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A CRITIQUE OF THE EARLY ISLAMIC CHARGE THAT
PAUL CORRUPTED CHRIST'S ORIGINAL RELIGION

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To Hannah: my wife, best friend, and “good thing” (Prov 18:22). I could not have completed this doctoral program or this dissertation without your encouragement, support, and sacrifice.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CMR* *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*. Edited by David Thomas et al. 21 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2009–2023
- EDB* *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by Freedman et al. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000
- EIr* *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Edited by Ehsan Yarshater. 16 vols. New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 1985–2020
- EIs* *Encyclopaedia Islamica*. Edited by Wilferd Madelung and Farhad Daftary. Leiden: Brill, 2008–
- EI²* *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Edited by P. Bearman et al. 2nd ed. 12 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1954–2005
- EI³* *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three*. Edited by Kate Fleet et al. 3rd ed. Leiden: Brill, 2008
- EQ* *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*. Edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe. 6 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006
- JQS* *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*
- JTS* *Journal of Theological Studies*
- MIC* *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*. Edited by Josef W. Meri. 2 vols. New York: Routledge, 2006
- ODI* *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Edited by John L. Esposito. New York: Oxford University, 2003

PREFACE

My journey with Islam began during my Master of Divinity coursework at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary where, by God's providence, I took my first course on Islam. Little did I know that that course would lead me to a doctoral dissertation on the apostle Paul more than a decade later. I credit my journey to Dr. Mike Edens, who first taught me to study Islam and to love Muslims. Drs. Dave Cashin, Warren Larson, and Ed Smither of the Zwemer Center at Columbia International University helped me develop my research and writing skills. Dr. George Martin, a constant encourager throughout my doctoral studies, is a godly example of the evangelist-theologian. Dr. Ayman Ibrahim has been a mentor, an instructor, an encourager, a supervisor, and a friend. This dissertation and my success as a doctoral student would not have been possible without his wisdom and admonishment. I am also thankful for the many friends, church members, and pastors who have invested in me over the years and encouraged me in my academic pursuits.

My wife, Hannah, is a blessing from God. She is an encourager, a source of great comfort, and my best friend. She has made great sacrifices to support my academic pursuits though she never complained or sought to discourage me. I am confident that I could never have survived this academic journey without her by my side.

Shane Folks

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Few men, short of Jesus himself, have had a greater impact on Christian doctrine and the history of the Christian church than the apostle Paul. The author of thirteen out of twenty-six New Testament books is the model Christian missionary and a prominent voice on many theological doctrines.¹ However, despite his importance to Christianity, perhaps no Christian figure is more vilified by Muslim writers—both classical and modern—than the apostle Paul.

The incendiary nature of Paul and his relationship to Islam stems from a narrative of alleged corruption that appeared in Muslim writings as early as the eighth century, based on the account from Sayf ibn ‘Umar (d. ca. 796).² For centuries, Muslim writers have claimed that the apostle Paul corrupted the original religion of Jesus with heretical teachings and unorthodox practices. Al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153) asserts that Paul

¹ New Testament scholars differ on Paul’s authorship of some of the letters historically attributed to him, namely 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles. For this dissertation, I will work under the conviction that Paul did author all thirteen letters. For an introduction to Pauline authorship see John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999); Mark J. Keown, *The Pauline Letters*, vol. 2 of *Discovering the New Testament: An Introduction to Its Background, Theology, and Themes* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021); Wayne A. Meeks and John T. Fitzgerald, eds., *The Writings of St. Paul*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993). For a detailed analysis of Paul’s missionary endeavors, see Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).

² Several Muslim writers I examine in this dissertation attribute their accounts to earlier authorities. For example, Sayf attributes his account to Ibn Abbās (d. 687); Ibn Qūlawayh (d. 977) attributes his account to Ja’far al-Šādiq (d. 765); Ibn Bābawayh (d. 991) attributes his account to Muhammad al-Bāqir (d. 733); ‘Ali Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 1176) attributes his account to Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. c. 725). The veracity of these attributions cannot be determined. As such, I will assume that the accounts are original to the later author. For this dissertation, what matters is not whether an account derives from an earlier authority, but what the later author says about Paul.

“disordered his affair” and “altered the bases of his knowledge,” mixing what he knew with the “arguments of the philosophers and the (evil) suggestions of his heart.”³ Paul “profess[ed] outwardly the religion of Jesus,” as Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) claims, but then deceived his followers to “induce them to follow the doctrine of [Christ’s] divinity.”⁴ As a result of Paul’s teaching, according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), Christians “have abandoned Christ’s religion and are opposed to him both in belief and practice.”⁵ Ibn Bābawayh (d. 991), also known as Shaykh al-Ṣaduq, asserts that Paul is condemned to hell for his disastrous actions because he “made some people Christians,” which means he led them away from the teachings of Jesus (i.e., Islam) into a new religion.⁶

I will argue in this dissertation that early Muslim writers expanded a preexisting Jewish tradition of Pauline corruption to refute the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, as well as the Christian practices of consuming pork and withholding circumcision.⁷ This assessment of the corruption narrative is not novel, as will

³ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. William Cureton (London: Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1842), 171–79, quoted in W. Montgomery Watt, “Ash-Shahrastānī’s Account of Christian Doctrine,” *Islamochristiana* 9 (1983): 251. See also William Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 69.

⁴ Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-fasl fī al-milal wa-al-ahwā’ wa-al-niḥal* (Cairo: n.p., 1317–1321), 2:221–22, quoted in P. S. van Koningsveld, “The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 211. See also Michael F. Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives of the Apostle Paul as a Narrative Framework for *Tahrīf*,” in *Arab Christians and the Qur’an from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period*, ed. Mark Beaumont (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 150.

⁵ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, *Šehit Ali Paşa* Collection, #1575 (Istanbul: Süleymaniye Library.), quoted in S. M. Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account of How Christ’s Religion Was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs,” *JTS* 19, no. 1 (1968): 153.

⁶ Ibn Bābawayh (Shaykh al-Ṣaduq), *Sawaabul A’amaal & Iqaabul A’amaal*, trans. Syed Athar Husain and Syed Maqsood Athar (Mumbai: As-Serat, 2008), 273. Bilal Muhammad translates the phrase as “Christianized the Christians.” See Bilal Muhammad, “Muslim Perspectives on St. Paul,” Berkeley Institute for Islamic Studies, February 9, 2020, <https://bliis.org/research/saint-paul-islam/>.

⁷ A cursory reading of the corruption accounts will demonstrate that the larger narrative contains more elements than the four addressed in my thesis statement. For example, ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s account refers to Paul’s influence on Roman (Christian) marriage practices, ritual cleansings, and the direction of prayer. See Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 140. Sayf describes Paul teaching the early Christians to change their direction of prayer and not fight back when persecuted, instead turning the other cheek. See Sean Anthony, “The Composition of Sayf b. ‘Umar’s Account of King Paul and His Corruption of Ancient Christianity,”

become evident from the survey of prior scholarship. However, I will make a novel contribution to the study of Paul in Islam by bringing more accounts of alleged Pauline corruption into conversation with prior scholarship to glean new insights. To support my thesis, I will examine multiple accounts of purported Pauline corruption from the first six centuries of Islam, beginning with the account from Sayf and ending with the account from al-Qarāfī (d. 1285). Confining my focus to the first six centuries will allow me to indicate that the Pauline corruption narrative was an early Islamic response to Christianity and that it was a persistent feature of medieval Islamic thought for centuries.

Methodology

The first task in this dissertation is to lay a foundation of prior scholarship concerning alleged Pauline corruption. The accounts that have received the most attention by modern scholars are those of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), and al-Qarāfī. I admit the determination of which accounts have been given the most detailed analyses is subjective. However, based on the relative amount of secondary research devoted to Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī, I believe it to be appropriate that they serve as the foundation for the current study. Therefore, I will first provide a summary of the secondary research related to these three accounts as well as a summary of what the three accounts say about Pauline corruption. The bulk of my attention will focus on the common features that persist across multiple accounts, though I will also address the more unique features of individual accounts when appropriate.

The second task will be to build upon the foundation by examining accounts that have not received sufficient analysis. There exist multiple accounts (*ḥadīth*, history,

Der Islam 85, no. 1 (July 2009): 177. I have chosen to limit my focus to these four elements because they appear most often in the accounts of alleged corruption. Other factors (Christian doctrines or practices) may have also influenced the emergence of the Pauline corruption narrative. Also, the term “early” can have a variety of meanings when applied to the religion of Islam or Muslim writings. I limit the scope of my dissertation to the first six centuries of Islam, from the traditional date of Muhammad’s death in 632 to the death of al-Qarāfī in 1285. Thus, by “early Muslims” I mean Muslims living in the first six centuries of Islam.

polemics, *tafsīr*) of alleged Pauline corruption that have been mentioned only in passing by modern scholars, relegated to footnotes, or excluded altogether, such as those from al-Qummī (d. 919), Ibn Qūlawayh (d. 977), Ibn Bābawayh (d. 991), and Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 1176). Even when the additional accounts mirror the accounts from Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi, the study is not a loss. Identifying elements of Pauline corruption in more accounts supports my assertion that the narrative was a persistent feature of medieval Islamic thought. Where the additional accounts differ with those of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi, the unique features will broaden the contemporary understanding of alleged Pauline corruption.

The third and final task will be to critique the origin, purpose, and persistence of the Pauline corruption narrative with the aid of the additional accounts. Muslim writers created the Pauline corruption narrative to refute the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, as well as the Christian practices of eating pork and withholding circumcision. These four elements of the corruption narrative, Muslim writers claim, are the same doctrines and practices imported into Christianity by the apostle Paul. By demonstrating that these four elements of Christianity were innovations of Paul rather than Jesus, Muslim writers could assure the larger Muslim community of the dubious origin and erroneous nature of Christianity.

Summary of the History of Research

In this history of research, I will focus on primary sources related to alleged Pauline corruption and their limited treatment by modern scholars. Although English translations are available for some of the accounts I will examine, comprehensive academic analysis of the accounts, their authors, their historical contexts, and theological implications is lacking. The few accounts that have garnered significant modern attention are the accounts that have the most detailed stories of alleged Pauline corruption. The following summary of research will highlight both the excellent modern treatments of alleged

Pauline corruption, and the need for a comprehensive analysis, which is the focus of the current dissertation.

S. M. Stern's 1968 article devoted to 'Abd al-Jabbār represents the beginning of modern treatments of Pauline corruption. He includes a full translation of Abd al-Jabbār's account, a discussion of how 'Abd al-Jabbār borrowed information from earlier authors, and a description of the historical background for the account. Following his commentary, Stern refers to other narratives from al-Kalbī (d. 763), al-Qarāfi (d. 1285), and al-Dimashqī (d. 1327) that promote the same general allegation of Pauline corruption, though each account has unique features. Abd al-Jabbār's basic assertion, says Stern, is that Paul imported pagan Roman teachings into the original religion of Jesus. Stern concludes that 'Abd al-Jabbār's story of alleged Pauline corruption was invented by a Muslim, perhaps even a former Christian, as an argument for the apostate form of Christianity in the medieval age.⁸

In 1996, P. S. van Koningsveld published an article on the Islamic image of Paul as it relates to the origin of *The Gospel of Barnabas*, an Islamic pseudepigraphic piece of anti-Christian polemic.⁹ His article has a two-fold purpose: (1) describe the Islamic image of Paul through the accounts of Sayf, al-Kalbī, and al-Qarāfi, and (2) describe the historical growth and spread of the Pauline corruption narrative. Van Koningsveld's work is helpful because he shows that the Pauline corruption narrative emerged in the early centuries of Islam but was later received and promoted by Muslims such as Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) and al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273).¹⁰

⁸ Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account,'" 184–85.

⁹ Van Koningsveld, "Islamic Image of Paul," 200–28. See also *The Gospel of Barnabas* (Brooklyn, NY: A & B, 1993). For an introduction to the history, study, and content of the Gospel of Barnabas, see Ghulam Murtaza Azad, "An Introduction to the Gospel of Barnabas," *Islamic Studies* 21, no. 4 (1982): 71–96; Jan Joosten, "The Date and Provenance of the Gospel of Barnabas," *JTS* 61, no. 1 (2010): 200–215; Oddbjørn Leirvik, "History as a Literary Weapon: The Gospel of Barnabas in Muslim-Christian Polemics," *Studia Theologica* 56, no. 1 (2002): 4–26; J. N. J. Kritzinger, "A Critical Study of the Gospel of Barnabas," *Religion in Southern Africa* 1, no. 1 (1980): 49–65.

¹⁰ Van Koningsveld, "Islamic Image of Paul," 210–16.

In the early years of the twenty-first century, Gabriel Said Reynolds provided a book-length analysis of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s apologetic work, *Critique of Christian Origins*.¹¹ Abd al-Jabbār argues that Christianity slowly deviated from the original religion of Jesus and became a false religion by the time of Islam’s founding. Though Paul was not the central focus of the *Critique*, he does appear in the polemical text as a key figure purportedly responsible for the import of (pagan) Roman religion into the Christian community. Reynolds’s treatment of the historical background and manuscript evidence for ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s account is invaluable, and he also provides a fresh translation of the alleged corruption event with commentary. His conclusion is that ‘Abd al-Jabbār used the Bible to construct a basic theological-historical message, namely that Christians abandoned the religion of Jesus and embraced paganism.¹²

In 2010, Sean W. Anthony published, “The Composition of Sayf b. ‘Umar’s Account of King Paul and His Corruption of Ancient Christianity,” a new analysis of a recently discovered manuscript containing portions of Sayf’s polemical writings.¹³ Anthony provides a full translation and commentary on Sayf’s account, and his central goal is to demonstrate that Sayf constructed his narrative of Pauline corruption from multiple sources, including Qur’ānic, exegetical, and Jewish, and wove them into a “moral drama with didactic implications for the Muslim *umma*.”¹⁴ Sayf depicts Paul’s alleged corruption of Christianity as a parallel to the influence of ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Saba’, sectarian leader of the Saba’īya, who led a revolt against ‘Uthmān, the third caliph (r. 644–656).¹⁵

¹¹ Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: ‘Abd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Boston: Brill, 2004).

¹² Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 107–8.

¹³ See Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 164–202. Prior to this discovery, scholars were dependent on al-Ṭabarī’s selected quotations of Sayf’s writings.

¹⁴ Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 165.

¹⁵ Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 165–67. See also Sean W. Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Saba’ and the Origins of Shī’ism* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Sean W. Anthony, “The Legend of ‘Abdallāh ibn Saba’ and the Date of Umm al-Kitāb,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21, no. 1 (January

The lesson from Sayf's account claims about Paul, it appears, is a warning for Sayf's contemporaries of the dangers of errant beliefs and sectarian groups.

Not all recent scholarly work on Pauline corruption focuses on Sayf and 'Abd al-Jabbār. In 2015, Diego Cucarella published *Muslim-Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean*, a book-length examination of al-Qarāfi's anti-Christian polemic, *Splendid Replies to Insolent Questions*, written in the thirteenth century.¹⁶ Al-Qarāfi claims that Christianity is a derivation from Jesus's original religion, and he includes two distinct narratives of alleged Pauline corruption, both of which parallel many of the same features as the account from Sayf, such as Paul's efforts to divide the early followers of Jesus into errant and competing factions. In addition, al-Qarāfi describes more of Paul's alleged activities, such as his deceptive entrance into the Christian community, his ploys to gain Christians' trust, his methods for teaching false doctrines and entrusting them to different men, and his eventual suicide.

A more recent work concerning alleged Pauline corruption is Michael Kuhn's 2018 chapter, "Early Islamic Perspectives of the Apostle Paul as a Narrative Framework for Tahrīf." Kuhn examines the accounts from Sayf, al-Tha'labī (d. 1038), and 'Abd al-Jabbār within the broader context of *tahrīf*, an Arabic term for corruption of the scriptures.¹⁷ Classical Muslim writers increasingly viewed the biblical writings as not only corrupted in meaning but also corrupted in their actual wording. However, to give credibility to a wholesale dismissal of the Bible as corrupted in its text, Muslims needed a (pseudo) history that explained how the text became corrupted. Paul, it seems, was the

2011): 1–30; Abbas Barzegar, "The Persistence of Heresy: Paul of Tarsus, Ibn Saba', and Historical Narrative in Sunni Identity Formation," *Numen* 58, nos. 2/3 (2011): 207–31; Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 154–59. For a summary of the events surrounding 'Uthmān's death, see Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Classical Age of Islam*, vol. 1 of *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974).

¹⁶ Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

¹⁷ Two separate but related issues emerge here: Paul's corruption of Christ's original religion and the corruption of Christian scriptures (whether by Paul or someone else). I will examine the two issues together chapter five.

natural culprit for the corruption of Christianity. Kuhn contends that Sayf, al-Tha'labī, and 'Abd al-Jabbār viewed Paul not merely as a false teacher, or even as the destroyer of Christ's original religion, but as the author of a new religion.¹⁸

The most recent publication concerning Pauline corruption is Martin Whittingham's 2021 book, *A History of Muslim Views of the Bible: The First Four Centuries*.¹⁹ Within his broader discussion of Muslim views of the Bible, Whittingham provides a brief introduction to the anti-Pauline writings of 'Abd al-Jabbār and Sayf and offers his assessment of their purported aims. Sayf's concern, says Whittingham, is the "preservation of Islam from corruption," and Paul serves as a case study in the damage false teachers can do to a religious community.²⁰ Two centuries later, Whittingham asserts, 'Abd al-Jabbār defends Muhammad's prophethood by arguing that Paul's influence destroyed the historical basis for Christianity.²¹ Whittingham's analysis demonstrates how Muslim authors were able to use the same corruption narrative to accomplish different goals in their writings.

Contribution to the Field

The Muslim assertion of Pauline corruption has garnered new interest in recent decades, as is evident from the summary of the history of research. However, modern researchers have focused on the most detailed accounts of alleged corruption, namely those from Sayf, 'Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī. A few other accounts have been examined, but not in depth, or perhaps only mentioned in passing, such as those from al-Tha'labī and Ibn Ḥazm. However, other accounts of Pauline corruption deserve attention, such as those from Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765), al-Ya'qūbī (d. 898), al-Būshanjī (d. 1074), and Ibn 'Asākir.

¹⁸ Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 167–73.

¹⁹ Martin Whittingham, *A History of Muslim Views of the Bible: The First Four Centuries* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 136–66.

²⁰ Whittingham, *History of Muslim Views*, 143.

²¹ Whittingham, *History of Muslim Views*, 137.

My contribution to the field is to bring additional accounts into conversation with previous scholarship to provide new observations on the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption. I will first examine additional accounts of purported corruption from *ḥadīth*, *sīra*, and polemical writings. The authors lived in Spain, North Africa, and the Middle East. They were Sunni and Shī'ī and adhered to various schools of jurisprudence. Where the accounts differ from those of Sayf, 'Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī, they offer new insights into an understanding of Pauline corruption. Even when the accounts have similar features, they still indicate the wider circulation of the corruption narrative.

In addition, I will devote an entire chapter to claims of Pauline corruption found in the *tafsīr* literature, which are Muslim commentaries on the Qur'ān. Prior scholarship on Pauline corruption has tended to focus on polemical writings meant to critique Christianity or bolster Muhammad's claim to prophethood. However, Qur'ān commentators also promoted Pauline corruption as they sought to interpret Qur'ānic passages related to Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus. My examination of the *tafsīr* will bring another genre of Muslim literature into the conversation surrounding alleged Pauline corruption and help to understand how Muslim writers used the narrative as a contextual background for Qur'ānic teaching.

By bringing new accounts into the study of Pauline corruption, I will also help expand the discussion concerning why the Pauline corruption narrative emerged.²² The assertions in the corruption narrative do not appear to have been chosen at random but rather intentionally to counter specific Christian doctrines that conflicted with Islamic orthodoxy. I will demonstrate that the Pauline corruption is a necessary and logical (though

²² Much modern scholarship on the corruption narrative fails to address this natural question and instead only examines the historicity of the extant sources and the general narrative content. Notable exceptions include Whittingham, *History of Muslim Views*, 140; Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 198; Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 107–8; Barzegar, “Persistence of Heresy,” 219–20; van Koningsveld, “Islamic Image of Paul,” 202. However, though these writers do address the issue, more analysis is needed, and more accounts need to be included, which is the original contribution of my dissertation.

not verifiable) explanation for the demise of the “Muslim Jesus,” the emergence of apostate Christianity, and the superiority of Islam.

Significance of the Study

The Muslim narrative of alleged Pauline corruption emerged as early as the eighth century in Sayf’s account, but it has persisted into the modern era. In both popular and academic publications, Muslim authors continue to claim that Paul corrupted Christ’s original religion, and that doctrines such as the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus are products of Paul, not Jesus. The current study, then, is significant because it focuses on an allegation that has remained a consistent feature of Islamic thought. By examining the origin and purpose of the Pauline corruption narrative, I will be able to understand better why it has survived to the present day. I provide the following examples as evidence that the Pauline corruption narrative continues to be utilized and promoted by Muslim thinkers in the modern era.

Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) was an Egyptian author and Qur’ān commentator most known for his association with the Muslim Brotherhood and his influence on modern Islamic extremism.²³ In his book, *Islam: The Religion of the Future*, Quṭb claims that the Gentile followers of Jesus endured such persecution at the hands of the Jews and Romans that they had to hide and live in secrecy for great lengths of time. During this time, Quṭb asserts, the Christians altered their Scriptures, combining Jesus’s teachings with legends and conflicting stories.²⁴ He alleges that the Gospels found in the Bible are, therefore, no longer representative of Christ’s teachings. The chief proponent of this new version of

²³ Quṭb is a renowned figure in modern Islamic extremism as a proponent of violence in the cause of Islam. See Yvonne Y. Haddad, “Sayyid Quṭb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival,” in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University, 1983), 67–98; Marvin Perry and Howard E. Negrin, eds., *The Theory and Practice of Islamic Terrorism: An Anthology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 23–28; Adnan A. Musallam, *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Quṭb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005).

²⁴ Sayyid Quṭb, *Islam: The Religion of the Future* (Kuwait: Holy Koran, 1984), 38.

