Romish" was used as a derogatory label for Roman Catholic beliefs and practices.

[29] Albert Rilliet, *Calvin and Servetus: The Reformer's Share in the Trial of Michael Servetus, Historically Ascertained*, trans. with notes and additions W. K. Tweedie (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1846), 68-69; Marian Hillar, *The Case of Michael Servetus (1511-1553): the Turning Point in the Struggle for Freedom of Conscience* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 248.

[30] Martin Whittingham, "How Could So Many Christians Be Wrong? The Role of *Tawātur* (Recurrent Transmission of Reports) in Understanding Muslim Views of the Crucifixion," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 19, no. 2 (2008), 167-178.

II. On the History of Christian-Muslim Polemical Writings

Christian-Muslim dialogues and debates started as early as the emergence of Islam itself since the Qurʾān itself integrates Christian doctrines through many chapters in which they are related to one of the major doctrines of Islam because the Qurʾān does not present the topics systematically but rather through engaging more than one topic for a certain purpose.[31] For instance, al-Biqāʿī (d. 885/1480), one of the renowned scholars on the harmony of the Qurʾānic chapters and verses, states that chapter three of the Qurʾān (Āl ʿImrān), in which Jesus is mentioned as a prophet of God, is an applied aspect of the verse "*O mankind, worship your lord, who created you and those before you, that you may become righteous.*" (Q 2:21) by denying the divinity of Jesus in order to have the pure concept of worshipping of God.[32] This "reformative," to use Josef van Ess's word,[33] nature of the Qurʾān has shaped the Muslim approaches towards studying the world traditions in terms of including them through their works by analyzing them in parallel to other philosophical and theological notions. For instance, Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī starts the examination of Christianity through the topic regarding what is impossible to be ascribed to God, namely, the incarnation. He writes: "Know that there is an agreement between the world traditions that it is impossible for God to incarnate except Christians, Nuṣayrīs and al-Isḥāqiyyah of al-Shīʿah, and some anthropomorphists."[34] In addition, the Qurʾānic warnings for Muslims not to make the same mistakes of the previous religions had also shaped the intrafaith dialogue since the Muslim theologians had used it against the other Islamic sects by proving that they had adopted the same notions as the Jews or Christians. Accordingly, it could be said that the Qurʾān was the inspiring source for the Muslim theologians to examine Christianity through the lens of their works.

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[31] Faḍl Ḥasan ʿAbbās, *Qaṣaṣ al-Qurʾān al-karīm*, 3rd ed. (Amman: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 2010), 80-81.

[32] Abū l-Ḥasan Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn ʿUmar al-Biqāʿī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, 1984), IV, 197.

[33] See Christian Meier, "The Origins of Islam: A Conversation with the German Islamic Scholar Josef Van Ess," *Fikrun wa Fann: A Publication of Goethe-Institut,* November 2011, translated by Charlotte Collins, http://www.goethe.de /ges/phi/prj/ffs/the/a96/en8626506.htm, accessed June 3, 2019.

[34] See al-Āmidī, *Abkār al-afkār,* II, 51, 235.

This line of thought developed through Muslim interactions with Christians themselves; although it was a challenge for the Christian theologians since they were facing a new religion that presented so many polemics against the main tenets of Christianity and was supported by a political power in addition to having an alternative story of the Christian tradition that does not devalue the great reputation of Mary and Jesus. It was a challenge for the Muslim theologians to define the Islamic concept of God since they are facing encounters from a Christian theology that had been philosophized through its engagement with Greek philosophy such as Stoicism and Platonism,[35] and thus the inherited philosophical objections against the scriptural conception of God are applicable on the Islamic context, too. That is why it is argued that the beginning of the great philosophical and theological debate over the concept of God in Islam started with such interactions,[36] as the first two real disputes that were not influenced by any other tradition are the issues of freewill and the grave sinner.[37]

The Christian encounters were on two levels: scriptural and philosophical. The scriptural perspective relies on the Qurʾānic Christology since Jesus was described there by many seemingly ambiguous terms as the spirit and the word, which are found mainly through the earliest surviving text in Arabic by a Christian entitled

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[35] See Peter C. Phan, "Developments of the Doctrine of Trinity," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 8.

[36] See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmūʿ fatāwá Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyyah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim (Medina: Mujammaʿ al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibāʿat al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 2003-2004), V, 20. One may find some statements related to this topic, such as Abū Jahl's: "Muḥammad claims that God is one, however, he worships more than one because he describes God by 'Allāh' and sometimes by 'al-Raḥmān' (the Merciful)" (Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr* [Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-l-Nashr, 1984], IX, 185-6), but they did not have an impact regarding this topic since they are not as philosophical as the Christian perspective.

[37] Muḥammad ʿAbduh, *"Risālat al-tawḥīd,"* in *al-Aʿmāl al-kāmilah li-l-Imām al-Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbduh*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAmārah (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1993), III, 378.

"On the Triune Nature of God,"[38] and thus some Christian theologians have developed it and argued that Jesus is the Word of God and is eternal, unlike in the Muslim tradition, in which the word of God is the Qurʾān.[39] One of the earliest Christian attempts to use such arguments is by John of Damascus (d. 749), who states: "For the orthodox Saracen believer at that time the proper answer would be 'uncreated,' because they believed that the Qurʾān was eternal. However, in the dialogue, the Christian is demonstrating to the Saracen that even their scripture affirms that Christ is the Word of God. Therefore, if Christ is the Word of God, and the Word of God is uncreated, then Christ must also be God because only God is the uncreated one."[40] The philosophical perspective focuses on the philosophical bases of the Muslim conception of the oneness of God, namely, the issue of the relationship between God and His attributes, using such strategies as the "attribute-apology," which quickly came under Muslim attack. One of the renowned Christian theologians who applied such an approach is ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī (d. 850). Sidney Griffith writes, "ʿAmmār intended to commend belief in Christianity, in the scholarly idiom of the day, to the intellectuals who were the adepts of the Islamic ʿilm al-Kalām."[41] This is similar to the position of

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[38] Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 121. I remember seeing at the New College Library (University of Edinburgh) one of the manuscripts for an ancient Bible in which the title written on the first page in Arabic is *Lā ilāha illā ʿllāh wa-l-Masīḥ ibn Allāh* (There is no God but Allah and the Jesus is the son of God), which indicates the impact of Muslim terminology on those who were living across the Islamicate world.

[39] F. E. Peters, *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition, volume II: The Words and Will of God* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 225; Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9ᵗʰ century C.E.)* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2014), 179.

[40] Daniel Janosik, *John of Damascus, First Apologist to the Muslims: The Trinity and Christian Apologetics in the Early Islamic Period* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 153.