Christianity, says Qutb, was Paul, who preached a conception of Christianity “adulterated by the residues of Roman mythology and Greek philosophy.”²⁵

In the preface to the first edition of his book *Jesus: Prophet of Islam*, the Pakistani writer, Muhammad ‘Ata’ur-Rahim (d. 1978), refers to present-day Christianity as a “mask” on the face of Jesus.²⁶ Though a mask worn long enough might acquire a life of its own, says ‘Ata’ur-Rahim, the mask must be rejected. Muslims, he claims, believe in the Jesus of history as opposed to the Jesus of Christianity. Modern Christianity is the product of the Gospels, which the Pauline church changed, ‘Ata’ur-Rahim writes, and that now contain none of the original message of Jesus.²⁷ Due to the innovations of Paul and his followers, asserts ‘Ata’ur-Rahim, Christians are following a religion of their own making rather than the teachings of Jesus.²⁸

The notion of Pauline corruption also appears in modern Muslim apologetics, as seen in the examples of Ahmed Deedat and Bilal Philipps. Deedat—a prominent polemicist and apologist for Islam—argues in his refutation of the crucifixion, *Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction*, that every “knowledgeable Christian” must concede that Paul is the real founder of Christianity, not Jesus.²⁹ Likewise, Philipps contends that Pauline Christianity formed as a new religion distinct from the “Jerusalem Nazarenes” who believed in Jesus, a “human Messiah figure.”³⁰ He alleges that Paul began to change Jesus’s religion, leading the church away from its original Jewish character into Greco-Roman philosophy, as

²⁵ Qutb, *Islam*, 39. See also Patrick Gray, *Paul as a Problem in History and Culture: The Apostle and His Critics through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 136–37.

²⁶ Muhammad ‘Ata’ur-Rahim, *Jesus, Prophet of Islam*, rev. ed. (London: Ta-Ha, 1996), ix.

²⁷ ‘Ata’ur-Rahim, *Jesus, Prophet of Islam*, 249.

²⁸ ‘Ata’ur-Rahim, *Jesus, Prophet of Islam*, 254.

²⁹ Ahmed Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction* (n.p.: Tafheem, 2022), 1–2.

³⁰ Bilal Philipps, *The True Message of Jesus Christ* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: International Islamic, 2006), 58.

indicated by Paul allowing the consumption of pork and the withholding of circumcision.³¹ Finally, Philipps contends, Christ's teachings were distorted after his death to the point that he was elevated to divine status. The truth of Jesus, Deedat and Philipps argue, is now found only in the last divine revelation, the Qur'ān.³²

In addition to the field of apologetics, modern treatments of Pauline corruption also appear in popular literature, as seen in the cases of Muslim thinkers Reza Aslan and Mustafa Akyol. In his 2013 book, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*, Reza Aslan argues that Jesus was a revolutionary leader whose followers later worshiped him as God. Aslan also critiques the apostle Paul, whose conversion story was a “propagandistic legend” that Luke created to convince his readers that Paul was the successor of Jesus, not the disciples.³³ He asserts that Paul's views about Jesus were so extreme that Paul needed a miraculous conversion story so he could claim divine revelation.³⁴ Ultimately, Aslan argues, Paul rejected the Law of Moses, including circumcision, and created a new Christ.³⁵

Like Aslan, Mustafa Akyol works from the same basic premise of Pauline corruption in his 2017 book, *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims*. He claims that two communities formed after Christ's death. One community, the Jerusalem church, was led by James and followed the Jewish religion of Jesus. Another group of Christians formed around Paul who formed a different version of Christianity than that of James or Jesus.³⁶ According to Akyol, Paul appealed to his

³¹ Philipps, *True Message of Jesus Christ*, 81–84.

³² Philipps, *True Message of Jesus Christ*, 97.

³³ Reza Aslan, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Random House, 2013), 184.

³⁴ Aslan, *Zealot*, 188.

³⁵ Aslan, *Zealot*, 186, 189–90.

³⁶ Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims* (New York: St. Martin's, 2017), 35.

supernatural encounter with Jesus for authority and preached a gospel in conflict with the gospel of Jesus.³⁷ Through the preaching and writing of Paul, Akyol argues, the Pauline sect of Christianity became increasingly Christocentric as opposed to theocentric.³⁸

Finally, Pauline corruption has appeared in scholarly writings of Shabir Akhtar (d. 2023). Akhtar was an author and research fellow at The Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies (Oxford) from 2013 to 2018. His 2018 commentary on Paul's letter to the Galatians is the most scholarly treatment of Pauline corruption in recent years. Restating the claims of medieval Muslim authors such as 'Abd al-Jabbār, Ibn Ḥazm, Akhtar asserts that Paul was the "plotter who destroyed monotheism."³⁹ The most charitable verdict he can give is that Paul was a "lost prophet who missed the mark."⁴⁰ Paul, says Akhtar, was the first person to argue for the rejection of circumcision, something Akhtar describes as "the single most significant inherited ritual of Judaism."⁴¹ Christianity as a whole, Akhtar asserts, does not reflect the religion of Jesus, but the religion of Paul. Instead, he says, Christianity is a "mystical pantheism infused with a vague notion of a human-divine interface whereby nature and the supernatural meet."⁴²

Because Muslims continue to believe and circulate the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption, continued scholarly analysis of the narrative is needed. I will examine this claim in my dissertation, including its potential sources, development through the first six centuries of Islam, and purposes in Muslim critiques of Christianity. I will also emphasize the features of the corruption narrative that contribute to its continued presence

³⁷ Akyol, *Islamic Jesus*, 37, 40.

³⁸ Akyol, *Islamic Jesus*, 41.

³⁹ Shabbir Akhtar, *The New Testament in Muslim Eyes: Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 13.

⁴⁰ Akhtar, *New Testament in Muslim Eyes*, 269.

⁴¹ Akhtar, *New Testament in Muslim Eyes*, 5.

⁴² Akhtar, *New Testament in Muslim Eyes*, 268. See also Shabbir Akhtar, *Islam as Political Religion: The Future of an Imperial Faith* (London: Routledge, 2011), 69, 83.

in Muslim thinking, even to the twenty-first century. Herein lies one of the contributions of my dissertation, as evidenced by my major arguments, to which I now turn.

Argument

To support my thesis, this dissertation must have basic three components. First, I will provide a detailed analysis of multiple accounts of alleged Pauline corruption from the first six centuries of Islam. Second, in my analysis of the corruption accounts, I will emphasize differences between Christian and Muslim doctrines and practices. Third, I will argue that Muslim writers expanded a preexisting Jewish tradition of Pauline corruption to refute the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, as well as the Christian practices of consuming pork and withholding circumcision, alleging that these Christian doctrines and practices were inventions of Paul, not elements of Christ's original religion.

A Summary of Paul's Alleged Corruption

Throughout my dissertation, I will examine accounts from a diverse group of writers, both Sunni and Shī'ī. My goal is to show how the narrative of Pauline corruption emerged and expanded in the first six centuries of Islam. The content of the narrative was unified but with significant diversions, as I will indicate throughout the dissertation. Its continued presence into the twenty-first century indicates that the narrative was not a fringe doctrine relegated to the extremities of Islamic religious life, nor was it a temporary doctrine that passed into history as quickly as it emerged. It took root in Islam—both Sunni and Shī'ī expressions—and persisted across the centuries. As a preview of the work to come, I include a list of the authors whose accounts of alleged Pauline corruption I will examine in this dissertation.⁴³

⁴³ This list is not exhaustive. I acknowledge that additional accounts of alleged Pauline corruption may exist that I did not discover in my research. Also, I have chosen not to include al-Wāḥidī (d. 1076), a student of al-Tha'labī, in my dissertation because his account is the same as al-Tha'labī. In addition, I have not included commentators who identify Paul as one of the three messengers in *sūra*

Sayf ibn ‘Umar al-Tamīmī (d. ca. 796)
Ibn Hishām (d. 833)
Al-Ya’qūbī (d. 898)
Al-Qummī (d. 919)
Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923)
Ibn Qūlawayh (d. 977)
Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 983)
Ibn Bābawayh (d. 991)
‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025)
Al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 1027)
Al-Tha’labī (d. 1038)
Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064)
Al-Būshanjī (d. 1074)
Al-Baghawī (d. 1122)
Al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153)
Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 1175)
Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210)
Al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273)
Al-Qarāfī (d. 1285)

Christianity and Islam in Conflict

As the Islamic empire conquered Christian lands, not all Christians converted to Islam. Many Christians refused to abandon their beliefs and instead maintained their commitment to their religious confessions and creeds.⁴⁴ Although Islamic empires exercised political and military control over vast regions of land in the centuries following Muhammad’s death, Muslim lands were still home to many Christians. The continued presence of Christianity posed a theological challenge to the religious unity of the Muslim community (*umma*) and its common theology (*kalām*). Despite Qur’ānic appeal

36:13–14, which says, “Strike a parable for them: the companions of the town, when the envoys came to it. When We sent two men to them, and they called them liars, We reinforced (them) with a third. They said, ‘Surely we are envoys to you.’” For a helpful list of these commentators, see “The Apostle Paul in Early Islamic Exegesis,” Answering Islam Blog, accessed April 13, 2024, https://answeringislamblog.wordpress.com/2019/12/16/the-apostle-paul-in-early-islamic-exegesis/#__RefHeading__Toc24633_1382849891. On the possibility of *sūra* 36:13–14 referring to Paul, see also Whittingham, *History of Muslim Views*, 141–42.

⁴⁴ Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 168. In chap. 5, I will discuss how interactions between Muslims and Christians, and the persistence of Christians in Muslims lands, may have contributed to the emergence of the Pauline corruption narrative. For an introduction to early Muslim Christian interactions, see Michael Philip Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2015); Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2008).

(Q 3:64–71) to a common spiritual heritage, Christianity and Islam were at doctrinal odds with each other concerning the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus and whether to consume pork and practice circumcision.

Central to the religion of Islam is the belief that all prophets from Adam to Muhammad—even Jesus—preached the same message of monotheistic devotion to Allah (Q 4:163–64).⁴⁵ All the prophets received the same revelation from Allah, the very revelation (according to Muslims) now preserved only in the Qur’ān. However, Muslim writers in the early centuries of Islamic rule recognized that many Christian beliefs and practices conflicted with the Qur’ān. The doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus were incompatible with the core Muslim doctrines of Allah’s oneness (*tawḥīd*) and the belief that Jesus was an important—but human—prophet. Early Muslim authors, as Akhtar notes, had to “face the problem that Christianity was not (historical) Islam, that is, not the same primordial faith which, according to the Quran, was proclaimed indifferently by all the prophets, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus.”⁴⁶ However, despite their need to reject contemporary (medieval) Christian teachings and practices, Muslim writers also needed to maintain a connection to a form of Christianity that is theologically identical to Islam.

Corruption of Christ’s Original Religion

The Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, as well as the Christian practices of eating pork and withholding circumcision, conflicted with Qur’ānic teaching. Early Muslim writers recognized that they claimed to follow Jesus just as the Christians did, but Muslims and Christians had doctrines and practices that were

⁴⁵ In his commentary on *sūra* 2:252 (“Those are the signs of God. We recite them to you in truth. Surely you are indeed one of the envoys”), Sayyid Quṭb writes that all messengers were sent with the same essential message of God’s oneness, and they called on people to worship God alone. See Sayyid Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, trans. and ed. M. A. Salahi and A. A. Shamis (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999), 1:308–13. See also Maulānā Muḥammad ‘alī, *The Religion of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Aḥmadiyya Anjuman Ishā’at Islām, 1990), 165–98; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 26; Richard C. Martin, *Islam* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), 30–33.

⁴⁶ Akhtar, *New Testament in Muslim Eyes*, 255.

incompatible with each other. As a result, early Muslim writers needed to link Islam to an “original” Christianity long since lost and simultaneously reject any contemporary (medieval) manifestation of Christianity as a Pauline invention.

To explain the loss of “original” Christianity, Muslim writers developed a grand narrative of Pauline corruption, which was an expansion of a preexisting Jewish tradition that alleged that Paul had infiltrated the early Christian community and led astray Jesus’s followers with false doctrines and practices. The apostle Paul was the natural culprit for the claim of corruption because of his writings on the divinity of Jesus and his prominent role in the early Christian church.⁴⁷ In the view of early Muslim writers, no one was more responsible for Christianity than Paul. What emerged in Islamic thought was the belief that, between the end of Jesus’s earthly ministry and the emergence of Islam, Christians had deviated from “original” Christianity as taught and practiced by Jesus. According to Muslim assertions, Christians in the medieval period were claiming to follow Jesus but, because of Paul’s influence, were instead following a misrepresentation of Jesus.

Muslim writers expanded the Jewish tradition of Paul as the corruptor to include distinctly Muslim allegations, namely that he was responsible for a variety of doctrines and practices that conflicted with the Qur’ān. Through the narrative of alleged corruption, Muslim writers were able to dismiss the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, and the practices of consuming pork and withholding circumcision as innovations of Paul, not elements of Christ’s original religion. Additionally, Muslims rejected the authority of Christian Scriptures, claiming they were corrupted (*tahrīf*), either in meaning or in the physical texts. Thus, according to Muslim thinking, Christians were following a false religion that Paul invented, and they lacked an authoritative text to which they could appeal. The only way to know what Jesus taught and practiced, Muslims asserted, was to read the Qur’ān, and the only true expression of the message that all prophets had proclaimed was Islam.

⁴⁷ Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 168.

Outline of the Dissertation

The original contribution of my dissertation is to bring new material into conversation with prior scholarship to produce new insights into the Muslim narrative of alleged Pauline corruption. I structured the layout of the dissertation to reflect that goal. I will begin with the foundation of prior scholarship, then interact with new material, then highlight new observations that come from the study.

Chapter 2: Alleged Pauline Corruption in the Accounts of Sayf ibn ‘Umar, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi

The accounts from Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi have received the most detailed analysis from modern scholars and, as such, serve as the foundation for this study. In chapter 2, I will provide a summary of the research on these accounts, full texts of each account, as well as a discussion of common narrative elements. I will also address the potential Jewish origin of Sayf’s account and the larger Pauline corruption narrative in general. As I progress in the dissertation and highlight unique features of other accounts, I will often refer to this foundation to indicate where other accounts mirror or diverge from the foundation.

Chapter 3: Alleged Pauline Corruption in Muslim Historiography

In chapter 3, I will examine accounts of alleged Pauline corruption that have received less attention from modern scholars. Some accounts have appeared in recent works, but they deserve further examination and comparison to the accounts of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi. The accounts examined in this chapter come from various genres, including history, *ḥadīth*, *sīra*, and critiques of Christianity, but they all fit within the larger category of Muslim historiography, a term that refers to the writing of history. One difference between these accounts and those of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi, is that they are far less detailed. However, though less detailed, the accounts do shed new light on the development of the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption. I will also include some

accounts that refer to Paul but do not describe his alleged corruption of Christianity. These additional accounts are still important to the dissertation because they provide further insight into the general Muslim view of Paul and because they are examples of the rich diversity in Muslim references to Paul. By bringing historiographical accounts into conversation with the foundational accounts described in chapter 2, I will highlight unique features as well as common elements that mirror the accounts from Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi.

Chapter 4: Alleged Pauline Corruption in Qur’ānic Commentary

Chapter 4 is similar in nature to chapter 3, in that I will bring more accounts of alleged Pauline corruption—this time from commentary on the Qur’ān (*tafsīr*)—into conversation with the foundational accounts of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi. I have chosen to devote a separate chapter to this genre because of the unique relationship that exists between the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption and the Qur’ān. Unlike writers of other genres, Muslim commentators married their allegations of alleged Pauline corruption to the authority of the Qur’ān by utilizing the story of Paul as a historical background by which they could interpret Qur’ānic passages that critique Christians and their theology.⁴⁸ I will begin with an introduction to the genre of *tafsīr* and the Qur’ānic assessment of Christians. Then, I will analyze the various Qur’ānic passages commentators interpreted through the lens of Pauline corruption, noting common features that appear in multiple accounts and any dissimilarities. I will also discuss how many of the commentators appear to rely either on Sayf’s account directly, or to the same Jewish tradition that formed the basis of Sayf’s account.

Chapter 5: The Purposeful Expansion of the Pauline Corruption Narrative

In the last chapter, I will describe how the additional accounts of alleged Pauline

⁴⁸ See Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 153ff.

corruption provide further insight into the origin, purpose, and persistence of the Pauline corruption narrative. Bringing new accounts into conversation with prior scholarship will shed more light on the attitudes that Muslim authors had toward Paul, the various charges they levelled against him, and how they used the claim of corruption to critique and dismiss elements of Christianity that conflicted with Qur'ānic teaching. Furthermore, I will give special attention to the religious context that birthed the corruption narrative and its origin in Jewish tradition.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: The Persistence of the Pauline Corruption Narrative

The conclusion to the dissertation will consist of two elements. First, I will provide a summary of the thesis statement, original contribution, and observations from my research. Second, I will discuss the missiological implications of the research. Because Muslims still believe and teach the Pauline corruption narrative today, Christians need to increase their understanding of it. They must study the origin, purpose, and persistence of the narrative to critique it and provide a defense of the historical, biblical Jesus and Paul.

CHAPTER 2

ALLEGED PAULINE CORRUPTION IN THE ACCOUNTS OF SAYF IBN ‘UMAR, ‘ABD AL-JABBĀR, AND AL-QARĀFĪ

The aim of this dissertation is to increase understanding of the origin, purpose, and persistence of the corruption narrative by bringing additional accounts of alleged Pauline corruption into conversation with accounts that have already received extensive scholarly attention; namely, the accounts from Sayf ibn ‘Umar (d ca. 796), ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), and al-Qarāfī (d. 1285). Modern scholars have devoted much of their attention to these three authors, perhaps because their descriptions of Paul’s alleged activities are so detailed compared to many of the accounts that I will examine later in chapter 3. Each of the three authors asserts that Paul corrupted Christ’s original religion and modified it into something different. According to Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī, the Christianity they encountered was not the original religion of Jesus. For these three Muslim writers, medieval Christians were following the religion of Paul, not Jesus.

Despite the narrative of Pauline corruption being a persistent feature of early Muslim thought, as I will demonstrate in this dissertation, the various details of what Paul allegedly did are not uniform across the accounts. Even two accounts from the same author, such as those from al-Qarāfī, are not identical. However, as Diego Cucarella notes, Muslim writers never intended all accounts of alleged Pauline corruption to be identical because a uniform message was not necessary. He writes that the legendary content of the narratives was never intended to represent historical truth but were instead *theologoumena*, which Raymond Brown defines as “the historicizing of what was

originally a theological statement.”¹ The Pauline corruption account, then, says more about Muslim writers’ views of Christianity than it does the historical development of Christianity. However, to say that the accounts are based on theological statements is not to say that they lack any historical basis at all. John Maier observes that a *theologoumena* could be “an historical event loaded with a heavy amount of theological symbolism and interpretations.”² The accounts of alleged Pauline corruption often mirror the biblical stories of Paul, such as in their identification of Paul as a Jew, his animosity toward Christians, his conversion, and his place of prominence in the Christian community. Though, in their claims of alleged corruption, Muslim writers depart from the biblical accounts and make theological—rather than historical—assertions concerning the origin of Christianity.

The theological assumption made by early Muslim writers is that all prophets, including Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, proclaimed the same religious message as recorded in the Qur’ān (Q 4:163–64).³ Because medieval Christianity conflicted with Qur’ānic teaching, Muslims reasoned, it must not be the same religion Jesus preached and practiced. Based on his prominence in the early Christian community and his writings on Jesus, the apostle Paul was a natural culprit for the alleged corruption of Christ’s original religion. Despite providing different accounts, Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī promote a unified assertion: Paul the Jew infiltrated the community of Jesus’s followers and corrupted both their beliefs and practices, creating a new errant religion.

¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 505, quoted in See Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 198–99.

² John P. Maier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 237n41.

³ See Maulānā Muḥammad ‘Alī, *The Religion of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Aḥmadiyya Anjuman Ishā’at Islām, 1990), 165–98; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 26; Richard C. Martin, *Islam* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), 30–33; P. S. van Koningsveld, “The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 209; Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, trans. and ed. M. A. Salahi and A. A. Shamis (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999), 1:308–13.

Sayf ibn ‘Umar (d. ca. 796)

Little is known about Sayf, an ‘Abbāsīd writer and compiler of narrations on early Islamic history, other than that he lived in Kufa (today’s Iraq) and served under the famous ‘Abbāsīd caliph Harun al-Rashīd (r. 786–809).⁴ Some classical Muslims, such as Yaḥyā ibn Ma‘īn (d. 847), Ibn Abī Ḥatīm (d. 938), and al-Dhahabī (d. 1348), deemed his records “weak” or “useless” and even accused him of heresy.⁵ Sayf’s writings do, however, receive some credibility because historians such as al-Ṭabarī relied on his accounts.⁶ I have included Sayf’s account because his description of Paul’s alleged activities is consistent with the broader tradition of alleged Pauline corruption and because the question of his reliability as a historian or *ḥadīth* narrator is not relevant to this dissertation.⁷ The origin of Sayf’s material and its historical veracity is less important than what Sayf alleges about Pauline corruption.⁸

⁴ Ayman S. Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam: Competing Themes in Early Islamic Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2021), 107–9. See also Fred Donner, “Sayf b. ‘Umar,” in *EP*, 9:102–3; Michael F. Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives of the Apostle Paul as a Narrative Framework for *Tahrīf*,” in *Arab Christians and the Qur’an from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period*, ed. Mark Beaumont (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 154–55; Claude Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity in Islamic Exegesis,” in *CMR*, 1:45.

⁵ Ibrahim has a list of several authors who critiqued Sayf’s traditions. Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 107n27. See also Ella Landau-Tasseron, “Sayf Ibn ‘Umar in Medieval and Modern Scholarship,” *Der Islam* 67, no. 1 (1990): 6.