[41] Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 85; Wageeh Y. F. Mikhail, "ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān*: A Topical and Theological Analysis of Arabic Christian Theology in the Ninth Century" (PhD

Saadia Gaon (d. 942), who wrote his *al-Amānāt wa-l-iʿtiqādāt* (The Book of Beliefs and Creeds) using Islamic terminology and is considered the founder of Judaic-Arabic literature.[42]

It is worth mentioning an important point regarding the Christian-Muslim dialogue, which is the usage of the Islamic terminology by Christians writing in Arabic who were living in what is known as the Islamicate[43] world. Sidney Griffith notes, for instance, about the Melkites that "like other Arab Christian writers of the period, they wrote primarily for the benefit of their own Arabophone confessional community, to clarify their creedal allegiances vis-à-vis other Christians and to respond to the challenge the Qurʾān and the 'Call to Islam' posed for their coreligionists."[44] Therefore, it was a challenge for both Muslims and Christians to choose the proper terms for their doctrines since each term would indicate a different meaning, as is the issue with the terms *ibn* and *walad*, since they both have different meanings in the Qurʾān. Another example includes the problematic nature of the term *ṣifah* (attribute) when it is compared with the concept of hypostases and so forth. The complexity of this issue is not limited to that era of translating the Christian doctrines into Arabic and to choosing the best term that suits the notion through the Christian faith; it is found currently in the discussion regarding Christian writers in other languages when translators try to find the exact meaning that is meant by the author, such as what Karl Barth

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diss., Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2013), 149; ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-burhān wa-kitāb al-masāʾil wa-l-ajwibah: Apologie et Controverses*, ed. Mīshāl al-Ḥāyik (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1977), 46-56.

[42] Daniel J. Lasker, "The Jewish Critique of Christianity under Islam in the Middle Ages," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 57 (1990-1991), 124, http://doi.org/10.2307/3622656; Saʿīd ibn Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī, *Kitāb al-amānāt wa-l-iʿtiqādāt*, ed. Samuel Landauer (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1880).

[43] The term "Islamicate" was coined by the historian Marshall Hodgson (d. 1968). It means "the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims." See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization, volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 59.

[44] See Griffith, "The Melkites and the Muslims: The Qurʾān, Christology, and Arab Orthodoxy," *Al-Qanṭara: Revista de Estudios Árabes* 33, no. 2 (2012), 425, http://doi.org/10.3989/alqantara.2012.004.

meant when he used the German term *Seinsweise* (modes of being), which was the reason behind being accused of adopting modalism,[45] which is the same case for Thomas Aquinas because of his notion of "subsistent relations" rather than persons.[46]

Accordingly, the Christian theologians have presented various philosophical and scriptural polemics against the main tenets of Islam, including the oneness of God, and noting some critical phrasing in the Qurʾān regarding the nature of Jesus, such as the Word of God and a spirit from Him. These polemics have led to a reshaping of the understanding of some Islamic doctrines. That is why, for instance, it is argued that the Muʿtazilīs' denial of God's attributes had a Christian origin.[47] The Muslim theologians had two types of responses to these polemics. First, they refuted the Christian polemics through writing works criticizing the main tenets of Christianity, such as al-Rassī's (d. 246/860) *al-Radd ʿalá l-Naṣārá* (A refutation of Christianity).[48] Second, they developed an intrafaith dialogue on the concept of God and His attributes by comparing Christian doctrines with the doctrines of some Islamic sects to declare the infidelity of these sects since they have the same doctrines as the Christian ones. As mentioned before, making this comparative analysis between the Christian doctrines and some doctrines of the Islamic sects is basically relying on using Qurʾānic warnings about having multiple Gods through intrafaith dialogue to support the philosophical argument with a theological one, especially with regard to the issue of God's attributes.

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[45] George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Trinity, and Some Protestant Doctrines after Barth," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 302.

[46] Michael C. Rea, "The Trinity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 411; Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 111.

[47] Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 62.

[48] ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī fī l-radd ʿalá l-Naṣārá ilá nihāyat al-qarn al-rābiʿ/al-ʿāshir* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-l-Nashr, 1986), 135-136; Gabriel Said Reynolds, "The Islamic Christ," in *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy and Troy A. Stefano (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 193.

Ibn Taymiyyah examined the Christian tradition by following in the footsteps of the Muslim writers who focused on finding relationships between the doctrines of some Islamic sects and the Christian doctrines in order to prove these doctrines regarding the concept of God are wrong. Therefore, his work *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ* could be considered an encyclopedia of comparative studies, as he discussed the genealogy of the Christian doctrines while comparing them with the notions from these Muslim sects. Servetus could be said to have been following in the footsteps of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī rather than those of John of Damascus because of his attempt to commend Christian faith while referring to Judaism and Islam, which is why Calvin denounced Servetus as an anti-Trinitarian and why he was killed for heresy.[49] Martin Bucer (d. 1551) declared that Servetus "deserves to be cut in pieces and to have his bowels torn out of him."[50] Therefore, Servetus's challenge to mainstream Protestantism is one of the phases of what became known as the "radical reformation,"[51] and it is a contribution to Socinianism.

III. Ibn Taymiyyah's and Servetus's Hermeneutics

Having mentioned this brief overview of the place of Ibn Taymiyyah and Servetus in the development of Christian-Muslim polemics, I will begin analyzing the biblical hermeneutics of Servetus

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[49] See William G. Naphy, "Calvin and Geneva," in *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 317. Robert Willis describes Calvin's attitude towards Servetus's work by saying: "It is not difficult to imagine the alarm that must at once have taken possession of Calvin's mind when he saw the errors, the heresies, the blasphemies, as he regarded them, which in bygone years he had vainly sought to combat, now confided to the printed page and ready to be thrown broadcast on the world." See Robert Willis, *Servetus and Calvin: A Study of an Important Epoch in the Early History of the Reformation* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1877), 233. For more about Calvin's role in Servetus's death, See Mack P. Holt, "Calvin and Reformed Protestantism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 222.

[50] See Richard Wright, *An Apology for Dr. Michael Servetus: Including an Account of His Life, Persecution, Writings and Opinions* (Wisbech: F. B. Wright, 1806), 98.

[51] A term coined by George Hunston Williams to be distinguished from the "Magisterial Reformation" of Luther and Calvin. See Sigrun Haude, "Anabaptism," in *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 238.

and Ibn Taymiyyah through their attitude towards the Nicene Creed because it is the main reason behind the false interpretation of the Bible according to them. Servetus aimed at expanding the Reformation to include foundational topics in Christian thought, namely, the Nicene Creed, which is a part of the intellectual line of Unitarism: "Throughout the fourth and fifth decades of the sixteenth century, Servetus travelled around the Protestant cities of Europe attempting to engage leading Reformed theologians in debates about the Trinity, which he believed, in its classical formulation at least, to be a corruption of the Biblical witness and contrary to reason."[52] However, there is an important point to be noted here, as is it usually overlooked due to the use of certain terms as the trinity without specifically defining what is meant by it. George Williams notes regarding Servetus's theological position that "he did not propose to reject the doctrine of the Trinity but rather to correct the errors of the scholastic and Nicene formulation. He would replace the philosophical argument undergirding the Trinity, which identified the substance of the three Persons with the more primitive, Biblically defensible argument of the unity of rule."[53] To achieve this end, he attacked the course of Trinitarian speculation by contrasting the late scholastic theories with the earliest biblical formulations.[54] Through his introduction of his last controversial work, *Christianismi Restitutio*, his project was very clear, which was to stand against the false interpretation of the Bible regarding the trinity, of which he writes, "Jesus himself, the human being, is the gate and the path, from which I shall with good reason take my starting point since the case will be presented concerning him and in order that I may refute the Sophists (Trinitarians)."[55] Ibn Taymiyyah states that the reason behind the false interpretation of the Bible is the Nicene Creed:[56] "Christians

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[52] Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI & Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 75.

[53] George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1962), 322.

[54] Bainton, *Hunted Heretic,* 31.

[55] Servetus, *The Restoration of Christianity*, 5.

[56] He uses the Arabic term *al-amānah* for the Nicene Creed which means *trust.* However, sometimes he uses the term *qānūn* (law). This could be understood while taking in consideration the point I mentioned regarding the terminological of Christians and Muslim to present the Christian doctrines in Arabic. See his

have adopted doctrines which are not found in the gospels nor the books of ancient prophets; the reason behind that is the Nicene Creed adopted by three hundred eighteen Christian scholars against Arianism at the time of Constantinople."[57] Furthermore, he states that Christians claim the infallibility of this consensus[58] since the main Christian sects such as the Nestorians and Jacobites[59] accepted it. In addition, he states that although Christians agreed upon accepting the Nicene Creed, they would declare each other to be infidels while interpreting it.[60]

The second part of Servetus's and Ibn Taymiyyah's hermeneutics has the methods they adopted for interpreting the Bible. Because they rejected the authority of the Nicene Creed, they had to find a new "criterion" for shaping the Christian doctrines found in the Bible. However, before presenting them, I shall present a brief analysis of Ibn Taymiyyah's attitude towards the Bible because as a Muslim, his case differs from that of Servetus. Ibn Taymiyyah's approach to the Bible cannot be understood without contextualizing it within the sacred texts of Islam. That is, Ibn Taymiyyah, like any other scholar, has an intellectual aim that he applies while approaching any topic. Therefore, one of his methods is comparing perspectives, whether within the Islamic context itself or from other contexts, regarding the Nicene Creed and Islamic scholasticism. In the case of the Bible, Ibn Taymiyyah makes an analogy regarding the Prophetic narratives and the corruption in the Bible. He states that although there is corruption in the Bible, this will not prevent us from knowing the proper interpretation since the rest of the books in the Bible demonstrate a clear notion regarding the concept of God, and this is also the case with the Prophetic narratives whenever a controversial narrative appears to contradict the others.[61] Ibn Taymiyyah relies on the Old Testament for his argument since its authority for him is much stronger than that of the New Testament; he clearly presents his attitude towards it through his affirmation of Avicenna's statement

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detailed refutation of the Nicene Creed; Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, III, 227-235.

[57] Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, I, 340-341; V, 73.

[58] *Ibid.*, II, 399.

[59] *Ibid.*, IV, 275.

[60] *Ibid.*, II, 167; III, 190.

[61] *Ibid.*, II, 442; III, 22.

that it is impossible to claim that *al-Kitāb al-ʿIbrī* (The Hebrew book – Old Testament) was fully corrupted by saying: "And what Avicenna had stated regarding the impossibility of fully corrupting the Old Testament is definitely true since the Prophet – Peace be upon him – had presented certain types of corruption, namely, ascribing *naqāʾiṣ* (deprecation) to God such as God's rest after creating the heavens and the earth."[62] This point is essential to understand the general attitude of Ibn Taymiyyah towards the corruption in the Bible. He claims that the Bible is not fully corrupted. There are only a few words that have been changed in the Bible; the real corruption is the misinterpretation of the text. Therefore, Ibn Taymiyyah's central argument through his work is not to prove that the biblical verses have been changed. Instead, he aims at proving that the Christian interpretation of the Bible, namely, the interpretation after the First Council of Nicene, contradicts the Bible itself and the ancient books of prophets.

In conclusion, his perspective could be traced back to two factors of his intellectual project. First, it is informed by his epistemological attitude towards accepting the Prophetic narratives that do not have the same authenticity as the Qurʾān. This had shaped Ibn Taymiyyah's method to focus on biblical criticism rather than arguments from reason. For instance, instead of denying the Christian claim that Jesus was raised on the third day, he claims that this apparition may have been a devil since this had happened so many times to other people throughout history.[63] He is saying this since it is related to his attitude towards the controversial issue of accepting the single report (*khabar al-wāḥid*) in terms of doctrines because he does accept it, and thus he cannot simply reject the Christian narrative regarding seeing Jesus raised on the third day due to the intellectual challenges that he will face while approaching Islam itself. The second factor is Ibn Taymiyyah's scope of *muḥālāt al-*

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[62]   Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ taʿāruḍ,* V, 78. Ibn Taymiyyah states that some early Muslim scholars, such as Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889), rejected only its interpretation as being "God's rest" without rejecting the text itself since it means according to Ibn Qutaybah that God had left the creation. See Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ,* IV, 418-419. As for Ibn Taymiyyah, he accepts the anthropomorphic language of the Old Testament except for the *naqāʾiṣ* (deprecation of God) such as God's rest after creating the heavens and earth. See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ taʿāruḍ,* V, 83-85.

[63]   Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ,* II, 317-318.

ʿuqūl (the impossible for human reason), which is limited mainly to the three classical laws of thought.[64] This has led Ibn Taymiyyah to defend the anthropomorphic language in the Old Testament, which is the same position as that of Joseph Priestley (d. 1804) towards anthropomorphism, as will be presented at the end of this study.

I have tracked Taymiyyah's and Servetus's approaches to biblical verses through their works on Christianity in addition to Ibn Taymiyyah's approach to Islam, and I found that they both adopted five methods to interpret the Bible: linguistic analysis, scriptural usage of a term, historical contexts of a term, scriptural harmony, and early authorities' understanding of scripture. This is not say that these are the only methods found in their works; it means that they are the methods that are related to this study only and that I was applying one of the rules of Kalām, that is, *al-dāl ʿalá l-wuqūʿ dāll ʿalá l-imkān* (its existence is a proof for its possibility to exist).[65] Although this rule is meant in a different context regarding the prophethood of Muḥammad, it can be used here for demonstrating that two or more examples are sufficient to serve as a criterion for understanding the methodology of a certain thinker, which is the case for Servetus and Ibn Taymiyyah.

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[64] There is a dispute among Ibn Taymiyyah's use of the term *al-ʿaql al-ṣarīḥ*. In my view, it is arguably the three classical laws of thought (the law of contradiction, the law of the excluded middle, and the principle of identity) since he always starts his evaluation of the ideas with these laws and accuses the other intellectuals as adherents of Kalām or as the Bāṭinīs, who rejected the law of the excluded middle, as Ibn Taymiyyah states. See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqīdah al-Iṣfahāniyyah*, ed. Saʿīd ibn Naṣr ibn Muḥammad (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2001), 143-144. Note that the term *al-ʿaql al-ṣarīḥ* was used by many Muslim thinkers as the philosopher al-ʿĀmirī (d. 381/992) but they differ regarding its definition. Both *ʿaql* and *ṣarīḥ* are general terms that could be understood in accordance with their usage in writing and in the reader's mind. See Abū l-Ḥasan Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-ʿĀmirī, *Kitāb al-amad ʿalá l-abad*, ed. Everett K. Rowson (Beirut: Dār al-Kindī, 1979), 162. For more about the use of this term in Ibn Taymiyyah's thought, see Miriam Ovadia, *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and the Divine Attributes: Rationalized Traditionalistic Theology* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2018), 154.