⁶ Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 107. See also Abbas Barzegar, “The Persistence of Heresy: Paul of Tarsus, Ibn Saba, and Historical Narrative in Sunni Identity Formation,” *Numen* 58 (January 2011): 210, 212–13, 219; Sean W. Anthony, “The Composition of Sayf b. ‘Umar’s Account of King Paul and His Corruption of Ancient Christianity,” *Der Islam* 85, no. 1 (July 2009): 166; Marianne Engle Cameron, “Sayf at First: The Transmission of Sayf ibn ‘Umar in al-Ṭabarī and Ibn ‘Asākir,” in *Ibn ‘Asākir and Early Islamic History*, ed. James E. Lindsay (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 2001), 62–77. It should be noted, however, that al-Ṭabarī did not rely on all of Sayf’s writings, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Ella Landau-Tasseron appears to reject the overall negative assessment of Sayf, observing that he was no different from other writers of his day in collecting different pieces of information from various sources, some of which was contradictory. She concludes that the assessment of Sayf as a questionable source of information reflects not the opinions of medieval writers, as evidenced by the fact that al-Ṭabarī relies on Sayf, but rather modern prejudice against him introduced by Wellhausen in the late 1800s. See Landau-Tasseron, “Sayf Ibn ‘Umar,” 6. For a discussion of how Sayf’s account appears in the work the Andalusian authors Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) and al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), see also van Koningsveld, “Islamic Image of Paul,” 210–16.

⁷ See Barzegar, “Persistence of Heresy,” 210; Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 167–73; Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 155, esp. 155n18.

⁸ See Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 110. Ibrahim also concludes that the historical accuracy of Sayf’s writings is less important than what Sayf says. Landau-Tasseron appears determined to defend Sayf’s

Sayf's reference to Paul's alleged corruption of Christianity is found in his text, *Book of Conquest and Apostasy*.⁹ While he provides a detailed narrative of alleged Pauline corruption, Sayf's purpose in writing the account is not primarily to critique Christian origins or doctrines. Instead, he uses the story of Paul as a *typos* for the later efforts of Ibn Saba', a Yemenite Jew who purportedly converted to Islam and founded an extremist Shī'ī sect, the Saba'īya.¹⁰ Sayf likens Paul to Ibn Saba' in that both men allegedly sought to divide religious communities with false doctrines and divisive practices.¹¹ Sayf's primary concern, writing in the eighth century, does not appear to be the origins of Christianity or its alleged corruption, or the early divisions between Sunnis and Shī'a. His concern appears to be the perennial threat of division, discord, and disunity that has the potential to tear apart the Muslim community.¹²

reliability from modern scholarly critique. She observes that, just because Sayf's reports may differ from consensus, they are not necessarily any less historical. See Landau-Tasserou, "Sayf Ibn 'Umar," 12.

⁹ When al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) wrote his grand history of the world, he relied on Sayf's book for his reconstruction of the murder of 'Uthmān, the wars of apostasy, and the conquest of Syria. See Barzegar, "Persistence of Heresy," 210; Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 154–55; Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 165; van Koningsveld, "Islamic Image of Paul," 201–2; Qasim al-Sammarai, "A Reappraisal of Sayf ibn 'Umar as a Historian in the Light of the Discovery of His Work *Kitāb al-Ridda wa-l-Futūh*," in *Essays in Honour of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid* (London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2002), 531–57. However, al-Ṭabarī did not rely on Sayf for his reference to Paul, as I will discuss in chap. 3.

¹⁰ See M. G. S. Hodgson, "'Abd Allāh b. Saba'," in *EP*, 1:51; Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 155; Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: Abd al-Jabbar and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 165; Gilliot, "Christians and Christianity," 1:45; Sean W. Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Saba' and the Origins of Shī'ism* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 9; Sean W. Anthony, "The Legend of 'Abdallāh ibn Saba' and the Date of Umm al-Kitāb," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21, no. 1 (January 2011): 1. Not all scholars agree that Ibn Saba' was a historical figure. See Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 109–10, especially 110n43.

¹¹ See Barzegar, "Persistence of Heresy," 210–16. Not content to sow discord only locally, Ibn Saba' supposedly traveled throughout Islamic lands before being embraced by the Egyptians, whom he stirred up against 'Uthmān. See Hodgson, "'Abd Allāh b. Saba'," 1:51. Throughout Sayf's narrative, Ibn Saba' is, according to Anthony, "the consummate instigator of every major conflagration of schism and sedition" threatening to destroy Muslim solidarity. Anthony, *Caliph and the Heretic*, 20. See also van Koningsveld, "Islamic Image of Paul," 202.

¹² See Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 167; Uri Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'ān: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1999), 165.

Having now examined the background for Sayf's narrative, I will turn to the account itself. Sayf claims the story of Pauline corruption was transmitted from Ibn 'Abbās (d. ca. 686), a renowned scholar of the first generation of Muslims who was the paternal cousin of Muhammad.¹³ Ibn 'Abbās was known for his knowledge of Muhammad and his skill in *tafsīr*, and he served in various military and political roles throughout his life, dying in AD 687. Sayf perhaps attributes his corruption account to Ibn 'Abbās to increase the legitimacy of the story, but a direct connection cannot be verified.¹⁴

While Sayf attributes his account of Pauline corruption to Ibn 'Abbās, he appears to have drawn inspiration from the earliest surviving Jewish account of Christian corruption, an anti-Christian work known as the *Life of Jesus*.¹⁵ In addition to features such as the illegitimate conception of Jesus by Mary and a Roman soldier, as well as Jesus using magic to perform miracles, the *Life of Jesus* describes a certain Jew infiltrating the

¹³ See L. Veccia Vaglieri, "'Abd Allāh b. al-'Abbās,'" in *EP*, 1:40. His mother claimed to be the second convert to Islam after Khadija, Muhammad's wife. See also van Koningsveld, "Islamic Image of Paul," 202.

¹⁴ Ibn 'Abbās died more than a century before Sayf was born. For a discussion of the line of authority from Ibn 'Abbās to Sayf, see Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 180–83. Based only on having Sayf as its author, the account is still one of the earliest surviving references to alleged Pauline corruption. See Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 167. On Sayf being one of the earliest accounts of alleged Pauline corruption, see Vevian Zaki, *The Pauline Epistles in Arabic* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 231; al-Sammarai, "Reappraisal of Sayf," 531–57; Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 156.

¹⁵ Multiple modern scholars argue that the *Life of Jesus* served as the inspiration for at least one version of the Muslim Pauline corruption narrative. See Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 170; Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account," 179–80; Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 233–36. Anthony claims that Sayf's knowledge of Christian sources was not strong enough to consider him the inventor of the Pauline corruption story. Thus, the *Life of Jesus* must have been written prior to Sayf. See Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 194–95. On the Toledoth Yeshu, see *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, ed. and trans. Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); *Toledot Yeshu Revisited*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). Sayf wrote his account in the eighth century, and although the first reliable excerpt of the *Life of Jesus* is in a ninth-century Latin work by Agobard (d. 840), bishop of Lyon, the work may have been written in the early Christian centuries. S. Krauss, in his edited edition of the *Life of Jesus*, writes that the work may have existed as early as the time of Justin Martyr (d. ca. 135). See S. Krauss, ed., *Das Leben Jesu* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902), 2–5, editor's introduction. See also Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 233n180; Norman Roth, "Polemics, Anti-Christian," in *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Norman Roth (New York: Routledge, 2003), 532.

Christian community and changing some of their religious practices.¹⁶ According to the anonymous author of the *Life of Jesus*, a group of Jews became worried about the growing influence of Christianity, a “pernicious faith” spread abroad by “twelve men (bad offspring of foul ravens), who wandered through twelve kingdoms and spread false doctrines among mankind.”¹⁷ As their concern grew, the Jews prayed for wisdom about how to be delivered from the wicked Christians. After they prayed, a certain man named Simeon Kepha (Simon Cephas)¹⁸ appeared to them and offered his services:

¹⁵My brethren and people, hear me: If ye approve my counsel I will root out these wicked men from the society of Israel, and they shall have no more any part or heritage with the Israelites. ¹⁶But is it necessary that ye shall take upon you the guilt of an offence. ¹⁷All responded saying, The sin be upon us; carry out thy purpose.

²⁶Simeon Kepha then said [to the Christians], I am sent by Jeshu, and he hath commanded me to come to you. Give me an oath that ye will do all things that I command. ²⁷So at once they all exclaimed, We will do all that thou commandest. ²⁸Then Simeon Kepha said, Know ye that he who was hanged was the enemy of the Israelites and their law, because of the prophecy of Esaias, saying, Your new moons and appointed holidays my soul hateth. ²⁹Moreover, be it known to you, that he did not delight in the Israelites, even as Hosea prophesied, Ye are not my people, ³⁰And although it be in his power to sweep them from the earth in one moment, nevertheless he did not wish to utterly destroy them, but desired that there should ever be in your midst witnesses of his hanging and stoning. ³¹Moreover, he underwent those great sufferings and sorrows that he might redeem us from hell. ³²And now he exhorteth and commandeth you no longer to ill-treat any of the Judeans; but if a Judean saith to a Nazarene, Go with me one mile, let him go with him two miles. ³³And if a Judean striketh a Nazarene on his left cheek, let him turn to him the right also; that in this world they may have their reward, but in the world to come may be punished in hell. ³⁴If ye do these things, ye shall be worthy to sit with in his seats. ³⁵Lo this also he requireth of you, that ye do not celebrate the feast of the Passover, but that ye hold sacred the day on which he died. ³⁶And that instead of the feast of Pentecost ye keep holy the fortieth day after the stoning, in which he ascended to heaven ³⁷Instead of the feast of tabernacles let the day of the nativity be made holy; and on the eighth day afterwards observe the memory of his

¹⁶ On other features of the *Life of Jesus*, see Roth, “Polemics, Anti-Christian,” 532.

¹⁷ *The Jewish Life of Christ*, edited by G. W. Foote and J. M. Wheeler (London: The Pioneer Press, 1919), 35–37.

¹⁸ The name of the man who corrupts Christianity is different depending on the edition. Anthony and Stern utilize editions that include Elijah taking on the name “Paul.” See Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 197; Stern, “Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 179. Conversely, in the 1919 edition that I have quoted from, the man who corrupts Christianity is Simeon Kepha (Simon Cephas). See also Roth, “Polemics, Anti-Christian,” 532.

circumcision. ³⁸All responded to these words, Whatsoever thou sayest, we will do; remain with us now.¹⁹

While Sayf provides more details of Paul’s alleged activities, multiple elements appear to be drawn directly from the *Life of Jesus*: Paul offering to help the Jews in their plight against the Christians, Paul claiming to be a Christian, and Paul changing some of Christ’s practices. One important additional feature that appears in Sayf’s version of the story is Paul introducing the new doctrines of Christ’s sonship, the incarnation, and the Trinity.²⁰ The primary differences between the *Life of Jesus* and Sayf’s account are perhaps due to the fact that the *Life of Jesus*, being anti-Christian, is opposed to Jesus, whereas Sayf believes that Jesus is a true prophet whose religion Paul destroys.²¹ As Stern observes, one need not try to locate a Jewish version of the story more similar to the Muslim version. Muslim authors were capable of embroidering on stories that they had heard.²² Sayf’s corruption account reads as follows:

He (Ibn ‘Abbās) said, “Isa/Jesus—upon him peace—proclaimed the Gospel to the Israelites and whomsoever God willed believed in his message. So after God Most High had raised him, the people delighted in his speech. His companions reached seven hundred among the people of the temple.” Then he continued, “Paul being the king in those days killed the Christians, so they fled. Then he rode in their tracks until he reached the narrow passes (of the mountains). Thus, they had bested him.

Paul told them (i.e., the Jews): “Indeed, their message is appealing, and they have gone to your enemy. They are still acting as the benefactors of the Christians. Soon, they will come ride against you with the aid of your enemies unless you pay heed to what I am about to say to you.” They said, “Yes, [we will]!” He said, “You are my partners in the good and the bad. I am as one of you.” “Yes!” they said.

So, he left his kingdom and wore their clothes. Then he pursued them with the intent to lead them astray until he reached their army. They took him saying, “Praise be to

¹⁹ Foote and Wheeler, eds., *The Jewish Life of Christ*, 35–37.

²⁰ Sayf ibn ‘Umar, *Kitāb al-ridda wa-l-futūh*, I, pp. 132–35 and II, fols. 62a–64b, quoted in Anthony “Composition of Sayf,” 178, hereafter Sayf, *Ridda*, 178.

²¹ See Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 180, for a discussion of the differences between the *Life of Jesus* and Sayf’s account.

²² Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 180. As one potential example of Sayf drawing from another Jewish source, Anthony observes that his use of the name Abu Saul may have been taken from other Jewish anti-Pauline writings. He notes that, as early as the ninth century, Dā’ūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ refers to Paul as Abba Saul, as does the eleventh-century scholar Tuvia ibn Moses. See Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 200.

God who has humbled you and taken your power from you!” Paul replied, “Lead me to your leaders, for my folly has not become [so great] that I come without a sign/proof.” Then they led him to their leaders, whereupon they said: “What do you have [to say]?” He answered, “Jesus found me while I was departing from you and took from me my hearing, my sight, and my reason. I neither heard nor saw nor reasoned. Soon after, he healed me, and, by God, I gave an oath to join your cause, to dedicate my life to you, and to teach you the Torah and its laws.” And they believed that he spoke the truth.

Paul said: “Build for me a hermitage/temple and furnish it with ashes,” and they furnished it with ashes. Paul dedicated himself to the worship of God therein and taught them whatsoever God willed. Afterwards, he locked himself away from them, and they circumambulated the hermitage/temple. They said: “We fear that he saw something displeasing and shunned it.” After a day, he opened it, and they said: “Have you seen anything displeasing?” “No!” he said, “Rather I have an opinion that I present to you. If it is correct then adopt it, but if it is erroneous then dissuade me from it.” “Let us hear it,” they said. Paul said: “Have you ever seen a flock grazing except it be with its shepherd?” “No!” they said. He continued, “I have seen the night and morning, the sun and moon and heavenly constellations coming from this direction, and that direction was none other than the direction most deserving to pray towards.” “You speak the truth,” they said. Thus, he caused them to abandon their direction of prayer. After that, he locked himself away for two days, and the Christians were fearful even more than the first time and circumambulated the hermitage/temple. When he opened it, they spoke as they did the first time, and he said the same. “Give us what you have,” they said. Paul said: “Do you not claim that a man, if he gives a present to a man and honors him only to have this man spurn him, that he will be hurt? God has subjected to you what is on the land and has created for your sake what is in the sky and has honored you with it. Indeed, none is more worthy than God so that one does not reject what he has honored. So how is it that some things are licit [to eat] and other illicit? Everything from the beetle to the elephant is licit.” They said, “He speaks the truth.” This is the second. Then after that, he locked himself away a third time, and they were even more fearful than the second time, and they circumambulated the hermitage/temple. When it had been opened by him, they spoke as before and so he did likewise. They said, “Give us what you have.” Paul said, “I think that no one ought to be harmed and no one recompensed, so whoever does evil to you, do not give him what he deserves. If one slaps his cheek, let him turn to him the other, and if he takes some of his clothing, let him give him the rest of it.” They accepted this and abandoned warfare.

After this, he locked himself away longer than before. The Christians were more fearful than they had ever been before and circled the hermitage/temple until he opened it. They spoke to him as they had before, and he spoke to them as he had before. They said, “Give us what you have.” He said: “Take the people of the temple away from me, so that no one remains save Ya’Qub (i.e., Jacob/James), Nastur, Malkun, and the Believer.” They did so, and he said, “Have you ever known of any human being who has created from clay a creature and breathed into it causing it to become a breathing thing?” “No!” they said. He said, “Have you ever known of any human being who used to tell people what they ate and stored away in their houses?” “No!” they said. He said, “Indeed, I claim that God Most High appeared to us and then concealed himself!” So, some of them said, “You have spoken the truth.” One said, “He is Allah, and Jesus is His Son.” Another said, “No, rather he is the third of three: Jesus is the Son, his Father, and his Mother!”

The Believer was horrified and said: “May God curse you all! What a catastrophe! No, by God, he has attempted nothing other than your corruption! We are amazed at what we accepted from him when we are the companions of Jesus - not him! We accepted Jesus, heeded him, and obeyed him! What a catastrophe! He attempted nothing other than leading you astray and corrupting you!” And, he cursed Paul, repented, and sought God’s forgiveness. He turned away from what Paul had taught them. He turned to his companions warning them. He feared that they would follow Paul. So, the Believer said, “Go out to . . . [blank in MS] and manage your affairs among them, for I see them only splitting into factions as you have done.”

They went out and managed their affairs as they believed. A group of people followed each person from among them. The Believer had the smallest following, so the three returned to Paul and informed him. He told them, “Overtake the Believer and his companions, then kill them lest they prove to be your undoing.” They went out to their companions and headed after the Believer. So said the Believer, “How miserable you are! Hasn’t his wretchedness and mendacity been clear to you? Did he not forbid you to harm anyone or to ride against them? Has he not changed his message to all of you?” Thus, they warred against them and overtook them. The Believer and his companions headed out towards Syria. Soon the Jews captured them, whereupon they informed them of the news. The Christians said, “We have fled to you in order to find security in your country. We have no need for anything in this world. We shall live in caves, on mountain peaks, and hermitages roaming about the countryside.” The Jews left them alone, and these Christians comprised the remnant.

The Christians took to living in hermitages and caves and wandered about. They were forced into innovation. And this is the Word of the Most High: “but the monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe it for them rather only to seek to please God and that they guard that with which they were entrusted”—namely, monotheism. They also disagreed over it except one faction among them “and We supported those who believed” among them and they are “over their enemies.” Among those from the Believer’s faction and others, “they became the ones that prevailed” (Q. 61:14) by the revelation and the appearance of Muhammad, blessing and peace upon him. Some of those fleeing believers fled to the Higaz, and the Prophet converted from them 30 monks who believed his message. And the like of Paul in this community is Ibn Saba’.²³

Sayf describes the early years of Jesus’s preaching and the growth of his community before moving to the main character, Paul, whom Sayf introduces as the murderous persecutor of Christians who causes them to flee for their lives.²⁴ According to Sayf, Paul becomes concerned about the growth of the Christian community and warns the Jews that the Christians “will come ride against [them] with the aid of [their] enemies.”²⁵ If the Christians were not stopped, according to Paul’s purported logic, and if their message

²³ Sayf, *Ridda*, 174–80.

²⁴ Sayf, *Ridda*, 175.

²⁵ Sayf, *Ridda*, 175.

continued to flourish, the Jews would suffer. As a result, Paul, says Sayf, devises a plan to infiltrate the Christian community and corrupt their teaching.

For Sayf, Paul was a malicious and devious man, an insincere convert to Christianity who recognized that he would need to convince the Christians that his conversion was genuine if he was to infiltrate their community.²⁶ As such, says Sayf, Paul abandons his kingdom and wears Christian clothes, pretending to be humble and remorseful.²⁷ The Christians appear to be convinced by Paul's trickery, saying "Praise be to God who has humbled you and taken your power from you!"²⁸ Still, Paul needs to convince the Christians not only that he had converted to their religion but also that he had been called by God to teach the Torah and its laws. To do so, says Sayf, Paul tells the Christians of his supposed supernatural encounter with Jesus.²⁹

According to Sayf, Paul tells the Christians that he had been pursuing them when he encountered Jesus, who took away his hearing, sight, and reason, such that he "neither heard nor saw nor reasoned."³⁰ This feature of Sayf's account resembles the description in Acts 9:1–9, where Paul encounters the risen Christ on his way to Damascus.³¹ Luke records that, after seeing a bright light and hearing the voice of Jesus, Paul "rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without

²⁶ See Barzegar, "Persistence of Heresy," 217; Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 166.

²⁷ Sayf, *Ridda*, 175.

²⁸ Sayf, *Ridda*, 175.

²⁹ Sayf, *Ridda*, 175.

³⁰ Sayf, *Ridda*, 176.

³¹ See Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 182. On the biblical account of Paul's encounter with Jesus, see David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 298–305; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 180–85; Charles W. Hedrick, "Paul's Conversion/Call: A Comparative Analysis of the Three Reports in Acts," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100, no. 3 (September 1981): 415–32.

sight, and neither ate nor drank” (Acts 9:8–9).³² Sayf asserts that Paul claimed to have lost his hearing and reason in addition to his eyesight, perhaps as an embellishment of the story. If Paul had stayed in this condition, that would be the end of the story, but, says Sayf, Paul claims that Jesus healed his physical condition.

Again, Sayf’s version is analogous to the story of Paul in Acts, where Paul’s eyesight returns to him through the ministry of Ananias and the power of Jesus (Acts 9:17–18). Sayf’s version of Paul’s supposed encounter with Jesus indicates that Sayf perhaps had access to a copy of the Bible, or at least portions of it. Sean Anthony notes that all of Sayf’s New Testament allusions come from either Luke or Acts. That observation would seem to indicate that Sayf was interacting with the biblical text, not merely utilizing stories he may have heard.³³ Furthermore, as a result of the supposed miraculous healing, says Sayf, Paul claims a call to leadership in the Christian community, saying he “gave an oath” to join the cause of the Christians, to “dedicate [his] life to [them],” and “to teach [them] the Torah and its laws.”³⁴ The Christians in Sayf’s story believe Paul’s claim of an encounter with Jesus and accept his teaching.

The bulk of Sayf’s account concerns Paul’s alleged efforts to deceive the

³² Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

³³ Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 199–200. In addition to biblical material, Sayf may have drawn inspiration for his narrative from the *Toledot Yeshu* (*Jewish Life of Jesus*), a Jewish anti-Christian text. See Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer, eds. and trans., *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, eds., *Toledot Yeshu Revisited* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). In this text, the Jews do not like that the Christians desecrate their Sabbath and festivals. They persuade Elijah, who calls himself “Paul,” to gain the Christians’ confidence and convince them to corrupt their religion. Anthony and Stern both discuss the relationship between Sayf’s account and that of al-Kalbī (d. 763), though as I discuss in chap. 4, the attribution of the account to al-Kalbī is tenuous. Similarities in the accounts lead Stern to say that both writers drew from the *Toledot Yeshu*. See S. M. Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account of How Christ’s Religion Was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs,” *JTS* 19, no. 1 (1968): 179–80. On the existence of an Arabic Bible in the first centuries of Islam, see Jack B. Tannous, “Arabic as Christian Language and Arabic as the Language of Christians,” in *Medieval Encounters: Arabic-Speaking Christians and Islam*, ed. Ayman S. Ibrahim (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2022), 1–93; Alexander Treiger, “From Theodore Abū Qurra to Abed Azrié: The Arabic Bible in Context,” in *Senses of Scripture, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians, and Muslims*, ed. Miriam Hjälms (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 9–57.

³⁴ Sayf, *Ridda*, 176.

followers of Jesus and introduce new errant teachings. With Paul's urging, according to Sayf, the Christians build him a small house where he can live and study. Four times Paul recedes to his house, which causes the Christians to worry. Sayf alleges that each time Paul appears from seclusion, he imparts a new teaching to the Christians that they had not believed before his arrival. First, he causes the Christians to change their direction of prayer because he claims he has seen the "night and morning, the sun and moon and heavenly constellations coming from this direction, and that direction was none other than the direction most deserving to pray towards."³⁵ In the early years of Islam, the Muslims prayed facing the Temple of Jerusalem like the Jews did.³⁶ Later, Muhammad changed the direction of prayer to face Mecca (cf. Q 2:142–45).³⁷ Paul, according to the authors of the corruption accounts, is responsible for leading the Christians to change their prayer direction away from where Jesus had pointed them.

In addition to changing the direction of prayer, Paul allegedly changes the early Christian community's stance on foods that are permissible to eat. Paul argues, says Sayf, that rejecting food Allah has provided as a gift would be to spurn him and potentially suffer harm. He teaches the Christians, "[Allah] has subjected to you what is on the land and has created for your sake what is in the sky and has honored you with it. Indeed, none is more worthy than [Allah] so that one does not reject what he has honored."³⁸ Rather than considering some foods to be unclean, Sayf alleges, Paul instructs the believers that

³⁵ Sayf, *Ridda*, 177.

³⁶ See D. A. King, "Kibla," in *EP*, 5:82–88; Richard Kimber, "Qibla," in *EQ*, 4:325–28.

³⁷ King, "Kibla," 5:82–88; Kimber, "Qibla," 4:325–28; 'Ali Dashti, *Twenty-Three Years: A Study of the Prophetic Career of Mohammad*, trans. F. R.C. Bagley (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1994), 92; C. E. Bosworth et al., eds., *Al-Ṭabarī, The History of al-Ṭabarī* (Albany: State University of New York, 1987), 7:24–25; Abdallah El-Khatib, "Jerusalem in the Qur'ān," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28, no. 1 (May 2001): 25–53; Simon O'Meara, *The Ka'ba Orientations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2020), 19–22.

³⁸ Sayf, *Ridda*, 177.

everything “from the beetle to the elephant” is permissible.³⁹ For Sayf, Paul’s changing of the dietary restrictions was the changing of a core religious practice of Jesus, and it resulted in the defiling of the Christian community through the eating of unclean food.

After his third period of seclusion, according to Sayf’s tale, Paul emerges to argue that no one “ought to be harmed and no one recompensed.”⁴⁰ Instead of fighting, Paul teaches the Christians to “turn the other cheek” and give beyond what is required, which appears to be a reference to Jesus’s teaching in Luke 6:27–31.⁴¹ The Christians accept Paul’s teaching, says Sayf, and abandon warfare. Sayf’s account is the only one I have found in which Paul is accused of causing the Christians to abandon warfare. He may have operated under the assumption that the followers of Jesus were told to fight in the cause of Allah because they were following an early form of Islam. By including this detail about abandoning warfare, Sayf may have intended to assert that Christians not only had their doctrines and practices corrupted by Paul, but also that they gave up the command to fight in Allah’s cause, whereas Muhammad and the Qur’ān maintained that command.⁴² According to tradition, Muhammad urged his followers to fight on behalf of Allah against unbelievers and promised them the reward of Paradise. One *ḥadīth* records Muhammad reportedly saying that Allah assigns people to participate in jihad, and they will be recompensed by Allah with reward or Paradise.⁴³ In another *ḥadīth* Muhammad reportedly

³⁹ Sayf, *Ridda*, 177.

⁴⁰ Sayf, *Ridda*, 177.

⁴¹ See Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 191–216.

⁴² On the imperative to fight in the cause of Islam, see David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), 5–31; Michael Bonner, “Ja’a’il and Holy War in Early Islam,” *Der Islam* 68 (1991): 45–64; Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2008); John Kelsay, “Jihad,” in *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction*, ed. Gerhard Bowering (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2015), 86–104; Ella Landau-Tasseron, “Jihād,” in *EQ*, 3:35–43.

⁴³ See Muhammad Muhsin Khan, trans., *The Translation of the Meanings of Al-Lu’lu’wal-Marjân: A Collection of Agreed upon Ahadith from al-Bukhari and Muslim* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Dar-us-Salam, 1995), 2:150–51 (#1229).

says that whoever fights for Allah’s word to be superior fights in Allah’s cause.⁴⁴

According to the Qur’ān, fighting is prescribed for the believers, and even though some do not like the requirement to fight, they dislike something that is good for them (Q 2:216).⁴⁵ Furthermore, *sūra* 4:95 says that the believers who sit at home, for reasons other than personal injury, are “not equal with the ones who struggle in the way of [Allah] with their wealth and their lives.”⁴⁶

Sayf describes Paul’s final period of seclusion ending with him inviting four men to gather with him in private: Ya’Qūb (i.e., Jacob/James), Nastur, Malkun, and the believer. The first three figures are representative of the three Christian sects known to early Muslim authors: the Jacobites, the Nestorians, and the Melkites.⁴⁷ Sayf claims that Paul gathers these four men and begins to teach his most controversial and (to Muslims) most blasphemous doctrines. Paul allegedly says to the men, “[Allah] Most High appeared to us and then concealed himself,” which is a reference to the Christian doctrine of the

⁴⁴ Khan, *Translation of the Meanings*, 2:156 (#1244). See also #1230–43, 45.

⁴⁵ Ibn Kathīr writes in his commentary that fighting is difficult and heavy on the Muslims’ hearts because it includes being killed or wounded. Yet, the Muslims dislike something that is good for them because fighting is followed by victory, domination of the enemy, and material gain. See Ibn Kathīr, *Ṭafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, abridged under the supervision of Shaykh Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2003), 1:597. Sayyid Quṭb likewise acknowledges the difficulty of fighting, but he notes that taking up arms in support of God’s cause serves the good of Muslim individuals, communities, and mankind. See Quṭb, *Shade of the Qur’ān*, 1:255.

⁴⁶ Ibn Kathīr writes that Muslims who did not fight would be compared to those who did, but if a Muslim had an illness or disability, he would not be compared. See Ibn Kathīr, *Ṭafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, 2:557. Quṭb writes that a clear distinction is made between “true believers” and those Muslims who are reluctant to sacrifice themselves for Allah’s cause despite having no disability. See Quṭb, *Shade of the Qur’ān*, 3:235.

⁴⁷ See Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 158. On these three groups, see Sidney Griffith, “‘Melkites,’ ‘Jacobites,’ and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria,” in *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 9–56; John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church 450–680 A.D.* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1989), 280–92. Robert Merrihew Adams, “Nestorius and Nestorianism,” *Monist* 104, no. 3 (July 2021): 366–75; Robert L. Wilken, “Tradition, Exegesis, and the Christological Controversies,” *Church History* 34, no. 2 (June 1965): 123–45; Carl E. Braaten, “Modern Interpretations of Nestorius,” *Church History* 32, no. 3 (September 1963): 251–67.

incarnation.⁴⁸ In response to Paul’s teaching on the incarnation, Sayf writes, one of the four men announces that Jesus is the “son of Allah,” and another man claims that Jesus is “the third of three: Jesus is the Son, his Father, and his Mother!”⁴⁹ The formulation of the Trinity in Sayf’s account reflects a Qur’ānic, not biblical, depiction of the Trinity (Q 5:116; 4:171).⁵⁰ That Sayf includes the same three figures as the Qur’ān is an indication that he sought to blame Paul not for the creation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity but for the doctrine as it was understood by Muslims based on the Qur’ān.⁵¹ Like many commentators, Sayf seems to be more concerned about the purpose of his narrative than about the content of it. He sought to demonstrate that Christianity was a product of Paul, but he had to make that case in connection with a Qur’ānic depiction of Christianity.

In all other accounts of alleged Pauline corruption that I examine in this dissertation, the new teachings come from the mouth of Paul. However, in Sayf’s account, Paul only teaches the doctrine of the incarnation. The claims about Jesus being the son of God and a member of the Trinity come from the mouths of the men Paul teaches. However, this distinction does not mean that Sayf views Paul as an innocent bystander in the corruption of Christ’s religion, as indicated by the fact that Paul does not, according to Sayf, refute the doctrines of Christ’s sonship or the Trinity. Thus, for Sayf, whether Paul explicitly taught the new doctrines or they emerged because of his

⁴⁸ The doctrine of the incarnation is the belief that the Son of God, Jesus, took on human flesh, being both fully human and fully God. See F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2005), 830. See also D. Larry Gregg, “Incarnation,” in *EDB*, 520–21.

⁴⁹ Sayf, *Ridda*, 178.

⁵⁰ In the Bible, the Trinity refers to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. See D. Larry Gregg, “Trinity,” in *EDB*, 1336–37; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 226–61.

⁵¹ See David Thomas, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in Early Islam: Misperceptions and Misrepresentations,” in *Heirs of the Apostles: Studies on Arabic Christianity in Honor of Sidney H. Griffith*, ed. David Bertaina et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 214–27; David Thomas, “Trinity,” in *EQ*, 5:368–72. I will return to this feature of Pauline corruption narratives in chap. 4 when I examine Muslim commentary on the Qur’ān.

teaching, the result is the same: Paul corrupted Christ's original religion.

The final portion of Sayf's account concerns the fourth individual that heard Paul's new teaching: the believer.⁵² According to Sayf, when Paul imparts new errant teachings, the believer is "horrified" and says, "May [Allah] curse you all! No, by [Allah], [Paul] has attempted nothing other than your corruption!"⁵³ The believer's rejection of Paul is based on his purported commitment to the original message of Jesus. According to Sayf, the believer says, "We accepted Jesus, heeded him, and obeyed him!"⁵⁴ For Sayf, the believer is representative of the early followers of Jesus who remained faithful to Jesus's teachings and did not follow Paul.

In Sayf's telling of early Christian history, a small number of people remain faithful to the original religion of Jesus and are not led astray into the religion early Muslim authors knew as Christianity. The Christians who followed Paul, says Sayf, went to war against the believer and his followers. Paul then tells the Christians to "overtake the believer and his companions, then kill them lest they prove to be your undoing."⁵⁵ Outnumbered, Sayf alleges, the believer and his followers flee to Syria where they find security, if they live in hermitages and caves (cf. Q 57:27b).⁵⁶ Thus, the believers survive in Syria as a faithful remnant fleeing the nefarious deeds of Paul and his Jewish conspirators.⁵⁷

⁵² For an examination of the term "believer" and its application to early Islam, see Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2010), 57–74.

⁵³ Sayf, *Ridda*, 179.

⁵⁴ Sayf, *Ridda*, 179.

⁵⁵ Sayf, *Ridda*, 179.

⁵⁶ Barzegar, "Persistence of Heresy," 218. On the believers fleeing to the Arabian Peninsula, see Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 158. Unless otherwise noted, all Qur'ān quotations are taken from A. J. Droge, *The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013). Droge chooses to use the term "God" instead of "Allah" in his translation, but for my dissertation, I will use "God" in relation to Christianity and "Allah" in relation to Islam.

⁵⁷ See Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 166.

For Sayf, the original followers of Jesus were the forerunners of Islam. They were proto-Muslims, in that they followed the message of Jesus, which was a nascent form of Islam (Q 4:163–64).⁵⁸ The “believer” in Sayf’s account, and the community that forms around him, represent an early form of Islam, thus demonstrating the continuity and uniformity of Muslim prophets.⁵⁹ For Paul to corrupt the religion of Jesus, according to Sayf, is to corrupt the perennial message of all prophets as recorded in the Qur’ān.

‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025)

‘Abd al-Jabbār was born in Asadābād, a small city in today’s western Iran sometime around 937 and spent his early years studying jurisprudence and theology.⁶⁰ He was a Mu’tazilī judge in Baghdad for many years until moving to Rayy (today a suburb of Tehran) in 978 to become the chief judge.⁶¹ Little is known of his later life, but by the time of his death in 1025, he was the chief exponent of the Mu’tazilī school of jurisprudence with a large gathering of disciples.⁶²

‘Abd al-Jabbār’s reference to alleged Pauline corruption appears in *Confirmation of the Proofs of Prophethood*, which was his contribution to the growing genre of literature

⁵⁸ Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 158.

⁵⁹ On the Muslim view of the continuity of prophets from Adam to Muhammad, see Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity,” 1:55; ‘Alī, *Religion*, 165–98; Rahman, *Islam*, 26; Martin, *Islam*, 30–33; See also van Koningsveld, “Islamic Image of Paul,” 208–9.

⁶⁰ Gabriel Said Reynolds, “‘Abd al-Jabbār,” in *CMR*, 2:595.

⁶¹ S. M. Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Ahmad,” in *EP*, 1:59. ‘Abd al-Jabbār eventually fell out of social prominence due to changing political situations. See Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 49; Reynolds, “‘Abd al-Jabbār,” 2:595–96; Gabriel Said Reynolds, “The Rise and Fall of Qadi ‘Abd al-Jabbar,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 1 (February 2005): 3–18.

⁶² Martin Whittingham, *A History of Muslim Views of the Bible: The First Four Centuries* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 136. See also Gabriel Said Reynolds and Samir Khalil Samir, introduction to *Critique of Christian Origins*, by ‘Abd al-Jabbār, ed. and trans. Gabriel Said Reynolds and Samir Khalil Samir (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2010), xxx–xxxv; Zaki, *Pauline Epistles*, 247; Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 161; Reynolds, “‘Abd al-Jabbār,” 2:594.

devoted to proofs of Muhammad's prophethood.⁶³ For 'Abd al-Jabbār, defending Muhammad's prophethood was insufficient by itself without the refutation of groups that rejected Muhammad, such as Christians.⁶⁴ To this end, 'Abd al-Jabbār critiques the origins of Christianity and Christian views of Jesus to show that "the Christians are contrary to Christ and his religion both in doctrine and practice."⁶⁵ The chief target of his critique of Christianity was the apostle Paul, whom he viewed as the alleged corruptor of Christ's original religion.⁶⁶ 'Abd al-Jabbār's corruption account reads as follows:⁶⁷

This Paul was a wicked and evil Jew who incited evil and worked for evil people, anxious to cause disorders. He desired leadership and dominion and used every kind of plot to this end. When he was a Jew, he was called Saul, and he worked against the Christians. Then he left Jerusalem and was absent for a long time. He returned to Jerusalem and began to work with the Christians against the Jews. He said to them, "Say this. Do this. Separate [from the Jews] and seek favor with the gentiles, the enemies of the Jews."

⁶³ In his attempt to confirm Muhammad's prophethood, 'Abd al-Jabbār collects stories from Muhammad's life and the Qur'ān that he thinks are of miraculous character. See S. M. Stern, "Quotations from Apocryphal Gospels in 'Abd al-Jabbār," *JTS* 18, no. 1 (April 1967): 34. On the genre of prophetic proofs, see Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 80–83, especially 80n28, as well as p. 178ff; Whittingham, *History of Muslim Views*, 137; Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account," 185; Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 162; Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 184; Reynolds and Samir, introduction to 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, xlii.

⁶⁴ *Critique of Christian Origins* is a blend of defending Islam (apologetic) and critiquing other groups, such as Christians (polemic). See Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 81, 127; Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 162; Reynolds, "'Abd al-Jabbār," 2:594; Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 25. For an overview of the manuscript folios devoted to Christianity, see Stern, "Quotations from Apocryphal Gospels," 34–39.

⁶⁵ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 161. Muhammad's knowledge of this fact, according to 'Abd al-Jabbār, is one of the proofs for his prophethood. See also Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 161.

⁶⁶ See Zaki, *Pauline Epistles*, 247.

⁶⁷ On the origins of 'Abd al-Jabbār's account, see Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account," 128–30; van Koningsveld, "Islamic Image of Paul," 200; Zaki, *Pauline Epistles*, 230; Shlomo Pines, "The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 2, no. 13 (1966): 1–74. The debate has concerned whether 'Abd al-Jabbār's account reflects a Judeo-Christian source or a Muslim source. Pines claims that the account was an Arabic translation of a treatise against Christian sects, but Stern flatly rejects that theory and instead claims the account was entirely Muslim in origin. Stern does, however, draw parallels between 'Abd al-Jabbār's account and the *Toledot Yeshu* (*Life of Jesus*), a Jewish anti-Christian work. See Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account," 179–80. See also Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*; Schäfer, Meerson, and Deutsch, *Toledot Yeshu Revisited*.

The Jews asked him, “How did you become a Christians? What led you to this?” He said: “God—Blessed and Most High—called me to this. My story is that I left Jerusalem, heading for Damascus. A dark night came upon me, a great wind blew, and I lost my sight. The Lord called me and said to me, ‘O Saul! Would you afflict the siblings and hurt the companions of my son?’ I replied, ‘O Lord, I repent.’ Then He said to me, ‘If it is as you say, go to Chaim, the Jewish priest, that he might return your vision to you.’ I went to him and informed him. Then he wiped his hand across my eyes. Something like egg shells or fish scales fell from them and I could see as before. Then God summoned me to heaven and I stayed with Him in heaven fourteen days. He entreated many things of me and told me many unpleasant things about you, which I will not say to you.” The Jews made fun of him. They were amazed at his foolishness and impudence.

[The Jews] took him to an official of Caesar, the king of the Romans ([the Jews] were at this time subject to the Romans). They said to him, “Do you know this man Saul?” He replied, “Of course. I know he is evil. He comes to us and slanders people.” They said to him, “He has claimed this and that” (mentioning to him what he said). The Roman became infuriated with him and ordered that he be thrown down to be beaten.

At this [Paul] said to him, “Would you beat a Roman?” He replied, “Are you a Roman?” [Paul] said, “Yes, I follow the religion of Caesar, king of the Romans. I am innocent of Judaism.” The [official] was forced to stop, since [Paul] had taken refuge in the religion of the king, and he said to him, “Here is a boat to take you to Constantinople. If you are Roman and follow the Roman religion, then go there, if it is as you say.” [Paul] said, “I will do it. Dispatch me to the land of the Romans!”

He went to Constantinople and spent time among the Romans. He attached himself to the king’s retinue and incited the Romans against the Jews. He reminded them of their enmity towards them, of what the Israelites had done to them and of [the Romans] whom they had killed. He instilled among them fear of the evil of the Jews and made them feel that they were not secure from [the Jews’] coming to power and assaulting them. He also mentioned to them their great wealth.

It is Roman convention that their women do not veil themselves before men. The wife of the king rides in the king’s procession with an uncovered face. She addresses the people, giving orders and prohibitions. This Paul gained her favor and spoke to her about the affair of the Jews.

It is a Roman convention that a man is not permitted to marry more than one woman. They may not be separated by divorce, old age, or any type of fault. Only she is permitted to him until she dies. The Roman women detest the religious practices of the Israelite prophets for deeming divorce lawful and allowing a man to marry as many women as he can support. Saul was asked, “Are you from a people of this way?” He said, “No. A man is not permitted more than one woman, as according to the decrees of the Romans.” He played the hypocrite with the women about this and became close to the king’s wife. She spoke to the king about raiding the Israelites, mentioning to him what Saul said. She asked him to listen to him and he did so.

He took the name Paul, which is a Roman name, to win them over.

The Romans have a severe aversion to circumcision of men and women and detest those nations that practice it. They asked Paul about it and he replied, “Yes, it is as you consider it. Circumcision is not necessary for you. It is only necessary for the Israelites since they are a nation whose foreskin is in their heart.”

The Romans eat pork. [Paul] announced, “It is not forbidden. Nothing which enters the inside of a person is forbidden. Only lies, which exit him, are forbidden.”

The Israelites do not eat [what] is slaughtered by idolaters, or by those who are not *ahl al-kitāb*, but the Romans are not like this. Paul concurred with them in this. He played the hypocrite with them in everything and did not oppose them in anything.

At that time, the Roman religious traditions were widespread. Most of them venerated the planets and believed that they brought life and death, benefit and harm. They had temples and sacrifices for them. Some of them were of the Greek religion, [holding] that these planets are living, rational, providing, and that they are lords. They believed in magic. In summary, all of their religions were invalid, weak, and corrupt. Paul would recount to them Christ’s virtue and asceticism, that his supplications were answered, and that he brought the dead to life. They would gather around and listen to him, yet he was deceptive and wicked.

The Romans prayed towards the rising sun. They did not hold the necessity of ritual cleansing or major ablution for intercourse or menstruation. [Nor did they] keep themselves clean of urine, feces, or blood; they did not consider these things impure.

The Romans also married pagans and the rest of the nations, which the Israelites do not do. The Romans spoke to Paul about this and he announced, “Let the believing woman marry an unbelieving man, for she will purify him. He will not make her impure, and their child will be pure.” He added, “This was only forbidden by the Tawrāt, but the Tawrāt is entirely evil. When the laws of the Tawrāt are removed from the people, God’s goodness will be perfected and His benevolence will be completed.”

Thus Paul tore himself away from the religion of Christ and entered the religions of the Romans. If you scrutinize the matter, you will find that the Christians became Romans and fell back to the religions of the Romans. You will not find that the Romans became Christians.⁶⁸

‘Abd al-Jabbār describes Paul as a ruthless, conniving, and deceitful false teacher who ingratiated himself with the Romans (Christians) to lead them away from the religion of Jesus. ‘Abd al-Jabbār begins his account of alleged corruption with a summary of Paul’s purported character, claiming Paul was a wicked Jew committed to evil, one who was committed to doing anything necessary to gain power over other people.⁶⁹ To this end, says ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Paul would not oppose anyone on a doctrinal matter and instead would enamor people through “things equivalent to incantations, medicine, sorcery, and

⁶⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 98–103. A parallel translation is available in Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 137–40. Compared to Reynolds’s version, Stern’s translation can appear wooden, but no major interpretive differences appear between the two versions.