[65] See Abū l-Faḍl ʿAḍud al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Aḥmad al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif fī ʿilm al-kalām* (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1999), 342.

First, using linguistic analysis means that the linguistic roots of each word should be considered while interpreting a text. For instance, Ibn Taymiyyah states that the term "spirit" should only be understood as "wind" in the verse (Genesis 1:2) according to its roots.[66] While refuting the use of the term "image" in Genesis 1:26 for the doctrine of the trinity, Ibn Taymiyyah states that this term should not indicate any further meaning except its known one, which is *likeness*.[67] Regarding the term *son*, he states that the first way of understanding this text is through its linguistic roots; therefore, this verse should be understood literally. That is, he is a real son, as with any other father-son relationship. However, since it goes against reason according to him, it should be understood in accordance with the scriptural usage of such terms.[68]

Servetus expresses his attitude towards this issue clearly by demonstrating a general rule for interpreting text: "Whoever shall handle the Holy Scriptures without a knowledge of the holy tongue will fall into pernicious errors."[69] For instance, he states regarding the Trinitarians' argument through the verse "The Lord said to my lord, sit at my right hand" that they do not know the original language of the Holy Scripture since this verse in Hebrew means "Jehovah spoke to the Adon himself," and thus it distinguishes between the Father and the Son.[70] Supporting the same interpretation, he states regarding the verse, "The Lord rained down from heaven sulphur and fire from the Lord upon Sodom and Gomorrah," that understanding how *lord* is used in this verse on the basis of the idiom of the language is fairly obvious if the Trinitarians knew Hebrew well.[71] In another example,

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[66] Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, III, 241.

[67] *Ibid.*, III, 445. He uses the same argument to refute interpreting the image of God as man's intellectual perception, as Maimonides and Islamic scholastics did, since the nature of language rejects limiting the meaning of *image* in internal characteristics to *attributes*. Therefore, it includes the apparent aspect of the being. See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, VI, 466; Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Michael Friedländer, 2nd ed. (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1904), 13.

[68] Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, III, 192.

[69] Servetus, *The Restoration of Christianity*, 97.

[70] *Ibid.*, 94.

[71] *Ibid.*, 124. There is always a general assumption that the Jews approach the text literally and the Christians approach it figuratively. However, at some point,

after citing several verses regarding the term *man*, he writes, "If you have common sense, reader, and trust in the nature of the demonstrative pronoun, you will recognize manifestly that this is the true and original meaning of that expression."[72] In addition, he states that the question of abstract names, such as calling Christ the wisdom of God, will cause the followers of Scotus difficulty only without a grasp of Hebrew since if some quality of God suits something but surpasses it, that thing is nevertheless named for that quality of God.[73] Lastly, in his argument that the Scripture uses the term *person* as the external aspect of man, Servetus supports his argument by citing its meanings in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.[74]

Second, considering the scriptural usage of a term means that any term in a sacred text should be understood in accordance with the other uses of the term in that sacred text or other scriptures. Ibn Taymiyyah states that one of the central methodological errors regarding some approaches to scripture is to understand a term without referring to its other uses, since this will lead to corruption.[75] For instance, he makes an analogy regarding the term *ḥulūl* (incarnation) by stating that this term is found through the books of prophets and is accepted. However, it should be understood according to that context only and not within the context of false interpretations that emerged later.[76] He interprets the term *son* by its

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Christians had to approach it literally to support their doctrines; J. Lasker writes, "The Jewish polemicists also employed the New Testament to point out the contradictions between this textual source of Christianity and Christian doctrines which sprang up later and became established in the Church. Whereas in the discussion of the Hebrew Bible the Christians accused the Jews of taking the text too literally, here it was the Jews who said that certain passages must be understood figuratively. When Christians read Matt. 26:26-23 ("This is my body ... This is my blood"), they understood it to mean that the Eucharist really became the body and blood of Jesus. The Jewish polemicists, for their part, maintained that these verses were obviously only a parable and were not meant literally." See Daniel Judah Lasker, "Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages" (PhD diss., Waltham, MA: University of Brandeis, 1976), 9.

[72]   Servetus, *The Restoration of Christianity*, 9.

[73]   *Ibid*., 123.

[74]   *Ibid*., 153.

[75]   Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, IV, 44.

[76]   *Ibid*., IV, 371.

use in another verse: "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36). He states that since there are various descriptions of the father and the son in the later verse, then the first passage must be read in the same way, too; thus, the father and the son are not one.[77] Furthermore, he states that there is no biblical verse that states that the eternal being is called *son*.[78] For the term *father*, he states that it cannot be understood literally because Jesus himself said that God is my father and your father, and thus the father here means the one who takes care of his creatures.[79] For the term *holy spirit*, he states that it has been used through the Bible as an angel who carries the revelation, as mentioned regarding the prophet David.[80] According to this methodology, he suggests a new interpretation of the biblical verse "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19); he notes after demonstrating his arguments regarding this topic: "It should be interpreted as the following: In the name of God, the prophet He sent, and of the Angel who carried the revelation."[81]

Servetus was aware of the other uses of the term *son* through scripture, as Ibn Taymiyyah mentioned. He interpreted *son* by claiming that Jesus is the true son and that we are the adoptive ones for two reasons: First, how could Jesus make us sons if he was not a son himself?[82] Second, Jesus was the only one who was born of the true substance of God, unlike us.[83] After a discussion of why the term *holy* was mentioned along with *power* to support his arguments with

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[77]   *Ibid.*, IV, 146; III, 416.

[78]   *Ibid.*, II, 3; 134.

[79]   *Ibid.*, III, 194.

[80]   *Ibid.*, II, 152-153.

[81]   *Ibid.*, III, 197. Ibn Taymiyyah has mentioned this verse so many times through his voluminous work, aiming to refute it through biblical criticism rather than an argument from reason since he is aware that this verse is widely spread throughout the Christian world. This is in accordance with his epistemological position regarding the acceptance of the Prophetic narratives that do not fulfil the conditions of the Qurʾānic transmission.

[82]   It is clear that Servetus had used *dawr* (circulation argument) while making this point.

[83]   Servetus, *The Restoration of Christianity*, 18.

other biblical verses, Servetus notes, "In this case the union does not mean that one may take metaphysically power for the incorporeal son, but rather that the spirit of Christ had all the strength."[84] In addition, he applies the same method while justifying how Jesus was sent by the Father from heaven since this term, that is the father, is used throughout other biblical texts.[85] Furthermore, he repeats statements such as the following: "You could not show a single word or a single iota in the Bible whereby scripture ever would call Word the son."[86] He confirms this notion by saying: "If you show some passage where 'Word' was at some point called 'son,' I will admit that I am beaten."[87] While he was attacking the Trinitarians' conception of *person*, he states that this term is used through scripture and elsewhere as the external aspect of man.[88]

Another aspect of the scriptural usage of a term is its meaning in other scriptures or the ancient books of prophets, since they originate from the same source, that is, God. This is one of Ibn Taymiyyah's central arguments through his polemics against the false interpretation of the baptism verse (Matthew 28:19). For instance, as for the holy spirit, he states that the meaning of *holy spirit* is *revelation*, not *God's life*, since other books of the prophets use this

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[84]　*Ibid.*, 14.