⁶⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 98.

magic.”⁷⁰ Everything that Paul allowed the Christians to do, alleges ‘Abd al-Jabbār, was prohibited by the Torah, a book Paul purportedly says is evil and must be removed from the people.⁷¹

‘Abd al-Jabbār asserts that Paul was a Jew who “worked against the Christians,” but then suddenly left Jerusalem for an extended period.⁷² When Paul returns, says ‘Abd al-Jabbār, he claims to be a Christian and sides with the Christians against the Jews.⁷³

Similar to the account of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār writes that Paul, when asked about his becoming a Christian, tells the Christians of an alleged encounter with Jesus on the way to Damascus. Paul, according to Sayf, claims that Jesus had called him to Christianity.⁷⁴

After Paul becomes a Christian, ‘Abd al-Jabbār writes, he is arrested and taken to the governor of the territory. Once in custody, Paul is threatened with whipping, but he avoids this punishment by appealing to his Roman citizenship. This story is a unique feature of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s account, as I have not found any other reference to it in Pauline corruption accounts. It appears to be based on the biblical version of Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem, though in the book of Acts, Paul is arrested on a charge of bringing a Gentile into the temple, and only later is he placed in the custody of the governor (Acts 21:27–22:29; 23:24).⁷⁵ ‘Abd al-Jabbār appears to be interacting with biblical material as he crafted his narrative of Christian origins, but he is not bound to follow the biblical text verbatim. Instead, he interprets the material through an Islamic worldview.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 102, 104.

⁷¹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 103.

⁷² ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 98.

⁷³ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 98.

⁷⁴ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 99.

⁷⁵ See Bruce, *Acts*, 408–22, 433; Peterson, *Acts*, 588–610, 622–24.

⁷⁶ Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 166, 172. On ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s use of the Pauline epistles in Arabic, see Zaki, *Pauline Epistles*, 247–50. Reynolds notes that ‘Abd al-Jabbār tends to use Syriac vocabulary rather than Arabic vocabulary when describing the Bible. Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 197.

‘Abd al-Jabbār appears to include this story in his account of Pauline corruption to explain how Paul came to the land of the Romans. Upon learning of Paul’s Roman citizenship, says ‘Abd al-Jabbār, the governor offers to send Paul to Constantinople, to the “land of the Romans,” since Paul follows the religion of the Emperor.⁷⁷ The sending of Paul to Constantinople instead of Rome betrays ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s limited understanding of history, given that Constantinople was founded more than two hundred and fifty years after Paul’s death and the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity was Constantine (d. 337).⁷⁸

‘Abd al-Jabbār devotes the bulk of his material concerning Paul to the alleged activities Paul undertook in Constantinople to lead the Roman Christians into error. He alleges that the Roman women ask Paul whether divorce was lawful and whether a man could marry more than one woman because they “hated the religious doctrines of the prophets of Israel since according to them divorce was permitted and a man is allowed to marry as many wives as he can support.”⁷⁹ In response to their hatred of this doctrine, says ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Paul teaches that “a man is not allowed more than one wife,” and he is widely received by the women. ‘Abd al-Jabbār claims that Paul’s comments on marriage “made him popular with the ladies and gave him influence with the Empress,” which fits ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s assertion that Paul was only seeking power and influence.⁸⁰

Paul uses his newfound influence in the Roman community, says ‘Abd al-Jabbār, to change two Christian religious practices. The Roman Christians in ‘Abd al-

⁷⁷ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 100.

⁷⁸ Reynolds and Samir, introduction to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, lii. Reynolds notes that ‘Abd al-Jabbār uses the term Rūm to refer to the Romans of Jesus’s day and the Byzantines of his own day. See Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 86–87. See also C. E. Bosworth, “Rūm,” in *EP*, 8:601–6.

⁷⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 101.

⁸⁰ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 101.

Jabbār’s account oppose circumcision, and they detest any nation that practices it.⁸¹ When they come to Paul, says ‘Abd al-Jabbār, he tells them that circumcision is “not necessary” for them, but only for the children of Israel, “a nation whose foreskin is in their heart.”⁸² The Roman Christians also consumed pork, says ‘Abd al-Jabbār, which conflicted with Jewish teaching, so Paul says to them, “It is not forbidden. Nothing which enters the inside of a person is forbidden.”⁸³ In doing so, ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues, Paul does away with two religious practices that were features of Christ’s original religion, and in so doing, Paul “[tears] himself away from the religion of Christ and [enters] the religions of the Romans.”⁸⁴

‘Abd al-Jabbār’s claim is that the Christianity of his day did not match the religion of Jesus, either in practice or in doctrine. Whereas other accounts of Pauline corruption focus on Paul introducing the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, ‘Abd al-Jabbār does not include these assertions in his *Critique*.⁸⁵ He also makes no mention of Paul emerging from a hermitage with secret knowledge that he imparts to three men, such as in the accounts from Sayf and al-Qarāfī (soon will be discussed). His primary allegation is that religious practices were changed to the point that Christianity became a Roman religion rather than the religion of Jesus.

One final element of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s account that is analogous to the broader corruption narrative is the fracturing of the Christian community into competing groups. In the *tafsīr* literature that I will examine in chapter 4, commentators allege that the Christians

⁸¹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 101.

⁸² ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 101. See also Q 2:88 and 4:155; also cf. Jer 4:4; Acts 7:51; Rom 2:29; Gal 5:3–4 on circumcision of the heart. This reference may also indicate further that ‘Abd al-Jabbār was interacting with biblical material. See Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 102–3.

⁸³ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 101.

⁸⁴ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 103. See also Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 128.

⁸⁵ For example, see Sayf, *Ridda*, 177–78.

divided into three groups based on three prominent men to whom Paul imparted secret knowledge. In ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s account, however, the Christians are split into two groups: one group is comprised of Christians who were led astray by Paul’s false teaching, and the other group remains faithful to Jesus’s original teaching. The Christians who remained faithful to Jesus’s teachings, says ‘Abd al-Jabbār, became the forerunners of the Muslims. Likewise, medieval Christians were the spiritual descendants of those Christians who followed Paul into a corrupted new religion.⁸⁶

‘Abd al-Jabbār writes from the premise that Christ’s earliest followers practiced a nascent form of Christianity based on the life and teaching of Jesus. In the *Critique of Christian Origins*, ‘Abd al-Jabbār asserts that Jesus and the disciples followed the Torah until Jesus left the earth. The first generations after Jesus, says ‘Abd al-Jabbār, continued to follow the way of Jesus.⁸⁷ Then, after some years, the followers of Jesus deviated from his religion because some people “began to make changes, substitutions, and innovations in religion.”⁸⁸ One of the people ‘Abd al-Jabbār says made changes was Paul, the nefarious Jew who enjoyed a special prominence among the early believers and was “more exalted than Moses, Aaron, David, and all of the prophets.”⁸⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār writes that when the

⁸⁶ For ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s description of how the people who remained faithful to Christ’s teachings suffered persecution, see ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 111.

⁸⁷ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 89.

⁸⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 89. ‘Abd al-Jabbār does not indicate who the “some were” who introduced changes, but he appears to indicate it was a group of people from among Christ’s followers who partnered with the Romans. The followers who remained faithful to Christ’s original teaching rejected the innovation, resulting in their persecution. ‘Abd al-Jabbār writes,

The others, however, replied: “You have done wrongly, we cannot let the gospel fall into the hands of the unclean Romans. By agreeing with the Romans, you have abandoned the true religion, so we cannot associate with you any longer, but must separate from you and prevent you from laying your hands on the gospel.” Thus a great quarrel arose among them. Those who had approached the Romans returned and said: “Before helping us against the Jews you must help us against our fellows and get us our book from them!” The others hid from the Romans and fled to distant lands. The Romans wrote about them to their officials in the districts of Mosul and the Arabian Peninsula, and so the fugitives were hunted down, some were burnt, others killed. (‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 93)

⁸⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 93. Zaki writes, “The way that Muslim polemicists perceived the person of Paul himself likely also played a role in the extent to which they used his

Torah was read in the Christians gatherings, no one stood in honor of the reading or in honor of Jesus. Yet, when Paul's epistles were read, the Christians stood, "venerating and exalting him and his discourse."⁹⁰

Paul's special prominence, 'Abd al-Jabbār claims, is what allowed him to introduce new teachings and practices into the Christian community, such that "the religion of Christ and the religions of the Messengers—peace be upon them—were not modified and substituted all at once, but rather one portion after another, in every age and period, until the change was complete."⁹¹ 'Abd al-Jabbār's description of Paul is one in which Paul dismantles the religion of Jesus piece by piece. In its place, Paul builds a new Roman pagan religion, and he does so for popularity and influence.⁹² The result was that the Christianity of 'Abd al-Jabbār's day, he alleges, was not the Christianity of Jesus, but a Roman religion (cf. Q 3:187).⁹³ He insists that Christianity was "no longer the true religion preached by Jesus but paganism called by a new name."⁹⁴ For 'Abd al-Jabbār, the Christians had thrown away the true religion of Jesus (cf. Q 3:187).⁹⁵ His conclusion is that, because of Paul's alleged activities, the Christians became Romans instead of the Romans becoming Christians.⁹⁶

Al-Qarāfi (d. 1285)

Al-Qarāfi was born in 1228 on the west bank of the Nile, though he later moved

epistles. Muslim polemicists were clearly aware of the elevated status of Paul among Christians." Zaki, *Pauline Epistles*, 234.

⁹⁰ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 90.

⁹¹ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 92.

⁹² Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 108.

⁹³ Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 172.

⁹⁴ Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account," 128.

⁹⁵ See Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 92.

⁹⁶ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 103.

to Cairo to build on his primary education.⁹⁷ In addition to his expertise in legal theory, al-Qarāfi also studied *kalām*, *tafsīr*, medicine, mathematics, and astronomy, and is believed to have authored more than thirty works.⁹⁸ He became a renowned Mālikī scholar and theoretician.⁹⁹ Not only did al-Qarāfi lead the Mālikī school in Cairo, but he also held two professorships and presided over the gathering of students each Friday at the Cairo mosque.¹⁰⁰

Al-Qarāfi's references to alleged Pauline corruption are found in his work, *Splendid Replies to Insolent Questions in Refutation of the Unbelieving Religion*. Al-Qarāfi had read a letter written by Paul of Antioch, the Melkite writer and Bishop of Antioch, to a Muslim friend.¹⁰¹ The "Letter to a Muslim Friend" was a detailed critique of common Muslim objections to Christianity, such as the rejection of biblical authority, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the incarnation of Jesus.¹⁰² After al-Qarāfi read the letter, he wrote *Splendid Replies* to respond to the Christian use of the Qur'ān and to defend Muhammad's

⁹⁷ Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 37–38. See also Sherman A. Jackson, *Islamic Law and the State: The Constitutional Jurisprudence of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1; "Qarafi, Shihab al-Din," in *ODI*, 253; Maha El Kaisy-Friemuth, "Al-Qarāfi," in *CMR*, 4:582; S. A. Jackson, "Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi," in *EF*, 9:436.

⁹⁸ Kaisy-Friemuth, "Al-Qarāfi," 4:582–83; Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 3, 15–19; "Qarafi, Shihab al-Din," *ODI*, 253; Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, appendix A, 273–74. For an introduction to his works on jurisprudence, see Sherman A. Jackson, "al-Qarafi, Shihab al-Din (1228–85)," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Bowering (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2013), 444–45.

⁹⁹ "Qarafi, Shihab al-Din," *ODI*, 253; Jackson, "Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi," 9:436.

¹⁰⁰ Kaisy-Friemuth, "Al-Qarāfi," 4:582; Jackson, *Islamic Law*, 13–15; Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 39–40.

¹⁰¹ Paul of Antioch lived before al-Qarāfi, perhaps between 1140 and 1180, and wrote his letter sometime around the year 1200, though whether the friend was fictitious or real is unknown. Cucarella believes the friend was fictitious. Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 2. The years for Paul of Antioch's life are based on Khoury's seminal work. See Paul Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche, évêque melkite de Sidon* (Beirut: *XII^e siècle*, 1964). See also Thomas F. Michel, ed. and trans., *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawab al-Sahih* (Delmar, NY: Caravan, 1984), 87; David Thomas, "Paul of Antioch," in *CMR*, 4:78.

¹⁰² While Paul of Antioch's letter was not the first defense of Christianity, it was unique in that Paul utilized quotations from the Qur'ān in addition to the Bible to support his arguments. See Thomas, "Paul of Antioch," 4:80. See also David Thomas, "Paul of Antioch's *Letter to a Muslim Friend* and *The Letter from Cyprus*," in Thomas, *Syrian Christians Under Islam*, 203–21.

prophethood based on the Bible.¹⁰³

Al-Qarāfi's assessment of Christianity is that it had been distorted through the adoption of practices that Jesus did not sanction, and that Christians disregarded clear scriptural teaching.¹⁰⁴ The chief culprit for Christianity's distortion, according to al-Qarāfi, was Paul, the deceiver who led the Christians to abandon Christ's religion and follow new doctrines. In this assessment, al-Qarāfi appears to be following the same story that Sayf used some five centuries earlier, the Jewish *Life of Jesus*, though, like Sayf, al-Qarāfi adds many embellishments.¹⁰⁵ What makes al-Qarāfi's treatment of Christianity unique is that he includes two different accounts of alleged Pauline corruption. Both accounts describe Paul's alleged efforts to infiltrate the Christian community and lead it to follow beliefs and practices that contradicted the religion of Jesus. The accounts, however, are markedly different in their details and al-Qarāfi makes no attempt to harmonize them. He presents both accounts as viable explanations for how Paul allegedly infiltrated the early Christian community through deception and then taught them new doctrines and practices that contradicted what Jesus taught. I will examine both accounts and will, like al-Qarāfi, make no attempt to harmonize them. Al-Qarāfi's two accounts read as follows:

“Paul's Self-Immolation and the Ploy to Divide the Christians”

The entirety of the Christians continued to practice circumcision until the time of Paul, who forbade it to them. He was more disastrous for the Christians than Satan. This Paul removed them from religion as a hair out of dough [i.e. without difficulty] and made them plunge into the darkness of error. It will have dire results for them!

¹⁰³ His “splendid replies” form the first of three refutations sparked by Paul of Antioch's letter. About a century after the letter, an anonymous Christian in Cyprus edited it and sent that revision to Ibn Taymiyya and al-Dimashqi. See Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 2. For Ibn Taymiyya's response to the letter, see Michel, *Muslim Theologian's Response*. For al-Dimashqi's response, see Rifaat Ebied and David Thomas, eds., *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades: The Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī's Response* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). For further background see David Thomas, “The Letter from the People of Cyprus,” in *CMR*, 4:769–72; Michel, *Muslim Theologian's Response*, 94; Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 2n6; Alexander Treiger, “The Christology of the *Letter from the People of Cyprus*,” *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 65 (2013): 21–48; David Thomas, “Idealism and Intransigence: A Christian-Muslim Encounter in Early Mamluk Times,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (2009): 85–103.

¹⁰⁴ Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 185.

¹⁰⁵ See Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 156.

The reason is that he was a Jew and was massively intent on combatting Christians and killing them. His heart was not satisfied with that and so he devised a stratagem. He memorized the Gospel (*al-Injīl*). Then he betook himself to an important monk and asked to serve him. He was accepted. He showed effort, sincerity, and zeal in different way of piety and benevolence for a long time. One night, he woke up and screamed, agitated from what he had seen in his dream. The monk asked him about it. He said, "I saw the Messiah (peace be upon him). He blew upon my mouth and blessed me. Now I find within myself words I do not recognize." Then he mentioned some of those words and they found them to be from the Gospel in their entirety. They believed it was due to the Messiah's care for him and to his great blessing. The monk said, "I am more entitled to serve you and you are more entitled to leadership." And so he occupied the leading position, advanced, and became famous to the point that the kings of Christians began to visit him on a fixed day of the year.

When his power over their hearts had become a reality, he told them during one of their visits to him: "The Messiah commanded me to descend tomorrow from this cell (*qilliyya*) and sacrifice myself at the foot of the mountain as an offering to him." This became distressing for the kings because of the end of his blessing and the pain of his departure, and that he will sacrifice himself with his own hand. They spent that night with sleepless eyes and their hearts anxious until morning. They entered to bid farewell. The king with the highest rank and most elevated position went in first to be alone during his farewell to him. Paul (may God curse him) said to him, "I am going now to the Messiah. I have a secret to entrust to you before I die. Know a measure of it and lift up its beacon." The king said to him, "What is it, O holy Father?" He said to him that the Messiah was the son of God the Most High. The king asked him, "The son of God?" He replied, "The son of God. Were he not, the things that were manifested through him would not have been manifest." The king kept to this, although he had not heard such a thing before that day. Then the king with the intermediate rank entered. Paul said to him, "I have a great secret. I am going to the Messiah. I leave it to you. Preserve it and live by it." He asked him, "What is it?" Paul said to him, "Mary is the consort of God." The king believed it, although he had not heard such a thing before that time. Then the king with the lowest rank entered to see him. He scared him and made it as long as with the other two. He confided to him that God was the third of three. He then came out in the heat of the day. Everyone was standing on a common level waiting to see what would happen to Paul. He came out from his hermitage (*ṣawma 'a*) wearing the robe of sacrifice and with a sharp knife. Everyone was looking at him. The king with the highest rank hurried to him after he had given up the ghost and took him in order to carry him to his country and have his blessing upon his kingdom. The other two kings took issue with him. So he divided Paul's remains between him and the other two in three parts and took the third containing the head. The other two kings contested his right to take the third that contained the noblest part of the body. The situation made it necessary to burn the body, reduce it to dust, and divide it into three parts for the sake of justice and equal shares. Afterwards, they went back to their countries. The king with the highest rank revealed his belief that Paul had confided to him and the other two did the same. Each one denied the doctrine of the other and denied that the monk Paul had said such thing or that it was part of the Prophetic messages and [Revealed] Books, and hence that it was unbelief. Each one fought the other as a religious duty and an act that draws one near to God. The harm they inflicted on one another was considerable and many of them were killed by their own swords and by the swords of the Jews, which was Paul's objective. Look how strong this hatred was and how great this craftiness!

"The Cunning Jewish King"

A party of our historians and of their historians said that when Jesus (peace be upon him) called the Children of Israel to faith, only a small group responded to him. Then he was raised up [to God]. The people delighted in his words until his followers reached seven hundred men. They waged war against the Children of Israel and called them to faith. Paul the Jew, who was also known as Būlus, was the king of the Children of Israel. He routed them and made them flee from Syria to al-Durūb. They bested him. Paul said [to his army]: “Indeed, their words are appealing, and they have gone to your enemy. They will send them back to their religious community (*milla*) and they will outnumber us. Commit yourselves to me in everything, whether good or bad.” So they did. He left his kingdom and sallied forth to meet them [i.e., Jesus’ followers], wearing their clothes so as to deceive them. They took him and said: “Thanks be to God who has taken your power from you.” He said to them, “Gather your leaders. My foolishness does not go so far that I come to you without a proof (*burhān*). Their leaders said, “What is the matter with you?” He said, “The Messiah came to me as I was departing from you and took my hearing, sight, and reason, so that I could not hear, see or reason. Then he lifted this from me and I made an oath to God to join your cause. And so I have come to live among you and to teach the Torah and its laws.”

They believed him and he commanded them to build a house (*bayt*) for him to worship God the Most High and pave it with ashes. So they did. He taught them whatsoever God willed. Then he locked the door and they walked around the house. They said, “We fear that he might have seen something displeasing.” After a day, he reopened it. They said, “Have you seen anything displeasing?” He said, “No! Rather, I have an opinion I present to you. If it is correct then adopt it. It is the following: Have you ever seen a flock sent to pasture except from its master’s [house] and leaving except from where the flock is commanded to do so?” They replied, “No!” He continued, “I have seen the morning and the night, the sun and the moon and the constellations coming only from there [i.e., from the east]. That is the direction which most deserves to be prayed in.” They said, “You speak the truth.” So he made them change their direction of prayer (*qibla*) from the Temple of Jerusalem to the true east. After that he locked the door for two days. They were more fearful than the first time and walked around it. Then he opened the door. They said, “Have you seen anything displeasing?” He said, “No! Rather, I have an opinion.” They said, “Let us have it.” He said, “Do you not claim that a man, if he gives a present to another man and the latter spurns it, he will be molested? God Most High has subjected to you all that is on the earth and in the sky. God is more entitled to not having his presents spurned. So how is it that some things are permitted [to eat] and others forbidden? Everything between the beetle and the elephant is permitted.” They said, “You speak the truth.” And so they followed him in permitting the forbidden things. After that he locked the door a third time. They were more fearful than the second time. When he finally let them in, he said, “I have an opinion.” They said, “Let us have it.” He said, “Clear everybody out of the house except Ya ‘qūb, Naṣṭūr, Malkūn, and Mu’min.” They did so, and he said: “Have you ever known of any human being who has made a creature out of clay that became a living being?” They replied, “No!” He continued, “Have you ever known of any human being who has healed the blind and the leper, and bring the dead to life?” They replied, “No!” He said, “I claim that God Most High has manifested himself to us and then veiled himself again.” One of them said, “You speak the truth.” One said, “No. Rather, God is three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Another said, “[They are] God and his son.” Another said, “He is God Most High who was incarnate for us.” And so they split into four sects. Ya ‘qūb kept to Paul’s saying that the God Most High is the Messiah and so did his devotees, who are the Jacobites. Naṣṭūr said that the Messiah is the son of God Most High by way of mercy

and so did his devotees, the Nestorians, except that his devotees did not believe that he was son by way of mercy, but rather as mentioned before. As for Malkūn, he said that God Most High is three, and so did his devotees, the Melkites. Then Mu'min stood and said to them, "May God's curse be on you! By God, this one has attempted nothing other than to corrupt you! We were the companions of the Messiah before him. We saw Jesus (peace be upon him) and we transmitted his words. This one is only leading you astray." Paul said to those who followed him, "Rise up with us and let us combat this Mu'min and kill him and his companions. Otherwise, he will corrupt your religion." Mu'min went to his people and said, "Do you not know that the Messiah is the servant of God and his messenger, and that he told you so?" They replied, "Yes!" He said, "Indeed, this accursed one has led those people astray." They [i.e., Paul and his army] rode in their tracks and routed Mu'min and his companions. They fled to Syria, where the Jews captured them. Mu'min and his companions informed them of the news and said, "We have fled to you to be safe in your country. We have no need for anything in this world. We only need caves and hermitages (*ṣawāmi*'), and we shall wander about the land." The Jews left them alone. Then some of those who had disbelieved imitated the companions of Mu'min regarding the hermitages and monasticism (*rahbāniyya*). And this is the word of the Most High: "But monasticism was something they invented" (Q 57:27). The Prophet (God bless him and grant him salvation) met thirty monks from among the companions of Mu'min. They followed him and died Muslims. Referring to them was revealed the word of the Most High: "We supported the believers against their enemy and they were the ones who came out on top" (Q 61:14), that is, [We supported the believers] with a proof (*ḥujja*). This event took place forty years after the Messiah (peace be upon him).¹⁰⁶

In both accounts, al-Qarāfi portrays Paul as a disingenuous trickster, not a genuine convert to Christ's religion. He writes that Paul was "a Jew and was massively intent on combatting Christians and killing them," but that he was not satisfied with a military approach alone.¹⁰⁷ Because Paul's heart was not satisfied with that approach by itself, al-Qarāfi writes, he "devised a strategem" to destroy the religion of Christianity and lead astray the entire community.¹⁰⁸ To infiltrate the Christianity community, al-Qarāfi alleges, Paul left his position of authority and went to the Christians wearing the same

¹⁰⁶ Al-Qarāfi, *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira 'an al-as'ila al-fājira*, quoted in Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 286–90, hereafter Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286–290. Cucarella provides an English translation of *Splendid Replies* based on two works: Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfi, *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira 'an al-as'ila al-fājira*, ed. Bakr Zakī 'Awad, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1987); and an unpublished PhD diss. by Nājī Muḥammad Dāwūd (Umm al-Qurā University, Mecca, 1985). Cucarella is convinced that Dāwūd's edition is superior.