[85]　*Ibid.*, 24-26.

[86]　*Ibid.*, 125.

[87]　*Ibid.*, 152.

[88]　*Ibid.*, 153. This was one of Servetus's strongest arguments because he referred to biblical terminology to support his theology in contrast to Calvin, and it was used by Arius for the same purpose. Timothy George notes that Calvin "was well aware that words such as *ousia*, *hypostases*, *persona*, and even *trinitas* were nonscriptural terms. He once said, 'I could wish they were buried, if only among all men this faith were agreed on: that Father, not the Spirit the Son, but that they are differentiated by a peculiar quality' (Inst. 1.13.15), yet precisely because certain heretics, such as Arius, have used scriptural language to affirm nonbiblical concepts of God, it was necessary for Calvin to refute their errors by using words such as *Trinity* and *Persons*." See Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2013), 207. It seems to me that Calvin's position towards using such nonscriptural terms is similar to Ibn Taymiyyah's position since the latter had used the term *jism* (body) many times through his works to refute the use of the term by other Islamic sects because it was used to examine the anthropomorphic language in the Qurʾān. For more discussion of this issue, see Ibn Taymiyyah, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, I, 550.

term in this way.[89] Another example is to use the Qurʾān to argue about the true meaning of *holy spirit*; he states: "Christians mention through their Nicene Creed that Jesus was incarnate by the holy spirit and Mary; this is true according to the Qurʾān, but the holy spirit means angel Gabriel."[90] For the term *son*, he states that the ancient books of prophets use this term as the honored person; it was not mentioned except as a description of a creature.[91]

Servetus also adopted this method clearly; he filled four pages citing verses from the Old Testament and the Qurʾān to prove that this notion of the Trinity is not found anywhere else.[92] He notes in another place, "Neither in the Talmud nor in the Qurʾān are such horrifying blasphemies found."[93] He was against compromising their doctrines with false interpretations, since they made such errors as interpreting "I have born you today" as "I produced you before the ages."[94] He states that there is an indication in the Old Testament, which is "On this day," that supports his interpretation of this scripture as the day of Jesus' resurrection and the day of regeneration.[95] In addition, he uses the various descriptions of God in the Old and New Testaments to support his views on the concept of God. He states that corporeal forms of God are evident in the Old Testament since there was no distinction between the Father and the son. However, in the New Testament, God is a spirit because God exists in the son.[96] Another example to support his view is when he states regarding the frequent usage of the expression "holy spirit" in the New Testament, "the reason for the difference is that there were sanctifications of the flesh in the Law, but not the sanctification of the

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[89]   Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, II, 20.

[90]   *Ibid*., II, 186; IV, 70.

[91]   *Ibid*., III, 304; IV, 328.

[92]   Servetus, *The Restoration of Christianity*, 48-51.

[93]   *Ibid*., 66.

[94]   *Ibid*., 86-87.

[95]   *Ibid*., 88, 92.

[96]   *Ibid*., 149. In the last section, while presenting a critique of Servetus's inconsistencies throughout his hermeneutics, I will argue that the context of this verse does allow this interpretation, of which George Stead (d. 2008) writes, "By saying that God is spiritual, we do not mean that he has no body." See George Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 98.

spirit. In fact, at that time there was the spirit, but not as it is now: thus they neither knew the holy spirit nor had they heard whether the holy spirit existed."[97] Another example is when he refers to Rabbi Igzhac: "Notice in what sense the Hebrews spoke: the Messiah was 'From the beginning.' It is not in the manner of the trinitarian sophists but because his person and visible form were subsisting in God. Hence, Rabbi Igzhac Arama said regarding Genesis: 'Before the sun was created, the Messiah's name was subsisting, and it was already sitting on the throne.'"[98]

Third, considering historical contexts of a term means that any term found within the sacred texts should be understood in accordance with the usage of language in its historical context or the original audience's understanding. For instance, both Servetus and Ibn Taymiyyah argue the same way by mentioning a similar story; Servetus notes regarding the argument from the original audience's understanding, "Are we of a lower order than the Samaritan woman? In John 4, she said, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah [Christ], can he?' Christ himself then confirmed the woman's understanding, though she knew nothing about incorporeal entities. When she was seeking for the Messiah to come, who was called the Christ, he answered, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.' He said 'I am' and 'the one you see speaking' He made no reference to something incorporeal; he simply said, 'I who speak, am the true and natural son of God.'"[99] This is the same well-known argument used by Ibn Taymiyyah to demonstrate the understanding of the terms used in accordance with the original audience at that time. He mentions the story of the woman whom the Prophet asked about the location of God; she said that He is in the heaven, and he confirmed her understanding.[100]

Fourth, scriptural harmony, which means that any controversial verse in scripture should be understood in agreement with other verses instead of adopting a contradictory understanding about its meaning. The first premise that Ibn Taymiyyah presents here is that most of the biblical verses state that there is only one God and Jesus

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[97] Servetus, *The Restoration of Christianity*, 274.

[98] *Ibid.*, 190.

[99] Servetus, *The Restoration of Christianity*, 10.

[100] Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Risālah al-Tadmuriyyah* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadiyyah, 1950), 87-88.

was a servant of God. On the other hand, there are a few verses that have controversial meanings regarding the two topics. Therefore, Christians, according to him, should have understood such controversial verses in accordance with the other references to Jesus as servant, but they did not.[101] In addition, he presents a general analogy between Christians and some Muslims regarding this point by noting: "And what Christians have done through their false interpretation of the Bible is the same error as those who altered the meanings of the Qurʾān to be compromised with their desires since both relied on controversial verses instead of the direct ones."[102] Servetus presents the same argument by citing Peter Lombard's words "Individual syllables almost by themselves imply unanimously the existence of a Trinity of three entities," and then he argued that most of the biblical verses are against this interpretation.[103]

Fifth, considering early authorities' understanding of scripture means that any term found within the sacred texts should be understood in accordance with the early authorities' understanding of scripture before the invention of new notions since those earlier understandings are the closest ones to the time of their revelation. Thus, those authorities had understood the scripture apart from engaging with other sources of knowledge. This is one of Ibn Taymiyyah's central arguments to approach scripture; he usually uses it in his discussions in the Islamic context, especially in regards to the topic of God's attributes by arguing that the scholastics' understanding of such texts is not found through the works of the early Islamic scholars, who are the real authorities for understanding scripture."[104] He further complains that "The authority of the scholastics' approach later became the only acceptable way of understanding Islam, and whoever rejects it is considered as someone who is going against mainstream Islam according to them."[105] He supports this criticism by mentioning the reason behind this false authority: "How could those scholastics be considered as

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[101] Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, I, 378; II, 315.

[102] *Ibid.*, I, 104-105.

[103] Servetus, *The Restoration of Christianity*, 39-40.

[104] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyyah,* I, 68.