¹⁰⁷ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286.

¹⁰⁸ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286.

type of clothing that they wore.¹⁰⁹

According to al-Qarāfi, Paul presents two proofs of his conversion to convince the Christians, one in each account. In the first account, al-Qarāfi claims Paul tricks the Christians by memorizing portions of the gospel in secret. He then goes to a monk and claims that Jesus had blown upon his mouth and blessed him, and that he then found words within himself that he did not recognize. When Paul recites the words he had secretly memorized, says al-Qarāfi, the Christians believe his story and receive him into their community.¹¹⁰ In the second account, al-Qarāfi asserts that Paul tells the Christians of a supernatural encounter with Jesus and his subsequent transformation and commitment to Christianity.¹¹¹ Again, claims al-Qarāfi, the Christians believe Paul and welcome him into their community to teach them “the Torah and its laws.”¹¹²

In both accounts, al-Qarāfi claims that Paul uses his newfound influence in the Christian community to import new doctrines that are contrary to the teachings of Jesus. He gathers four men to himself to receive his new revelation: Ya‘qūb, Naṣṭūr, Malkūn, and “Mu‘min” (the Believer). When the Christian community splits after Paul’s death, the first three men become the namesake figures of the three branches of Christianity that early Muslims knew in the Middle East: Ya‘qūb (Jacobites), Naṣṭūr (Nestorians), Malkūn (Melkites).¹¹³ Like Sayf, al-Qarāfi claims that Paul teaches these men new doctrines about Jesus that elevate him to divine status.¹¹⁴ In al-Qarāfi’s account, Paul teaches that Jesus is the son of God, Jesus was God incarnate, Mary is the consort of God, and God is the third

¹⁰⁹ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286. See also Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 180.

¹¹⁰ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286.

¹¹¹ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286.

¹¹² Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 288.

¹¹³ Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 180. See also van Koningsveld, “Islamic Image of Paul,” 205.

¹¹⁴ Sayf, *Ridda*, 178. The same story that Sayf and al-Qarāfi include in their accounts, that of Paul teaching new doctrines, is an essential element of the *tafsīr* literature. However, the fourth individual, the believer, does not appear in the *tafsīr* accounts. He only appears in the accounts of Sayf and al-Qarāfi.

of three (cf. Q 9:30; 5:73; 6:101).¹¹⁵ That Paul allegedly imported *these* doctrines into Christianity, as opposed to other doctrines, is no accident. The divinity and sonship of Jesus, the incarnation, and the doctrine of the Trinity were central issues in Christianity, but they were also in direct conflict with the Qur’ān. Al-Qarāfī appears to claim that Paul taught these non-Qur’ānic teachings to indicate that they were not part of Christ’s original religion.¹¹⁶

In addition to these doctrines, Paul also, according to al-Qarāfī, changes the direction of prayer (*qibla*) and does away with the Old Testament prohibitions against consuming unclean animals.¹¹⁷ Paul changes the Christians’ prayer direction away from the Temple of Jerusalem toward the true east, al-Qarāfī claims, based on his observations of the constellations.¹¹⁸ Then, according to al-Qarāfī, Paul does away with the Old Testament prohibitions against certain foods, what al-Qarāfī calls the “forbidden things,”

¹¹⁵ The claim that Paul introduced the doctrine of the Trinity is a common feature in the *tafsīr* accounts, though the trinitarian formula is Qur’ānic rather than biblical: Jesus, Mary, and Allah. Muslim commentators claim that Paul taught that Mary was a god alongside Allah. Al-Qarāfī is the only author I have found who says Mary was Allah’s “consort,” which seems to imply that Paul taught that Mary and Allah had physical relations because she was his consort. By using the term “consort,” al-Qarāfī may have only meant that Christians view Mary as equal to God, as his partner. However, the doctrine of Christ’s sonship appears in many corruption accounts, and the notion that Mary and Allah had physical relations is not foreign to Muslim views of Christianity. For example, in his *tafsīr*, al-Rāzī says that one reason Christians divided is because they interpreted the sonship of Jesus physically. See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-kabīr wa-mafātih al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 16:35–36, translation generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, November 29, 2023, <https://chat.openai.com/>.

¹¹⁶ Muslim commentators also assert that Paul imported these non-Qur’ānic teachings into Christ’s religion. For example, al-Tha’labī and al-Qurṭubī both allege that Christ’s followers were of one religion until Paul entered their community and taught them the Trinity and divinity of Jesus. See Abū Ishāq Aḥmad al-Tha’labī, *Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-’Arabī, 2002), 5:33, quoted in Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 164–65, hereafter Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 164–65; Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, trans. Aisha Bewley (Bradford, UK: Diwan, n.d.), 5:335–36.

¹¹⁷ Sayf and ‘Abd al-Jabbār also claim that Paul did away with practices Jesus observed. See Sayf, *Ridda*, 177–78; ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 86–90. This feature of the Pauline corruption narrative does not feature prominently in the *tafsīr*, perhaps because commentators were more concerned with Christian doctrines than Christian practices.

¹¹⁸ Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 288. See also King, “Qibla,” 5:82–88; Kimber, “Qibla,” 4:325–28.

and makes all foods permissible.¹¹⁹ By deciding to consume pork, the Christians had, according to al-Qarāfi, separated themselves from “the Torah and the Gospel and opposed God’s messengers.”¹²⁰ He uses multiple biblical passages to support his claim, including the prohibition against pig flesh (Lev 11:7–8), the story of the pigs drowning in the sea (Mark 5:1–14), and Jesus’s admonition not to cast pearls before swine (Matt 7:6).¹²¹ Even though al-Qarāfi appeals to the Torah and the Gospels in defense of his claim about pork, he dismisses the Christian justification of eating pork based on Peter’s dream (Acts 10:9–16) because dreams cannot overrule religious commands and because the account of Peter’s dream is part of the New Testament that, according to al-Qarāfi, had not been reliably transmitted.¹²²

One other charge al-Qarāfi levels against Paul, and one that ‘Abd al-Jabbār also includes, is that he causes the Christians to discontinue the practice of circumcision.¹²³ This element of al-Qarāfi’s narrative of Pauline corruption is not included in the two accounts noted previously, but the charge is made in al-Qarāfi’s broader response to the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*. He appeals to the story of Abraham in Genesis 17:1–27 as proof that the Christians, under the instruction of Paul, had abandoned what had been given to them.¹²⁴ As ‘Abd al-Jabbār says, “Christ only came to revive the Tawrāt and to establish

¹¹⁹ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 288. Though al-Qarāfi does not mention pork, that animal is what Muslim writers often have in mind when claiming Paul allowed the eating of unclean animals. Sayf’s account is comparable to al-Qarāfi’s account, in that he does not mention pork, but ‘Abd al-Jabbār writes that Paul allowed the eating of pork to ingratiate himself with the Romans. See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 101–3; Sayf, *Ridda*, 177.

¹²⁰ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 189.

¹²¹ Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 189.

¹²² See Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 189; cf. pp. 54–55, 166–69, and 224–25. Al-Qarāfi appears to use portions of the Bible selectively, only using portions that support his claims. In chap. 5 I will discuss this phenomenon further, and how the allegation of Pauline corruption relates to the broader Muslim doctrine of *tahrīf*, the corruption of Christian scriptures.

¹²³ See Cucarella’s analysis of this accusation in Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 186–89. See also ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 87–90.

¹²⁴ Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 186–87.

it,” which is why Jesus was circumcised¹²⁵—which is the same argument al-Qarāfi makes about Jesus. Thus, like ‘Abd al-Jabbār, al-Qarāfi equates abandoning circumcision to abandoning the Torah that Jesus and his forebears followed.

One individual who does not accept Paul’s teachings as new revelation from Jesus is “Mu’min” (the believer). This character does not appear often in corruption accounts—only in the accounts of Sayf and al-Qarāfi—but he is an important figure and the personification of a foundational Muslim claim about the religion of Jesus and all the prophets, namely that a remnant of faithful believers maintained the truth of Jesus and became the forerunners of Islam.¹²⁶ According to al-Qarāfi, the believer recognizes that Paul’s teaching is a departure from the religion of Jesus. Al-Qarāfi says the believer declares a curse on the other men, saying Paul “has attempted nothing other than to corrupt you! We were the companions of the Messiah before him. We saw Jesus (peace be upon him) and we transmitted his words. This one is only leading you astray.”¹²⁷ The words of the believer in al-Qarāfi’s account capture the essence of the Pauline corruption narrative: the people who followed Jesus had their religion corrupted by someone (Paul) who did not know Jesus or his teaching. When the believer refuses to follow Paul’s teaching, al-Qarāfi says, Paul’s followers persecute them, forcing them to flee to Syria where they continue to follow the teachings of Jesus.¹²⁸ For al-Qarāfi, people who remained faithful to Jesus’s religion were proto-Muslims, people who believed the same basic message that all Muslim

¹²⁵ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 87–88.

¹²⁶ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 288–89; Sayf, *Ridda*, 179. For ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s description of how the people who remained faithful to Christ’s teachings suffered persecution, see ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 111. On the faithful Christians being forerunners of Islam, see Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity,” 1:43. See also Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islām and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993), 20–21; Muḥammad Azizan Sabjan and Noor Shakirah Mat Akhir, “Early Christian Sects and Schisms in Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal: A Study on Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrestānī,” *Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* 8 (2015): 27.

¹²⁷ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 289.

¹²⁸ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 289.

prophets had taught, including Jesus and Muhammad.¹²⁹ Later, when Muhammad began his preaching, the descendants of the original believers accepted Muhammad as the proclaimer of the same religion Jesus had preached.

Like Sayf and ‘Abd al-Jabbār, al-Qarāfī writes from the assumption that the religion of Jesus was not the religion of Paul.¹³⁰ Moreover, for al-Qarāfī, the religion of Jesus was lost *because of* Paul. Al-Qarāfī depicts Paul as a devious schemer intent on destroying Christianity. He was willing, as al-Qarāfī claims, to do anything to earn the Christians’ trust, infiltrate their community, and corrupt their religion. Paul, then, for al-Qarāfī, is the enemy of truth *par excellence* and the enemy of Jesus’s true followers.

Conclusion

My original contribution to the study of alleged Pauline corruption is to bring new material into conversation with the accounts that have already received noticeable scholarly analysis. To do so, I first needed to lay the foundation of what has already been written on Paul in Islam, which is why I focused this chapter on the corruption accounts of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī. Their accounts are far more detailed than the accounts of other writers that I will examine in chapter 3, which is perhaps why so much recent scholarship has been devoted to them.

The reason these four accounts (two from al-Qarāfī) are so detailed is perhaps related to the purpose of each author’s writings. Both al-Qarāfī and ‘Abd al-Jabbār include accounts of alleged Pauline corruption in larger works devoted to defending Muhammad’s prophethood and critiquing Christian claims. Sayf’s account is different, in that it appears in a history of the early Muslim movement, but the immediate context is a warning about the dangers of sectarianism and Ibn Saba’, whom Sayf describes as the chief culprit responsible for the Sunni-Shī’ī conflict. Thus, all three authors refer to Paul in the context

¹²⁹ See ‘Alī, *Religion*, 165–98; Rahman, *Islam*, 26; Martin, *Islam*, 30–33; van Koningsveld, “Islamic Image of Paul,” 209; Quṭb, *Shade of the Qur’ān*, 1:308–13.

¹³⁰ See Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 180.

of critiquing other religious movements. Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi may have determined to write detailed accounts of alleged Pauline corruption to bolster their critiques of Christianity (or Saba’īya for Sayf). Conversely, most of the accounts I discuss in chapter 3 do not appear in polemical works, but instead are found in biographical writings, histories, and *ḥadīth*, which do not appear to have a critique of Christianity or defense of Muhammad as their main purpose.¹³¹

These four accounts are representative of the broader tradition of Pauline corruption, and they provide examples of features that are common to many accounts. Despite being written by three different men from different times, locations, and religious-political contexts, the accounts from Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi are remarkably similar in their claims. As noted earlier in the chapter, Sayf and al-Qarāfi appear to have expanded the same Jewish tradition recorded in the *Life of Jesus* with additional details and accusations against Paul. ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s account of Pauline corruption is markedly different from Sayf’s and al-Qarāfi’s, though he does make the same basic assertion that Paul changed the religion of Jesus.¹³² The similarities among the accounts seem to indicate that the authors were aware of multiple traditions of Pauline corruption and crafted their own versions as suited their respective concerns. The differences in the three accounts, conversely, appear to indicate that Muslim writers were drawing not from written accounts, but from a collection of memorized stories of Paul.¹³³ Furthermore, the fact that ‘Abd al-

¹³¹ The two exceptions are Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) and al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153), both of whom refer to Paul in their critiques of other religions, as I will discuss in the next chapter. However, the brevity of their references to Paul may be a result of the broad focus of their books. Attempting to critique multiple religious movements in the same text may have prevented them from crafting more elaborate narratives of alleged Pauline corruption. They may also have assumed that their Muslim readers knew about the Pauline corruption narrative and chose to focus their writings on other religious groups.

¹³² See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 98–103. On the influence of the *Life of Jesus* on ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *Critique*, see Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 233–36. Reynolds observes that the *Life of Jesus* and the *Critique* are fundamentally different but that some features of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s story do appear to be drawn from the *Life of Jesus*. Conversely, Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 182, says that ‘Abd al-Jabbār modified a different Jewish story, not the *Life of Jesus*.

¹³³ Ibrahim notes that Muslim historians appear to have relied on a “shared pool of memory” that they used selectively to narrate their accounts. Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 16. On the ability of a

Jabbār, Sayf, Ibn Ḥazm, and many Muslim commentators appear to be familiar with some version of the corruption account in the *Life of Jesus* is indication that the story was broadly circulated among Muslims.¹³⁴

The tradition of alleged Pauline corruption, therefore, does not appear to be bound by geography, time, or sectarian affiliation. The three authors work from the same assumption that medieval Christianity is not identical to the original religion of Jesus, as evidenced by Christian worship of Jesus and belief in the doctrine of the Trinity, and Christian practices related to circumcision and consuming pork. All three men allege that the cause of this deviation from Christ's religion was Paul, a devious schemer who determined to trick his way into the Christian community and lead the people astray into false doctrines and practices.

While the accounts from Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī demonstrate the consistency of major claims made against Paul, they also demonstrate the diversity that appears in the details of each account. No singular account of alleged Pauline corruption exists, but instead, multiple accounts exist. Each account is unique and may contain details not found in other accounts. For example, as I noted, ‘Abd al-Jabbār includes the story of Paul's arrest and threatened beatings, while I have not found the story in any other account. He also describes Paul's alleged pandering to the Roman Christians, especially the women, agreeing with all that they say and allowing them to change their practices. In Sayf's

tradition/narrative to become part of collective memory, Sarah Bowen Savant writes, “As a tradition accumulates weight and authority, it shapes collective agreements about the past, thereby creating memories.” Sarah Bowen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2013), 4. Conversely, Donner prefers the terms “collective images” or “collective visions” of the past. He writes that a “collective vision” develops when members of a community share memories of past events. The individual memories are shared, combined, and adjusted as they interact with other memories, producing a collective vision of an event. See Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginning of Islamic Historical Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1998), 138–39.

¹³⁴ Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 197. See also Philip Alexander, “The *Toledot Yeshu* in the Context of Jewish-Muslim Dialogue,” in *Toledot Yeshu Revisited*, edited by Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 138, for a discussion of the prevalence of the *Life of Jesus* among Jews living in the Muslim world. Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 197, posits that the migration of a Jewish story to Muslim writings is not difficult to imagine and perhaps occurred along the same channels as Muslim stories about the Israelite people.

account and one of al-Qarāfi's accounts, Paul enters the Christian community by appealing to a supernatural encounter with Jesus, but in al-Qarāfi's other account, Paul secretly memorizes a portion of scripture and then pretends that Jesus had imparted those words to him. Muslim writers make no attempt to follow a standard narrative of corruption, but instead appear willing to craft their own versions of the story. Even al-Qarāfi, who wrote two different accounts, made no attempt to harmonize them. Each account of alleged Pauline corruption was written as one potential explanation of how Paul allegedly corrupted the religion of Jesus. What matters most, it appears, is not the content of the narrative, but its purpose, which is why Sayf, 'Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi could write four different—sometimes conflicting—narratives of alleged Pauline corruption.

In the next chapter, I will interact with additional accounts of alleged Pauline corruption in Muslim historiography and bring them into conversation with the material from chapter 2. The writers I will examine work from the same basic assumption that Christianity is not the religion of Jesus due to the corrupting activities of Paul. However, some of these accounts differ from the accounts of Sayf, 'Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi in that they do not detail how Paul allegedly corrupted Christianity. Instead, they appear to assume known stories about Paul, so they describe his character and his eternal punishment instead of his specific activities. As such, these additional accounts further support my earlier observation that Muslim writers developed unique versions of the Pauline corruption account and did not seek to harmonize them with other accounts.

CHAPTER 3

ALLEGED PAULINE CORRUPTION IN MUSLIM HISTORIOGRAPHY

In chapter 2 I laid the foundation for this dissertation; that is, the preliminary work that modern scholars have produced on the accounts of alleged Pauline corruption from Sayf ibn ‘Umar, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi. Now, I will turn my attention to corruption accounts in Muslim historiography, which refers not merely to historical events or the documentation of said events, but rather to writing about history.¹ The references to Pauline corruption that I will examine in this chapter come from multiple genres of Muslim writing, such as *ḥadīth*, polemics, biography, and history, each with its own field of corresponding scholarship. However, though each of these genres is unique, I argue that they fit within the broader term “historiography” because they are attempts by Muslims to write history, either as they believed it happened or as they desired their audience to believe it happened.² Each of the authors in this chapter make claims about early Christianity and Paul’s alleged activities, and in so doing propose a version of

¹ Chase Robinson observes that the term “history” can refer to the past or to one’s thinking, teaching, and writing about the past. “Historiography,” he says, is a more precise term because it refers only to writing about the past. Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), xvi. Ayman S. Ibrahim likewise acknowledges that historiography is not the same thing as history. In his text on conversion in Muslim historiography, he writes that his goal is not to analyze actual events but to investigate how Muslim writers described those events. See Ayman S. Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam: Competing Themes in Early Islamic Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2021), 2. Andrew Rippin writes that actual history, meaning the events themselves, has become “totally subsumed within later interpretation and is virtually, if not totally, inextricable from it.” Andrew Rippin, “Literary Analysis of Qur’ān, *Tafsīr*, and *Sīra*,” in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1985), 156. See also Fred Donner, on the early Islamic historiographical tradition, especially his discussion on how a particular group or subcommunity—and by extension, author—will have its own vision of the past. Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginning of Islamic Historical Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1998), 125–46.

² Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 22.

history that suits their respective religious context and purpose of writing.³ As with the accounts of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī, the consensus of writers I examine in this chapter is that Paul is the corruptor of Christ’s religion.

Before beginning my analysis of the historiographical accounts, I must acknowledge that not all the accounts in this chapter contain explicit references to alleged Pauline corruption. Only the first four authors—Ibn Qūlawayh, Ibn Bābawayh, Ibn Ḥazm, and al-Shahrastānī—appear to make direct references or allusions to Pauline corruption. The remaining four authors—Ibn Hishām, al-Ya’qūbī, al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn ‘Asākir—appear to be retellings of biblical stories through a Muslim lens. I have chosen to include these additional accounts in this dissertation because they contribute to a better understanding of what texts or traditions early Muslim writers may have been aware of and what claims they made about Paul. Also, because some of the accounts lack any explicit reference to alleged corruption, they may also indicate that the corruption narrative was not universally known or accepted throughout the Muslim world.

Ibn Qūlawayh (d. 977)

Abū al-Qāsim Ja‘far al-Qummī, known as Ibn Qūlawayh, was a grammarian and scholar of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* born in today’s northwestern Iran in the early tenth century. As a youth he traveled to Baghdad to study the Qur’ān, then later moved to Syria to work as a private tutor.⁴ Throughout his life, Ibn Qūlawayh had a reputation as a scholar and an expert in all branches of religious knowledge, as well as morals and customs.⁵ His

³ In this way, historiographical accounts indicate more about the authors of the accounts than about the events they described. See Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 2. They are, as Robinson observes, a representation of history rather than a record, and that representation is based on later writers’ circumstances and objectives. See Chase Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), viii. See also Rippin, “Literary Analysis,” 156, where he states that historiographical accounts are “the existential records of the thought and faith of later generations.”

⁴ A. Spitaler, “Ibn Khālawayh,” in *EP*, 3:824.

⁵ Spitaler, “Ibn Khālawayh,” in *EP*, 3:824. There exists some debate over whether Ibn Qūlawayh was Sumi or Shī‘ī. See Vinay Khetia, “A Study of the Textual History, Doctrinal Content and

writings were devoted to Arabic morphology and lexicography, Qur'ān readings, and *aḥādīth*. Ibn Qūlawayh died in Aleppo in 977.⁶

Ibn Qūlawayh's reference to the apostle Paul is found in his book *The Complete Pilgrimage/Visitation Guide*. This large collection of more than eight hundred *aḥādīth* is a handbook that records the favors and rewards people received who visited the tombs of the prophet and the imams.⁷ The tradition concerning Paul is attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, though the origin of the tradition cannot be known with certainty.⁸ Ja'far al-Ṣādiq was the sixth *imām* of Shiism and the last *imām* recognized by both Twelver and Isma'ili Shī'a.⁹ He lived in Medina and was known as an authority on *ḥadīth*, even appearing in Sunni collections.¹⁰ Ja'far al-Ṣādiq died in 765.¹¹ Ibn Qūlawayh's reference to Paul appears in a list of people who are allegedly in hell for teaching error to Allah's followers and opposing the faithful through the generations. It reads as follows:

I asked, "And who are they?" Imam (asws) replied, "Bulis who taught the Jews ' . . . *the Hand of Allah is tied up*' (Quran 5:64) . . . Nastoos who taught the Christians that Isa (as) was '*The Messiah is the son of Allah*' (Quran 9:30) and that they are three . . . Firoan of Musa (as) who said, '*I am your lord, the most high*' (Quran 79:24) . . . Numrood who said, 'I have overpowered all within the earth and

Philosophy of Twelver Shī'ī Liturgy from the Period of the Imāms to 'Abbās al-Qummī (d. 1359/1940)" (PhD diss., McMaster University, 2022), 222.

⁶ Spitaler, "Ibn Khālawayh," in *EF*, 3:824, says he died in 980.

⁷ See Andrew J. Newman, *Twelver Shiism: Unity and Diversity in the Life of Islam, 632 to 1722* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2013), 60–62; Khetia, "Study of Twelver Shī'ī Liturgy," 223–36.

⁸ See M. G. S. Hodgson, "Dja'far al-Ṣādiq," in *EF*, 2:375.

⁹ He was born sometime between 700 and 703 in Medina, and his mother was the great-granddaughter of Abū Bakr. See Hodgson, "Dja'far al-Ṣādiq," in *EF*, 2:374; Ron P. Buckley, "Ja'far al-Ṣādiq," in *EF*, accessed November 18, 2023, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_32681.

¹⁰ Buckley, "Ja'far al-Ṣādiq," in *EF*, accessed November 18, 2023, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_32681. See also Hodgson, "Dja'far al-Ṣādiq," in *EF*, 2:374.

¹¹ Hodgson, "Dja'far al-Ṣādiq," in *EF*, 2:374. For further study on Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990), 82-90; S. H. M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000), 259–88; John B. Taylor, "Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, Spiritual Forbear of the Sufis," *Islamic Culture* 40 (1966): 97–113; Robert Gleave et al., "JA'FAR AL-ṢĀDIQ," in *EIR*, accessed November 18, 2023, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_3796.

killed those in the heaven' . . . the killer of Ameerul Momineen (asws) . . . the killer of Syeda Fatima (sa) and Mohsin (as) . . . the killers of Hasan (asws) and Hussain (asws) . . . as well as Muawiyah (la) and Amr ibn As, each has no hope of salvation . . . and anyone who incited hatred against Us, who helped Our enemies against Us—either with his tongue, wealth, or hand—will also be with them.”¹²

Paul is included in the list alongside other controversial figures in Islamic history, or at least in an Islamic understanding of history. Nimrod was the son of Cush and great-grandson of Noah and is first mentioned in the “Table of Nations” (Gen 10:8–12), where he is described as “a mighty hunter before the LORD.”¹³ He is not named in the Qur’ān, but may be the king who argues with Abraham in *sūra* 2:258 (cf. Q 26:68 and 29:34).¹⁴ According to *sūra* 2:258, Abraham claims that Allah alone has the power to give life and death, but the unnamed king (Nimrod) refuses to humble himself before Allah. Instead, he argues he also can give life and death. The unnamed king represents pride and arrogance before Allah, and opposition to Allah’s true followers, so Ibn Qūlawayh includes him in the list of people in hell.¹⁵

In addition to Nimrod, Ibn Qūlawayh refers to the Pharaoh during the time of Moses, the one who raised himself up and said, “I am your highest Lord” (Q 79:24).¹⁶

¹² Al-Qummī (Ibn Qūlawayh), *Kamil al Ziarat*, trans. Syed Jazib Reza Kazmi (Lahore, Pakistan: Wilayat Mission, 2014), 482, emphasis original.

¹³ He is also listed in the genealogy of Adam to Abraham in 1 Chron 1, with the description of being “the first on the earth to be a mighty man” (v. 10). In Mic 5:6, “Nimrod” is used as a synonym for Assyria. For further study on Nimrod, see W. Creighton Marlowe, “Nimrod,” in *EDB*, 965–66; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 448–52; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990): 337–40; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987): 222–24.

¹⁴ Ibn Kathīr identifies the king as Nimrod. See *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, abridged under the supervision of Shaykh Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2003), 2:35–37. Conversely, Sayyid Quṭb acknowledges that the story does not name the king “because mentioning it will not add to the moral of the story.” Sayyid Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, trans. and ed. M. A. Salahi and A. A. Shamis (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999), 1:356.

¹⁵ Ibn Kathīr writes that Nimrod denied the existence of a god other than himself. See Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2:36.

¹⁶ The Qur’ānic story of Pharaoh is comparable to the biblical account in that Pharaoh exalts himself and refuses to listen to God’s command. See Thomas B. Dozeman, “Book of Exodus,” in *EDB*, 443–44; William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey*:

Allah sent Moses to the pharaoh with signs, but Pharaoh would not believe them (Q 3:11; 7:103–141; cf. 17:101–2). Pharaoh persecuted the Israelites and made their lives difficult (Q 14:6). He would not recognize Allah’s authority, so Allah brought judgment upon Pharaoh and his people and rescued the Israelites (Q 2:49–50; cf. 8:52–54; 10:75, 90).¹⁷

In addition to Pharaoh, Ibn Qūlawayh mentions the people who fought against Fatima and her sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn.¹⁸ According to the traditional account, upon the death of Muhammad in 632, Fatima supported ‘Alī as the new caliph, opposing Abu Bakr. Her support for ‘Alī, as well as the support of other Muslims who believed ‘Alī to be the rightful caliph, led to two civil wars and the ultimate death of ‘Alī, al-Ḥusayn, and al-Ḥasan.¹⁹ Ibn Qūlawayh appears to demonstrate Shī’ī sympathies by including people who opposed ‘Alī as caliph alongside nefarious characters like Nimrod and Pharaoh. Just as people had opposed Allah’s true followers in the past, implies Ibn Qūlawayh, so they opposed the party of ‘Alī.

Concerning Paul’s efforts to oppose Allah, Ibn Qūlawayh claims that Paul taught the Jews that “the hand of [Allah] is tied.”²⁰ This phrase is a reference to *sūra* 5:64, in

The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996): 52–62.

¹⁷ See Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1:224–27. On Pharaoh in the Qur’ān see Eric Ormsby, “The Faith of Pharaoh: A Disputed Question in Islamic Theology,” *Studia Islamica*, nos. 98/99 (2004): 5–28; Andrew C. Smith, “Moses and Pharaoh’s Magicians: A Discursive Analysis of the Qur’anic Narratives in the Light of Late Antique Texts and Traditions,” *JQS* 20, no. 1 (2018): 67–104; C. Umhau Wolf, “Moses in Christian and Islamic Tradition,” *Journal of Bible and Religion* 27, no. 2 (April 1959): 102–8.

¹⁸ See L. Veccia Vaglieri, “Fāṭima,” in *EI*², 2:841–50.

¹⁹ For a survey of the early decades following Muhammad’s death, including the battle for the caliphate and the two Islamic civil wars, see Najam Haider, *Shī’ī Islam* (New York: Cambridge University, 2014): 53–83; Marshal G. Hodgson, *The Classical Age of Islam*, vol. 1 of *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974), 187–230; ‘Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Shī’ite Islam*, trans. and ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York, 1977), 39–73; Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997); Fred Donner, “Modern Approaches to Early Islamic History,” in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. Chase F. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2011), 1:625–47; Martin Hinds, *Studies in Early Islamic History*, ed. Jere Backharach, Lawrence Conrad, and Patrica Crone (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1996).

²⁰ Syed Kazmi’s translation uses the name Bulis (*Būlus*), which is the Arabic name for Paul.

which the Jews claim that “the hand of [Allah] is chained” or tied, which could indicate a limitation on generosity. The larger context of the verse is an indictment against Jews and Christians for their disbelief of Allah’s message and messenger. The Jews have “already entered in disbelief and will depart in it” (Q 5:61). The rabbis and teachers do not “forbid them from their saying what is a sin and (from) their consuming what is forbidden” (Q 5:63). In his commentary on *sūra* 5:64, Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) condemns the Jews for their false teaching, writing that they should be “cursed for what they uttered.”²¹ Allah’s hands, Ibn Kathir asserts, are “widely outreached. He spends as He wills.”²² The accusation from the Jews, according to Ibn Kathir, is that Allah is a miser, one who hoards wealth and does not give generously to others. He invokes “Allah’s continuous curses” on them “until the Day of Resurrection” because Allah is “far holier than what they attribute to Him.”²³ Likewise, Sayyid Quṭb writes that the Jews’ statement of Allah’s hands being tied ‘is the outcome of the Jews’ wrong concept of [Allah], limitless is He in His glory.’²⁴ Ibn Qūlawayh identifies Paul as the alleged source of the doctrine described in *sūra* 5:64, though Paul is absent in the Qur’ānic text.

Just as Paul is blamed for teaching the Jews that God’s hands are tied, so Nestor is blamed for teaching the Christians that “Christ is the Son of God” and for introducing the doctrine of the Trinity, saying, “They are three.”²⁵ This feature of Ibn Qūlawayh’s account is unique. He blames Paul for the alleged corruption of the Jews rather than the Christians. However, Paul’s relation to Nestor is perhaps indication that Ibn Qūlawayh was combining details from multiple accounts of Pauline corruption. Nestor appears in Ibn Qūlawayh’s account as the source of the doctrines of Christ’s sonship and the Trinity.

²¹ Kathīr, *Ṭafsīr*, 3:221.

²² Kathīr, *Ṭafsīr*, 3:221.

²³ Kathīr, *Ṭafsīr*, 3:221.

²⁴ Quṭb, *Shade of the Qur’ān*, 4:171–76.

²⁵ Qummī, *Kamil al Ziarat*, 482.

Nestor does appear in many of the corruption accounts I examine in this dissertation, but not always as the source of Christian doctrines. Sometimes he is only the recipient of Paul's teachings. Other times the doctrines come from Nestor's mouth, but because of Paul's instructions. For example, al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 1078) asserts that Paul went to Jerusalem "but left Nestor as his lieutenant, after teaching him that Jesus, Mary, and God, are the three members of the Trinity."²⁶ In the account from al-Qarāfī (d. 1285), however, Paul gathers three men and gives them secret knowledge. One of the men, according to al-Qarāfī, was Nestor, who said, "The Messiah is the son of God Most High by way of mercy."²⁷ While Nestor is the one who says Jesus is the son of God, according to al-Qarāfī, the connection to Paul's secret knowledge seems certain. Al-Qarāfī appears to imply that the three men would never have thought new doctrines about Jesus *apart from* the efforts of Paul.

Ibn Qūlawayh's account is an example of how Muslim writers drew from multiple traditions related to alleged Pauline corruption. Paul and Nestor are two key figures in many of the accounts, but the details surrounding each of them are often different. Ibn Qūlawayh presented his version of a corruption account and identified both Paul and Nestor as the corruptors of Judaism and Christianity, respectively. As a result, says Ibn Qūlawayh, both men are condemned to hell for opposing God's truth.

Ibn Bābawayh (d. 991)

Commonly known as Shaykh al-Saduq, Ibn Bābawayh was known for his intellect and is recognized as a central figure in Twelver Shiism.²⁸ Little of his life is

²⁶ Al-Damīrī, *al-Hayāt al-hayawān al-kubrā* (Cairo: n.p., 1956), 2:143, quoted in S. M. Stern, "Abd al-Jabbār's Account of How Christ's Religion Was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs," *JTS* 19, no. 1 (1968): 178. Stern provides a combined translation of the account from al-Damīrī with additional words from al-Isfarāyīnī's account.

²⁷ Al-Qarāfī, *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira 'an al-as'ila al-fājira*, quoted in Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 286–90, hereafter Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 288.

²⁸ A. A. A. Fyzee, "Ibn Bābawayh(i)," in *EP*, 3:727.

known with certainty, though he was perhaps born in 923 or shortly thereafter in Khurāsān, a region covering portions of today’s Iran, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan.²⁹ As a youth he studied with Ibn Qūlawayh and became known for his writings on Shī’ī jurisprudence and *ḥadīth*.³⁰ Ibn Bābawayh died in 991.

Ibn Bābawayh’s reference to Paul is found in his book of reports called *The Rewards and Punishments of Deeds*, which describes actions that are morally right or wrong, as well as the spiritual reward or punishment that comes because of one’s actions.³¹ Ibn Bābawayh attributes his report on Paul to Muhammad ibn ‘Alī (d. 733), also known as Muhammad.³² Upon the death of his father in 712 or 713, Muhammad al-Bāqir became the fifth *imām* of the Twelver Shī’ī branch of Islam, but he was also known among Sunni Muslims, as his traditions feature in the writings of Ibn Ishāq and al-Ṭabarī.³³ Ibn Bābawayh’s tradition about Paul is a list of people who are said to be in the pit of hell for their denial of the truth and/or their actions to oppose Allah’s rule, and it reads as follows:

There is a valley of Hell called Saqar. It hasn’t taken a breath since the time Allah created it. If Allah had permitted it to take in the breath equal to the tip of a needle, it would have sucked all the people of earth with it and burnt them to ashes. The

²⁹ Fyzee, “Ibn Bābawayh(i),” in *EP*, 3:726. Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, 64, says he was born sometime around 918.

³⁰ Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, 64. See also Haider, *Shī’ī Islam*, 148; Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi’i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi’ism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1985), 174.

³¹ Ibn Bābawayh devotes 389 chapters to rewards for good deeds and 131 chapters to punishments for evil deeds. For more analysis of Ibn Bābawayh’s *Book of Reports*, see Bekir Kuzudişli, “Sunnī-Shī’ī Interaction in the Early Period: The Transition of the Chains of Ahl al-Sunna to the Shī’a,” *Ilahiyat Studies* 6, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2015): 7–45.

³² Al-Bāqir means “the one who splits knowledge open” or “the one who possesses great knowledge.” See E. Kohlberg, “Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Zayn al-’Ābidīn,” in *EP*, 7:397–98. See also Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi’i Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 37–41. Born in Medina 676 or 677 to a family of great spiritual ancestry for the Shī’a, Muhammad ibn ‘Alī’s mother was a daughter of al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī, making him a grandson of both al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn.

³³ Kohlberg, “Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Zayn al-’Ābidīn,” in *EP*, 7:398. In this role, al-Bāqir used his intellectual abilities and academic background to formalize Twelver thought. He was likely the first to formulate the basic doctrines of Twelver Shiism, such as the nature of the imamate passing from one imam to the next by divine command, the belief that all imams descending from the Fāṭimid line, and the belief that all imams have special knowledge and absolute spiritual and political authority. See also Lalani, *Early Shi’i Thought*, 58–95.

people of Hell seek refuge from its extreme heat, stink, filth and chastisement, which Allah has prepared for those who deserve Hell. There is a mountain inside it. All the residents of this mountain seek refuge from the extreme heat, stink, filth and chastisement of it, which Allah has prepared for them. Surely there is a ravine in this mountain. All the residents of this mountain seek refuge from the extreme heat, stink, filth and chastisement of this, which Allah has prepared for its residents. There is a well in that ravine and all the residents of this ravine seek refuge from the extreme heat, stink, filth and chastisement of this well, which is prepared by Allah for its residents. There is a serpent in that well. The residents of this well seek refuge from the filth, stink and poison of this serpent, which is made for the residents by Allah. There are seven boxes inside this serpent, out of which five are concerned with past Ummahs and two are related to this Ummah. . . . As far as the past five are concerned, they are [Cain]; for he murdered his brother [Abel], Nimrod for he fought with [Abraham] (a.s.) regarding the Lord and said that he gives life and death, [Pharaoh]; for he said that he was the supreme lord to his subjects, [A Jew]; for he made a group of people Jew and Paul, who made some people Christians and from this Ummah are the two desert Arabs (infidels).³⁴

Ibn Bābawayh’s account is comparable to that of Ibn Qūlawayh in that it lists famous people from history who are said to have opposed the truth of Allah. Nimrod and Pharaoh appear again in almost identical fashion. The difference concerning Paul is that Ibn Bābawayh blames him for “Christianizing the Christians,” whereas Ibn Qūlawayh blames him for being the “Jew who Judaized the Jews.”³⁵ In both cases, Paul is blamed for leading God’s people astray, which seems to indicate how the broader tradition of alleged Pauline corruption includes accounts that are not only different, but also conflicting, yet with no attempt to harmonize them.³⁶

By saying that Paul “Christianized” the Christians, Ibn Bābawayh operates from the standard Muslim belief that Jesus’s original religion was corrupted. He blames Paul for turning the original religion of Christ into the religion that medieval Muslims encountered. That blame is echoed by al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153), who writes that Paul “disordered his affair, made himself (Peter’s) partner, altered the bases of his knowledge, and mixed it

³⁴ Shaykh Sadooq (Ibn Bābawayh), *Sawaabul A’amaal & Iqaabul A’amaal*, trans. Syed Athar Husain Rizvi and Syed Maqsood Athar (Mumbai: As-Serat, 2008): 272–73.

³⁵ Sadooq, *Sawaabul*, 272–73; Qummī, *Kamil al Ziarat*, 482.

³⁶ For example, consider al-Qarāfī’s two accounts of alleged Pauline corruption. See Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 286–89.

with the arguments of the philosophers and the (evil) suggestions of his heart.”³⁷ ‘Abd al-Jabbār likewise notes that Paul “tore himself away from the religion of Christ and entered the religions of the Romans.”³⁸ According to Ibn Bābawayh, Paul earned a place in hell alongside the other purported malefactors of Islamic history for his efforts to corrupt the early Christians.

Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064)

Born in al-Andalus (today’s Spain) in the year 994, Ibn Ḥazm was the son of an important official and perhaps from a family recently converted to Islam from Christianity.³⁹ As a youth he learned the typical curriculum: Qur’ān, *ḥadīth*, law, history, grammar, rhetoric, and literature.⁴⁰ Ibn Ḥazm attempted to serve in politics but upset too many people in the political establishment, so he instead devoted himself to scholarship.⁴¹

³⁷ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. William Cureton (London: Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1842), quoted in William Montgomery Watt, “Ash-Shahrastānī’s Account of Christian Doctrine,” *Islamochristiana* 9 (1983): 251–52, hereafter Shahrastānī, *Kitāb*, 251–52. See also William Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 69.

³⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Said Reynolds and Samir Khalil Samir (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2010), 103.

³⁹ See Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 59–60, especially 59n264; Mahmud Ahmad et al., “Ibn Hazm on Christianity: An Analysis to His Religious Approaches,” *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 1, no. 4 (2011): 242; Darío Fernández-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise: Muslims, Christians, and Jews under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain* (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2016), 84; Ghulam Haider Aasi, “Muslim Understanding of Other Religions: An Analytical Study of Ibn Hazm’s *Kitāb al-Fasl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā wa al-Niḥal*” (PhD diss., Temple University, 1987), 46; W. Montgomery Watt and Pierre Cachia, *A History of Islamic Spain* (London: Routledge, 2017), 111ff.

⁴⁰ Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 60–61. His first teachers were women of the harem. Ibn Ḥazm writes of his early education, “I never sat with men until I was already a youth and my beard had begun to sprout. Women taught me the Holy Qur’an. They recited to me the poetry, trained me in calligraphy.” Quoted in Aasi, “Muslim Understanding,” 46, 49. See also Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), 3; R. Arnaldez, “Ibn Ḥazm,” in *EP*, 3:791.

⁴¹ See Ahmad et al., “Ibn Hazm on Christianity,” 242; Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, “Ibn Ḥazm,” in *CMR*, 3:137; Watt and Cachia, *History of Islamic Spain*, 111–12; Arnaldez, “Ibn Ḥazm,” in *EP*, 3:791; Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 61–63; Aasi, “Muslim Understanding,” 54ff; Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 8–9; Martin Whittingham, *A History of Muslim Views of the Bible: The First Four Centuries* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 150.

When he died in 1064, Ibn Ḥazm was a renowned intellectual and well-known critic of the Bible.⁴²

Ibn Ḥazm’s account of alleged Pauline corruption appears in his critique of other religions, *The Book of the Distinction Regarding Religions, Sects, and Heresies*.⁴³

Although the *Book of the Distinction* compares various religions to Islam, the work is more than a mere comparative religion text because the aim is polemical rather than descriptive.⁴⁴ In describing other religions, Ibn Ḥazm systematically details their alleged errors in light of the dogmas of Islam.⁴⁵ In the section on Christianity, Ibn Ḥazm takes up two central issues concerning Christians: a refutation of the doctrine of the Trinity and demonstration that Christian scriptures had been corrupted not only in meaning, but in the actual texts.⁴⁶ One reason the Christians had believed error and lost their scriptures, says Ibn Ḥazm, was because of the efforts of Paul. His account of alleged Pauline corruption is brief, though its basic premises mirror the more detailed accounts of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī. Ibn Ḥazm’s corruption account reads as follows:

Their rabbis on whose authority they have adopted their religion—the Tawrat as well as the Books of the Prophets (peace be upon them!)—agreed to bribe Paul the Benjaminite (may God curse him!). They ordered him to profess outwardly the religion of Jesus (peace be upon him) and to deceive his followers and to induce

⁴² Arnaldez, “Ibn Ḥazm,” in *EP*, 3:790; Vevian Zaki, *The Pauline Epistles in Arabic* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 250. See also Sala, “Ibn Ḥazm,” in *CMR*, 3:137; Watt and Cachia, *History of Islamic Spain*, 111–13; Whittingham, *Muslim Views of the Bible*, 150; Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 1.