[105] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhāj al-sunnah al-nabawiyyah fī naqḍ kalām al-Shīʿah al-Qadariyyah*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (Riyadh: Jāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Suʿūd al-Islāmiyyah, 1986), I, 315.

authorities for understanding religion compared to the ancient scholars although they had various central disputes over their approach?"[106] In addition, he supports his attitude by mentioning the role of the political authority in theological debate; he considers the time of al-Maʾmūn as the first one to support such an approach by the caliphate since it had never been supported by any political institution during the first two hundred years of Islam.[107]

Servetus demonstrates this method, too: "Consider why the manner of speech used by the ancients is not found among our Trinitarians and why instead we find another manner that is totally different and unknown to the ancients."[108] In the introduction to his last work, Servetus writes: "Clement, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and all the other early authorities asserted that this expression, 'Christ,' was a word that referred to human nature."[109] Furthermore, he writes, "All these men neither documented nor contemplated the conceits of our Trinitarians."[110] He further states such ideas had never been heard of, even at the time of Simon Magus.[111] This was one of Servetus's successful projects to examine the mainstream Reformed Christianity that was presented mainly by Calvin. Irena Backus notes that "Servetus's appeal to the ante-Nicene fathers was successful enough to preclude Calvin from making any extensive use of them in his exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity. However, it did not stop the reformer from reinterpreting the Bible to bring it into line with the Nicene teaching."[112] This argument in particular could answer the question that I have raised in the introduction: how could a person examine an established doctrine that has been accepted across the writings of theologians? Therefore, Servetus knew the credibility of this argument through the eyes of Calvin, and thus his "rhetorical strategy pushed Calvin and his allies into the corner in that, were they

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[106] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmūʿ fatāwá*, V, 10.

[107] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmūʿ fatāwá*, V, 553. In addition, he states that the adoption of the corrupted Christianity happened at the time of Constantine. See Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, V, 95.

[108] Servetus, *The Restoration of Christianity*, 47-48.

[109] *Ibid.*, 7.

[110] *Ibid.*, 26.

[111] *Ibid.*, 110.

[112] Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2003), 113.

to concede his point, then an unbridgeable chasm between the New Testament, the postapostolic church, and the relatively late council of Nicaea was established."[113]

IV. How Could Early Christians Be Wrong?

The main implication of the last point regarding the argument from early authorities' understanding of scripture is the question, how could early Christians be wrong? This question is rhetorical. That is, the early authorities' understanding of scripture is essential for contextualizing any reading of scripture, and it must include any understanding of the text that the first generation of a religion had. Therefore, the question "How could early Christians be wrong?" will be examined through this last section by asking it to Servetus, Ibn Taymiyyah, and the Muslim audience, thus providing three main conclusions to build on the analysis of the biblical hermeneutics of Ibn Taymiyyah and Servetus.

As seen in the last section, Ibn Taymiyyah and Servetus have approached the Bible through the same five methods. However, a critical question could arise here: how could they have different findings regarding the interpretation of such controversial verses of the Bible despite both having rejected the Nicene Creed? I argue that there are two central points for answering this question: First, their commitments to different faiths that informed their theological thinking rather than their intellectual projects. That is, Ibn Taymiyyah is a Muslim, and thus he has a further argument that he uses while presenting his examination of the Christian tradition, which is proving that Muḥammad is a prophet sent by God and that the Qurʾān is the word of God. Thus, the Qurʾān rejects Jesus as divine. He is committed to this point since proving the prophethood of Muhammad is based on intellectual arguments that are known throughout Muslim theological works, namely, those dedicated to *al-nubuwwāt* (matters related to prophethood). Therefore, his references to the Qurʾān to refute the Christian doctrine make the entire basis of his argument different from that of Servetus.

The second point is their different scopes of examining the Christian tradition, while Servetus was aiming at restoring Christianity

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[113] Paul Chang-Ha Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 54.

from the Nicene and post-Nicene theologians through heavily relying on the ante-Nicene fathers as the authority for understanding the Scripture, Ibn Taymiyyah aimed at restoring it from the whole Christian tradition, including the ante-Nicene fathers, due to the argument that comes through "Qurʾānic" Christianity, which means to present an alternative story of the whole Christian tradition. However, a question arises here regarding Ibn Taymiyyah's project to restore Christianity from the whole Christian tradition, including that of the ante-Nicene fathers: how could early Christians be wrong? That is, while Muslim scholars, including Ibn Taymiyyah, faced an intellectual challenge regarding the issue of *al-tawātur* (recurrent transmission of reports) of some Christian doctrines as the crucifixion of Christ since the Qurʾān apparently denies it,[114] Ibn Taymiyyah used another specific method related to his intellectual project, which is the argument from early authorities' understanding of scripture, since he heavily relies on it through the Islamic tradition known as *fahm al-Salaf* (the predecessors' understanding of Scripture).

This reliance on early authorities informs his approach to understanding Islam; subsequently, it is found through his approach to other religions, since they mostly discuss the same topics. For instance, the Muslim thinker who doubts the authority of *tawātur* through his analysis of Islam, as the Muʿtazilī Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām (d.

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[114] See Whittingham, "How Could So Many Christians Be Wrong? The Role of *Tawātur* (Recurrent Transmission of Reports) in Understanding Muslim Views of the Crucifixion," 167-178. The Muslim intrafaith dialogue regarding their own intellectual project has led some of them, such as al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), to examine the mainstream Muslim attitudes towards the crucifixion of Christ. See Abū l-Rabīʿ Najm al-Dīn Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Qawī ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Ṭūfī al-Ḥanbalī, *al-Intiṣārāt al-Islāmiyyah fī kashf shubah al-Naṣrāniyyah*, ed. Sālim ibn Muḥammad al-Qarnī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-ʿUbaykān, 1999), I, 355-356; al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī ʿilm uṣūl al-fiqh*, ed. Jābir Fayyāḍ al-ʿAlwānī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1992), IV, 256; Abū l-ʿAbbās Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Idrīs ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Qarāfī, *Nafāʾis al-uṣūl fī sharḥ al-Maḥṣūl*, ed. ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd and ʿAlī Muḥammad Muʿawwaḍ (Mecca: Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1995), VI, 2843; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī al-mushtahir bi-l-Tafsīr al-kabīr wa-Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), XI, 101.

231/845),[115] will not find any problem rejecting the *tawātur* of the crucifixion of Christ because it is already not a part of the intellectual foundation that he accepts. The same is found through examining the other non-Muslim traditions. For instance, Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), the Ashʿarī theologian, states that Zoroastrians and *al-Thanawiyyah* (dualists) reject God's ability to do the *mumkināt* (contingent possibilities); this is accordance with the adoption of *al-taḥsīn wa-l-taqbīḥ al-ʿaqlī* (the human mind's unaided qualification of things as good or bad).[116] He is saying here that the Zoroastrians' claim is not applicable to us, that is, his school of thought, Ashʿarīs, and thus he is transferring the discussion to the other Islamic sects that had accepted this notion as if he were presenting an objection to their intellectual project.

Let us put the question in a different way regarding Ibn Taymiyyah's intellectual project and his approach to Christianity; what is the position of Ibn Taymiyyah regarding the divinity of Jesus assuming that he had access to the whole writings of the ante-Nicene fathers, namely, having Edward Burton's (d. 1836) work *Testimonies of the Ante-Nicene Fathers to the Divinity of Christ* in his hands?[117] I argue that Ibn Taymiyyah would trace these testimonies regarding the divinity of Jesus the same way he had regarding the issue of *ḥawādith lā awwal lahā* (infinitely regressing series of temporally

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[115] Abū ʿAbd Allāh Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Bahādur ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Zarkashī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿĀnī (Kuwait & Hurghada: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyyah & Dār al-Ṣafwah li-l-Ṭibāʿah wa-l-Nashr, 1988), IV, 238.

[116] Nāṣir al-Dīn Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar ibn Muḥammad al-Bayḍāwī, *Ṭawāliʿ al-anwār min Maṭāliʿ al-anẓār* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah li-l-Turāth), 179-180. The Jews used this argument to argue for the binding nature of the Mosaic Law in addition to the argument from *tawātur*. See al-Ṭūfī, *Darʾ al-qawl al-qabīḥ bi-l-taḥsīn wa-l-taqbīḥ*, ed. Ayman Maḥmūd Shihādah (Riyadh: Markaz al-Malik Fayṣal li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah, 2005), 122; ʿIzz al-Dawlah Saʿd ibn Manṣūr ibn Saʿd Ibn Kammūnah al-Isrāʾīlī al-Baghdādī, *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāth li-l-milal al-thalāth: al-Yahūdiyyah, al-Masīḥiyyah, al-Islām*, ed. Moshe Perlmann (Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār, 1967), 107.

[117] For more information regarding Ibn Taymiyyah's theory of accepting reports, see Carl el-Tobgui's article "From Legal Theory to *Erkenntnistheorie*: Ibn Taymiyya on *Tawātur* as the Ultimate Guarantor of Human Cognition," *Oriens* 46, no. 1-2 (2018), 6-61, https://doi.org/10.1163/18778372-04601002.

originated things) when he criticized Ibn Ḥazm's claim that there is a consensus through the whole Islamic tradition on the doctrine of creation ex nihilo (out of nothing).[118] This is to say that both doctrines – the divinity of Jesus[119] and creation ex nihilo – share one central point in my view, which is that they are not clearly presented through the very early history of Christianity and Islam due to the generally ambiguous terms used for represent them, "creation" and "son of man," respectively, in addition to an important point, which is the domination of the practical aspect of religion that is being lived within its rules rather than forming the theoretical philosophical and theological issues. Andrew Hofer notes that "Robert L. Wilken rightly comments that 'the study of early Christian thought has been too preoccupied with ideas. The intellectual effort of the early church was at the service of a much loftier goal than giving conceptual form to Christian belief. Its mission was to win the hearts and minds of men and women and to change their lives,'"[120] which is the same case in early Islam since the disputes regarding the concept of God started later.[121] Accordingly, Ibn Taymiyyah may find his way of facing this intellectual challenge of the testimonies through arguing that the

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[118] See Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī al-Qurṭubī, *Marātib al-ijmāʿ fī l-ʿibādāt wa-l-muʿāmalāt wa-l-iʿtiqādāt* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qudsī, 1938), 167; See Hoover "Perpetual Creativity in the Perfection of God: Ibn Taymiyya's Hadith Commentary on God's Creation of This World," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15, no. 3 (2004), 287-329, https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/15.3.287.

[119] For a detailed discussion about the divinity of Jesus, see the conflicting views through these two works; Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: the Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2014); Michael F. Bird, et al., *How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus' Divine Nature - A Response to Bart D. Ehrman* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

[120] Andrew Hofer, "Scripture in the Christological Controversies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Paul M. Blowers and Peter W. Martens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 460.

[121] See al-Āmidī, *Abkār al-afkār*, V, 39. This argument is developed by Joseph Priestley to support Unitarianism; "Priestley's story begins not with words, but with silence. The lack of Trinitarian language within scripture, the silence of John the Baptist, Christ, and the Apostles on this important matter, the absence of any Jewish writers inveighing in opposition to the principle: these are all indications that the early church was Unitarian." See Elizabeth Sarah Kingston, "'The Language of the Naked Facts': Joseph Priestley on Language and Revealed Religion" (PhD diss., Falmer, Brighton, UK: University of Sussex, 2010), 185.

Ebionites who had rejected the divinity of Jesus[122] are among the authorities who could answer the question "How could early Christians be wrong?" In other words, if Ibn Taymiyyah was asked how the ante-Nicene fathers could be wrong regarding their testimonies to the divinity of Jesus, then he could reply, "According to your rightful logic, how could the Ebionites be wrong since they serve as the first attempt to understand the personhood of Jesus?"

This is the central question, that is how could the Ebionites be wrong, in which I will be examining Servetus's concept of God through his hermeneutics that he used to criticize the Trinitarians, namely, the original audience and the "very" early authorities, the Ebionites. The question here would be to what extent does the Bible teach Servetus's concept of God, namely, his Neoplatonism?[123] Starting with the argument from the original audience such as the Samaritan woman, whom Servetus refers to many times, I argue that it is difficult to suggest that his understanding was their understanding because the foundation of Servetus's Neoplatonism is found through his theology based on a fascination with light symbolism.[124] Thus, it is

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[122] Edward Burton, *Testimonies of the Ante-Nicene Fathers to the Divinity of Christ*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1829), 481. The Ebionites are historically categorized as "Jewish Christians" who believed in Jesus but continued following the Jewish law. See Oskar Skarsaune, "Introduction, 1: Jewish Believers in Jesus in Antiquity – Problems of Definition, Method, and Sources," in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 9; Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 99; Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, ed. and trans. John A. Baker (Chicago: The Henry Regnery Co., 1964), 114.

[123] Some ante-Nicene fathers have criticized Neoplatonism, as did Irenaeus (d. 202). Plotinus (d. 270), who is considered as the founder of Neoplatonism, had "presuppositions that prevented him from speaking about a divine history within the world. Therefore, Irenaeus would no doubt have regarded him as an unbeliever." See E. P. Meijering, "God Cosmos History: Christian and Neo-Platonic Views on Divine Revelation," *Vigiliae Christianae* 28, no. 4 (1974), 268, https://doi.org/10.2307/1583232.

[124] Elisabeth Feist Hirsch, "Michael Servetus and the Neoplatonic Tradition: God, Christ and Man," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 42, no. 3 (1980), 572. This is also found in his approach to the Imago Dei. See Jason van Vliet, *Children*

difficult to suppose that the Samaritan woman could have understood Servetus's concept of God because "when the Christians encountered the term 'allegory' in Paul - which served as an impulse to and confirmation of their own dealings with Holy Scripture - they could not in the first place understand it other than as the rhetor (or perhaps already the grammarian) had taught them in the school."[125] Therefore, approaching the term "Light" with this philosophical interpretation is problematic, and his polemics against those who accepted "incorporeal entities," namely, the Trinitarians, may be questioned since he had done the same through his Neoplatonism. I am not saying that this is the only meaning of the text since the original audience could simply serve as the gateway to further meanings, such as the Avicennan hermeneutics, which allow that scriptures are meant to call the masses to adhere to the truth.[126] Thus, he accepts that there is an understanding of the original audience, but it is a departure point for him. However, Servetus's hermeneutics cannot be read as Avicennan ones since he does use this argument for another purpose: to accept the literal understanding of the text to prove a doctrine, as with the Samaritan woman, when he writes, "He – Jesus – made no reference to something incorporeal; he simply said, 'I who speak, am the true and natural son of God.'"[127]

This is one of the common issues found across the hermeneutics of the three Abrahamic faiths in which a certain term had a certain meaning according to the original audience based upon their use of language and then was changed due to later interactions with world traditions. The impact of this issue is primarily seen while approaching the concept of the incorporeality of God, which started at the time of Philo of Alexandria, as he was the first one to interpret the notion of "God is not like a man" in order to accept the philosophical concept of God as not composed of parts, which Mireille Hadas-Lebel notes that Philo "likes to quote it independent of

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of God: The Imago Dei in John Calvin and His Context (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 239.

[125] Charles Kannengiesser, ed., *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2004), I, 162.

[126] Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *al-Aḍḥawiyyah fī l-maʿād*, ed. Ḥasan ʿĀṣī (Tehran: Muʾassasah-ʾi Shams-i Tabrīzī, 1382 HS), 99.

[127] Servetus, *The Restoration of Christianity*, 10.

its context."[128] This is found in Servetus's attempt to use the verse "God is spirit" (John 4:24) as a basis for his theology. However, and according to his hermeneutics, the context for using such term does not support his theology. George Stead asserts: "By saying that God is spiritual, we do not mean that he has no body but rather that he is the source of a mysterious life-giving power and energy that animates the human body, and himself possesses this energy in the fullest measure. The spirit is an unseen power, like the wind or the breath; and God, who is himself unseen, can communicate with men, not only by visible apparitions but by unseen agencies, spirits."[129] Accordingly, the original audience and let's say the early authorities, namely, the Ebionites, could not have accepted Servetus's theology, and thus I am arguing here that the logical conclusion of Servetus's hermeneutics would lead to Joseph Priestley's theology, in which he argued that "no person can reflect upon this subject without thinking it a little extraordinary, that the Jewish Christians, in so early an age as they are spoken of by the denomination of Ebionites, should be acknowledged to believe nothing either of the divinity, or even of the pre-existence of Christ, if either of those doctrines had been taught them by the apostles."[130] That is why early Christians believed in a corporeal concept of God.[131] What makes this argument more interesting is bringing Ibn Taymiyyah's insights to bear, since the basis of his philosophical-theological concept of God is similar to Priestley's one: both share a similar understanding of one of the most complicated issues in philosophy and theology, which is anthropomorphism, since it was probably the main criticism of the scriptural concept of God since the time of the Classical Greek religions.[132] Thus, they use the same argument, which is "the fact that

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[128] Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Philo of Alexandria: A Thinker in the Jewish Diaspora*, trans. Robyn Fréchet (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2012), 152.

[129] Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, 98.

[130] Burton, *Testimonies of the Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 481.

[131] David L. Paulsen, "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses," *Harvard Theological Review* 83, no. 2 (1990), 105.

[132] Mor Segev states that "the most explicit criticism of the content of traditional religion in ancient Greek philosophy is found in the fragments of Xenophanes, who rejects the anthropomorphic depictions of divinity at the basis of traditional religion in general." See Mor Segev, *Aristotle on Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 16.

the deity and the human mind possess intelligence does not necessarily mean that they are similar in other respects,"[133] and thus they were accused of implying that God is material[134] since Priestley accepted materialism and Ibn Taymiyyah rejected many times through his works the notion of having something that is not capable of being known by the senses, calling it *maʿdūm* (nonexistent)[135] which could be interpreted as materialism although it requires more investigation.[136]

Having presented the question "How could early Christians be wrong?" to Ibn Taymiyyah and Servetus, I will present it now to a modern discussion of the Christian-Muslim dialogue regarding the divinity of Jesus. That is, I have mentioned through the introduction that both the new data found through the Christian tradition as available in the writings of the ante-Nicene fathers and the classical Muslim intellectual arguments will be engaged in order to present a new challenge for the intellectuals of both traditions to contend. This methodology is inspired by the intelligent freethinker Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who states through the introduction of his voluminous work *Nihāyat al-ʿuqūl* that he shall do his best to strengthen every idea

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[133] Simon Mills, "Joseph Priestley and the Intellectual Culture of Rational Dissent, 1752-1796" (PhD diss., London: Queen Mary, University of London, 2009), 194; Ibn Taymiyyah, *Darʾ taʿāruḍ*, V, 83.

[134] Ann Thomson, *Bodies of Thought: Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 224. "Arguing that we have no conception of God apart from his actions in nature and thus no warrant for forming a notion of an immaterial first cause, Priestley states that his materialism is that philosophy which alone suits the doctrine of the Scriptures, though the writers of them were not philosophers, but had an instruction infinitely superior to that of any philosophical school. Every other system of philosophy is discordant with the Scriptures, and, as far as it lays any hold upon the mind, tends to counteract their influence." See J. G. McEvoy and J. E. McGuire, "God and Nature: Priestley's Way of Rational Dissent," in *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences, Sixth Annual Volume*, ed. Russell McCormmach (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 334.

[135] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, I, 229.

[136] Since this study is limited to Servetus and Ibn Taymiyyah, I will not go further in analysing the two projects of Ibn Taymiyyah and Priestly. However, the seeming similarities between the two thinkers regarding central issues in philosophy and theology could form an interesting study.

even if it does not have any strong argument before examining it.[137] Accordingly, the question "how could early Christians be wrong?" is presented to the Muslim audience in the following manner: Do the testimonies of the ante-Nicene fathers to the divinity of Jesus reach the level of being considered *tawātur maʿnawī* (thematic recurrent mass transmission), namely, the ones mentioned by Edward Burton? This is the same argument used by the influential theologian al-Kawtharī (d. 1952) regarding the second coming of Jesus, in which he claims that the Prophetic narratives on this topic had reached the level of being considered as *tawātur maʿnawī*.[138] This is not a challenge for Islam itself since Islam is based on the argument from the prophethood of Muḥammad, which has already been built through other intellectual arguments regarding the miraculous Qurʾān. This is a challenge for the intellectual project of each Muslim figure and even Christian ones, because once the Christian thinker accepts this argument, he or she would face its logical conclusions while examining and understanding his or her own tradition and the other traditions since, for instance, the Muslim could use the same argument to prove the prophethood of Muḥammad. Accordingly, each Muslim figure will have a different answer for this central question, which I argue is probably the strongest one that could be presented by Christians using Muslim intellectual arguments.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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[137] Al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-ʿuqūl*, I, 99. That is why he elsewhere presents a critical question by stating that since we necessarily know that Jesus did not teach that he is the son of God, then how could all Christians accept this notion? He answers the question by suggesting that Christians interpreted the term "Son" to be a real son as a response to the Jewish term for Jesus. Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī*, XVI, 35-36. This reminds me of the method of German scholar Johann Joachim Müller (d. 1733), which Noel Malcolm describes as "the requirement of equal treatment took priority over the need to prove gross fraudulence" while he was demonstrating that all religions accept polygamy and physical paradise. See Malcolm, *Useful Enemies*, 312-313.

[138] Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, *Naẓrah ʿābirah fī mazāʿim man yunkir nuzūl ʿĪsá ʿalayhi l-salām qabla l-ākhirah*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Khalīl li-l-Ṭibāʿah, 1987), 115.

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