⁴³ Whittingham, *Muslim Views of the Bible*, 151–53. See also Zaki, *Pauline Epistles*, 250; Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 65; Ahmad et al., “Ibn Hazm on Christianity,” 244; Aasi, “Muslim Understanding,” 81–83.

⁴⁴ Watt and Cachia, *History of Islamic Spain*, 113–14. See also Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 65.

⁴⁵ Arnaldez, “Ibn Ḥazm,” in *EP*, 3:796; Sala “Ibn Ḥazm,” in *CMR*, 3:141.

⁴⁶ According to Ibn Ḥazm, the Christian Scriptures (OT and NT) could not be preserved in their original purity because the original authors were persecuted and martyred, and the Christian community could not preach openly for three hundred years. See Aasi, “Muslim Understanding,” 148–49. I will discuss the Muslim claim of scriptural corruption in chap. 5. See Whittingham, *Muslim Views of the Bible*, 152–53; Sala, “Ibn Ḥazm,” 3:141–42; Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 13; Camilla Adang, “Medieval Muslim Polemics against the Jewish Scriptures,” in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), 152–53; Ahmad et al., “Ibn Hazm on Christianity,” 244–45.

them to follow the doctrine of his divinity. They told him: we shall take upon ourselves your sin. He was extremely successful, as is generally known.⁴⁷

Three basic components of Ibn Ḥazm's account require attention: the Jews' role in hiring Paul, Paul's motivation for corrupting the religion of Jesus, and the task assigned to Paul. In Ibn Ḥazm's telling of Paul's alleged corruption efforts, the Jews are the primary culprit. He asserts that the Jews agreed with one another to bribe Paul to corrupt Christianity.⁴⁸ No reason is given for why Paul should corrupt Christianity, but Ibn Ḥazm may have in mind Paul's concern that Christians were correct in their doctrine, such as in al-Tha'labī's account, or Paul's concern about the growing influence of Christianity, such as in Sayf's account.⁴⁹ Whatever the reason, Ibn Ḥazm claims the Jews agreed that the Christians needed to be countered. Moreover, Ibn Ḥazm describes the Jews telling Paul that they will take upon themselves his sin.⁵⁰ The Jews do not indicate what the sin would be, but they are perhaps referring to Paul's need to be deceitful and lie to the Christians. Thus, in Ibn Ḥazm's account, the Jews are willing to accept any consequences of Paul's sin for the greater good, the corruption of Christianity.

According to Ibn Ḥazm, the Jews bribe Paul to “profess outwardly the religion of Jesus (peace be upon him) and to deceive his followers and to induce them to follow the doctrine of his divinity.”⁵¹ In this account of alleged corruption, the Jews give Paul the idea to fake his conversion to Christianity so he can be accepted into the Christian community.⁵² Once Paul gains access to the followers of Jesus, according to Ibn Ḥazm,

⁴⁷ Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusi, *Kitāb al-fisal fi al-milal wa-al-ahwa' wa-al-nihal* (Cairo 1317-21) 2:221–22, quoted in P. S. van Koningsveld, “The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 211, hereafter Ḥazm, *Kitāb*, 211.

⁴⁸ Ḥazm, *Kitāb*, 211.

⁴⁹ Sayf ibn 'Umar, *Kitāb al-ridda wa-l-futūḥ*, I. pp. 132-35 and II, fols. 62a-64b, quoted in Anthony “Composition of Sayf,” 178, hereafter Sayf, *Ridda*, 175.

⁵⁰ Ḥazm, *Kitāb*, 211. See also Sayf, *Ridda*, 175.

⁵¹ Ḥazm, *Kitāb*, 211.

⁵² Compare Ibn Ḥazm's account to Paul's deceit in Sayf, *Ridda*, 175; Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286–87.

he is to “deceive them” and “induce them to follow the doctrine of [Christ’s] divinity.”⁵³ The doctrine of Christ’s divinity is one of the doctrines that conflicts most with the Qur’ānic portrayal of Jesus, and it appears in many accounts of alleged Pauline corruption. Authors of alleged corruption accounts unanimously assert that the doctrine was not original to Jesus but was imported into Christ’s religion by Paul.⁵⁴

Ibn Ḥazm’s detailed refutation of Judaism and Christianity in *Book of the Distinction* stands in contrast to the brevity of his treatment of alleged Pauline corruption. He gives a systematic treatment of Christianity and Christian Scriptures, alleging that the texts and the religion were both corrupted. Yet, Ibn Ḥazm is content to provide only a brief description of Paul’s alleged role in said corruption, perhaps based on the assumption that his readers were aware of the broader corruption tradition. He merely portrays Paul as a money-hungry liar willing to do great harm for his own advancement.

Al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153)

Al-Shahrastānī was a prominent theologian and philosopher born in the small city of Shahrastan, in today’s Republic of Turkmenistan, in 1086. As a youth he studied in Nishapur (today’s Iran) and then travelled to Baghdad at age thirty to study theology.⁵⁵

Al-Shahrastānī returned to Persia after his studies and worked in the service of the Saljūq

⁵³ Ḥazm, *Kitāb*, 211.

⁵⁴ For example, in al-Qarāfi’s account, the three kings who learn secret doctrines from Paul believe what he says “although [they] had not heard such a thing before that day.” See Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286–87. The doctrine of Christ’s divinity also appears frequently in the *tafsīr* literature, as in the accounts from al-Tha’labī and al-Qurṭubī. See Abū Ishāq Aḥmad al-Tha’labī, *Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-’Arabī, 2002), 5:33, quoted in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: Abd al-Jabbar and the Critique of Christian Origin* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 164–65, hereafter Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 164–65; Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, trans. Aisha Bewley (Bradford, UK: Diwan, n.d), 5:335.

⁵⁵ Diana Steigerwald, “Al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153 C.E.),” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed September 23, 2023, <https://iep.utm.edu/shahras/>. See also Muḥammad Azizan Sabjan and Noor Shakirah Mat Akhir, “Early Christian Sects and Schisms in Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal: A Study on Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī,” *Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* 8 (2015): 20; Thomas, “Al-Shahrastānī,” in *CMR*, 3:549; Adam R. Gaiser, “Satan’s Seven Specious Arguments: Al-Shahrastānī’s *Kitāb al-milal wa-n-niḥal* in an Isma’ili Context,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2008): 180.

ruler of Khurāsān.⁵⁶ He authored many works during this time, including a comprehensive theology and a book on different religious sects. Toward the end of his life, al-Shahrastānī returned to his native home where he died in 1153.

Al-Shahrastānī's reference to Paul appears in his book on religious sects, *The Book of Sects and Creeds*, which is a complete survey of Muslim and non-Muslim religious groups as well as Greek and Islamic philosophers.⁵⁷ In his section on Christianity, al-Shahrastānī gives a typical Muslim assessment of the religion, claiming Christianity is a distortion of true monotheism and Christians had refused to accept Muhammad's prophethood.⁵⁸ One reason the Christians had left the truth, says al-Shahrastānī, is because of Paul importing new doctrines. His account of Paul's actions reads as follows:

Paul, however, disordered his affair, made himself (Peter's) partner, altered the bases (*awḍā'*) of his knowledge, and mixed it with the arguments of the philosophers and the (evil) suggestions of his heart. I have seen a letter by Paul which he wrote to the Greeks (*Yūnāniyyīn*) (in which he said): "You think that the position of Jesus (peace upon him) is like the position of the other prophets, but it is not so; rather is his likeness the likeness of Melchizedek, who is king of peace (*salām*), to whom Abraham (peace upon him) was giving tithes, and who was blessing Abraham and anointing his head." Now (this) is surprising; it is reported in the Gospels that the Lord (may he be exalted) said, "You are the unique (*waḥīd*) son"; but how can he who is unique be like one of the human race?⁵⁹

Prior to his comments on Paul, al-Shahrastānī gives a summary of Christian doctrines concerning Jesus, including his ascension and second coming, as well as the Trinity. He then claims Peter had witnessed Jesus's crucifixion, after which Jesus

⁵⁶ Steigerwald, "Al-Shahrastānī." See also Thomas, "Al-Shahrastānī," in *CMR*, 3:549; Gaiser, "Satan's Seven Specious Arguments," 180.

⁵⁷ The approach al-Shahrastānī takes is to rank each non-Muslim sect or ideology based on its proximity to Islam, meaning how closely each group conforms to Islamic orthodoxy. For each group or ideology, al-Shahrastānī documents their claims and arguments and then highlights the irrational and illogical aspects of each religion, according to his own assessment. See Thomas, "Al-Shahrastānī," in *CMR*, 3:550; Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters*, 68; Sabjan and Akhir, "Early Christian Sects and Schisms," 22; Steigerwald, "Al-Shahrastānī."

⁵⁸ For example, al-Shahrastānī describes the three hypostases of the Godhead as well as the human and divine natures of Jesus. See Shahrastānī, *Kitāb*, 251; Thomas, "Al-Shahrastānī," in *CMR*, 3:552; Sabjan and Akhir, "Early Christian Sects and Schisms," 21–22, 35–36.

⁵⁹ Shahrastānī, *Kitāb*, 251–52. See also Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters*, 69.

designated Peter his successor because he was “the best of his disciples in knowledge, asceticism and conduct.”⁶⁰ However, whereas Jesus chose Peter to lead his followers, says al-Shahrastānī, Paul took advantage of Peter’s influence and “made himself (Peter’s partner)” so he could corrupt Christ’s religion.⁶¹

Al-Shahrastānī asserts that Paul “disordered his affair” by altering the bases of his knowledge and mixing it with “the arguments of the philosophers and the (evil) suggestions of his heart.”⁶² Without further details, one cannot know for certain what al-Shahrastānī is referring to, but the broader corruption narrative does provide a possible answer. Many Muslim writers, such as Sayf and al-Qarāfī, describe Paul’s background in Judaism.⁶³ Al-Shahrastānī may be implying that Paul knew the truth of Jesus’s teaching since Jesus was the prophet sent to the Jews but did not follow that truth. Instead, says al-Shahrastānī, Paul imported the “arguments of the philosophers” with his own evil suggestions.⁶⁴ Al-Shahrastānī does not describe what doctrines Paul created, though he perhaps meant those Christian doctrines that conflict with the Qur’ān, such as the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity.

While al-Shahrastānī’s reference to Pauline corruption lacks the detail found in the writings of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī, it does contain assertions about Paul that are consistent with the broader corruption narrative. Perhaps assuming common knowledge of the broader corruption narrative, al-Shahrastānī limits his comments on Paul to *what* Paul allegedly did rather than *how* Paul allegedly did it. At the end of his

⁶⁰ Shahrastānī, *Kitāb*, 251.

⁶¹ Shahrastānī, *Kitāb*, 251.

⁶² Shahrastānī, *Kitāb*, 251.

⁶³ See Sayf, *Ridda*, 175; Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 286–87.

⁶⁴ Shahrastānī, *Kitāb*, 251. Compare the reference to Paul importing philosophy to ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s account where he writes that Paul “tore himself away from the religion of Christ and entered the religions of the Romans. If you scrutinize the matter, you will find that the Christians became Romans and fell back to the religions of the Romans. You will not find that the Romans became Christians.” See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 103.

description of Christianity, al-Shahrastānī asserts that the Christians eventually split into seventy-two sects, but that the three most prominent were the Melchites, the Nestorians and the Jacobites. He does not describe how the Christians split into these groups, nor does he connect the splitting to Paul’s efforts. However, given that other Muslim writers blame Paul for the emergence of these same three sects, it seems that al-Shahrastānī may again be assuming common knowledge and providing only brief comments on Paul.⁶⁵ Still, the final conclusion from al-Shahrastānī is that Paul was an evil man who intentionally changed what he knew of the Old Testament and mixed it with philosophy and the “suggestions of his heart.”⁶⁶ As a result, for al-Shahrastānī, the truth of Christ’s religion was corrupted, and the Christians descended into error.

Non-Corruption References to Paul in Muslim Historiography

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, some of the accounts that I include do not appear to make explicit statements about Pauline corruption. Instead, they appear to describe biblical events as understood through a Muslim lens. I have chosen to include the accounts from Ibn Hishām, al-Ya’qūbī, al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn ‘Asākir because, though they do not reference Pauline corruption, they are still valuable to the broader focus of this study, which is the Muslim view of the apostle Paul. The accounts may also indicate that, though widespread, the Pauline corruption narrative was not universally known or accepted in the early Muslim world.

Ibn Hishām (d. 833)

Ibn Hishām was born and raised in Egypt, and he became known for his

⁶⁵ The accusation that Paul was responsible for Christianity splitting into three sects is a common feature of the *tafsīr* literature, as in the accounts from al-Samarqandī and al-Tha’labī. See Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-Samarqandī al-musammā Bahār al-’ulūm*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu’awwad et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyya, 1993), 1:423–24, translation generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, November 30, 2023, chat.openai.com/; Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 164.

⁶⁶ Shahrastānī, *Kitāb*, 252.

knowledge of genealogy and grammar.⁶⁷ He is most renowned for his biography titled *The Life of Muhammad*, which is an edited version of a text from Ibn Ishāq. Muhammad ibn Ishāq was born in Medina in about AD 704 and became known for his vast knowledge of reports about significant past events and *ḥadīth* transmission.⁶⁸ He trained in Alexandria and eventually settled in Baghdad where he served under the second ‘Abbāsīd caliph, Abu Ja’far al-Manṣūr (d. 775), and wrote his biography of Muhammad by commission of the caliph. Ibn Ishāq died in 767.⁶⁹ His biography of Muhammad no longer exists in its original form, but his student, al-Bakkā’ī (d. 799) preserved a recension of the work, which was later edited by Ibn Hishām, who omitted certain passages and added his own contributions.⁷⁰ The result is that the surviving biography of Muhammad is more a product of Ibn Hishām than Ibn Ishāq.⁷¹

The reference to Paul in Ibn Hishām’s biography of Muhammad does not mention alleged corruption of Christ’s religion. Instead, Paul’s name appears in a short summary of Jesus’s early followers and their fates. The description reads as follows:

Those whom Jesus son of Mary sent, both disciples and those who came after them, in the land were: Peter the disciple and Paul with him, (Paul belonged to the followers and was not a disciple) to Rome; Andrew and Matthew to the land of the cannibals; Thomas to the land of Babel which is in the land of the east; Philip to Carthage which is Africa; John to Ephesus the city of the young men of the cave;

⁶⁷ W. Montgomery Watt, “Ibn Hishām,” in *EP*, 3:800; Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 127.

⁶⁸ Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 121; See also Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 27; J. M. B. Jones, “Ibn Ishāq,” in *EP*, 3:810.

⁶⁹ Alfred Guillaume, introduction to *The Life of Muhammad*, by ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām and Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq, trans. Alfred Guillaume (1967; repr., Oxford: Oxford University, 2014), xiii–xiv. See also Claude Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity in Islamic Exegesis,” in *CMR*, 1:37.

⁷⁰ See Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 124; See also Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 132; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 38; Watt, “Ibn Hishām,” in *EP*, 3:800; Claude Gilliot, “Ibn Ishaq,” in *MIC*, 1:357; “Ibn Hisham, Abu Muhammad Abd al-Malik,” in *ODI*, 127; Aaron W. Hughes, *Muslim and Jew: Origin, Growth, Resentment* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 21.

⁷¹ See Gilliot, “Ibn Ishaq,” in *MIC*, 1:357; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 37–38; Watt, “Ibn Hishām,” in *EP*, 3:800; Guillaume, introduction to *The Life of Muhammad*, by Ibn Hishām and Ibn Ishāq, xli–xliii; Gilliot, “Ibn Ishāq,” in *MIC*, 1:357; Suleiman Mourad, “Christians and Christianity in the *Sīra* of Muḥammad,” in *CMR*, 1:57; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 25. For a discussion of the time gap between the life of Muhammad (d. 632) and the earliest biographies, which were written some 150–200 years later, see Hughes, *Muslim and Jew*, 21.

James to Jerusalem which is Aelia the city of the sanctuary; Bartholomew to Arabia which is the land of the Hijāz; Simon to the land of the Berbers; Judah who was not one of the disciples was put in the place of Judas.⁷²

Ibn Hishām asserts that Peter and Paul were together in Rome, but he makes a distinction as to their relationship to Jesus. Peter, he says, was a “disciple,” whereas Paul “belonged to the followers and was not a disciple.”⁷³ Ibn Hishām’s account appears to be a simple restatement of the biblical testimony. Paul is nowhere in the Bible called a disciple of Jesus, neither one of the twelve nor of the seventy-two.⁷⁴ He is instead an apostle of Jesus (Gal 1:1), a title Ibn Hishām does not use but al-Ṭabarī does.⁷⁵ Ibn Hishām says nothing about Paul’s supposed encounter with Jesus, his disingenuous conversion to Christianity, his alleged corruption of Christ’s religion, or his alleged role in causing Christian sectarianism, all common features of the broader corruption narrative. He merely distinguishes Paul from the disciples in a brief summary of early Christian figures.

Al-Ya’qūbī (d. 905 or later)

Aḥmad al-Ya’qūbī was a Shī’ī historiographer whose works represents some of the earliest historical writings in Arabic literature to survive.⁷⁶ Despite his prominence, a

⁷² Ibn Hishām and Ibn Ishāq, *Life of Muhammad*, 653. See also Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity in Islamic Exegesis,” 1:47.

⁷³ Ibn Hishām and Ibn Ishāq, *Life of Muhammad*, 653.

⁷⁴ For a list of the twelve disciples see Matt 10:1–4; Luke 6:12–16; cf. Acts 1:12–26. For the sending of the seventy-two disciples, see Luke 10:1–23. See also Peter K. Nelson, “Disciple,” in *EDB*, 348–49.

⁷⁵ See al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al. (Albany: State University of New York, 1987), 4:123. Five times Paul calls himself an apostle: Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 9:1–2; Gal 1:1; 1 Tim 2:7. See also Paul K. Moser, “Apostle,” in *EDB*, 78–79.

⁷⁶ Sean Anthony and Matthew S. Gordon, “Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya’qūbī: A Biographical Sketch,” in *The Works of Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya’qūbī: An English Translation*, ed. Matthew S. Gordon et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1:9; Dwight M. Donaldson, “Al-Ya’qūbī’s Chapter about Jesus Christ,” in *The Macdonald Presentation Volume*, ed. William Shellabear et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1933): 89. Al-Ya’qūbī was contemporary with the six compilers of Sunni traditions and his universal history was written twenty-five years before the first of the four books of Shī’ī traditions. See Donaldson, “Al-Ya’qūbī’s Chapter,” 90. See also J. Robson, “*ḥadīth*,” in *EI²*, 3:23–28; Amin Ehteshami, “The Four Books of Shi’i

complete biography of al-Ya'qūbī does not exist, which makes it difficult to know anything of his early life with certainty. What scholars have pieced together is based on other writers who cite al-Ya'qūbī and what can be inferred from reading his texts.⁷⁷ He is generally thought to have been born in Baghdad sometime around 820, but that date is only an informed guess.⁷⁸ He then worked in administrative posts for several ruling dynasties in Baghdad and Egypt before dying in 905 or later.⁷⁹ He wrote as both a political insider, someone working for the ruling government, but also a religious outsider, being Shī'ī in a Sunni context.⁸⁰

Al-Ya'qūbī's account of Paul appears in his *Book of History*, a universal history similar to that of al-Ṭabarī written around 872.⁸¹ In the first of two volumes, al-Ya'qūbī begins with the creation of the world and ends with the dawn of Islam. Of particular note is al-Ya'qūbī's chapter on Jesus in which he uses the canonical Gospels to supplement the Qur'ān, weaving the two texts together into one single narrative.⁸² Al-Ya'qūbī's description

Hadith: From Inception to Consolidation," *Islamic Law and Society* 29 (2022): 225–79; Anthony and Gordon, "Ibn Wāḍiḥ," 1:10.

⁷⁷ Anthony and Gordon, "Ibn Wāḍiḥ," 1:10. See also Sean Anthony, "Was Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya'qūbī a Shi'ite Historian? The State of the Question," *Al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 24 (2016): 18ff.

⁷⁸ Anthony and Gordon, "Ibn Wāḍiḥ," 1:10. See also Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 36–37.

⁷⁹ Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 37. See also Anthony and Gordon, "Ibn Wāḍiḥ," 12; David Thomas, "Al-Ya'qūbī," in *CMR*, 2:75; Anthony and Gordon, "Ibn Wāḍiḥ," 14; Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 28; Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 197.

⁸⁰ For an introduction to the debate concerning al-Ya'qūbī's sectarian leanings, see Anthony, "Was Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya'qūbī a Shi'ite Historian?," 15–41. Doubt exists as to whether or to what extent al-Ya'qūbī was Shī'ī.

⁸¹ See Thomas, "Al-Ya'qūbī," in *CMR*, 2:76; Tarif Khalidī, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Mas'ūdī* (Albany: State University of New York, 1975): 29. See also Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 38–39; William G. Millward, "Al-Ya'qūbī's Sources and the Question of Shi'a Partiality," *Abr-Nahrayn* 12 (1971–1972): 48. Al-Ya'qūbī is also known for a second famous work, a geography of the Arab world titled *Book of the Countries*. See Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 37; Anthony and Gordon, "Ibn Wāḍiḥ," 9; Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 198.

⁸² See Thomas, "Al-Ya'qūbī," in *CMR*, 2:76; Sydney Griffith, "The Gospel, the Qur'ān, and the Presentation of Jesus in al-Ya'qūbī's *Ta'rīkh*," in *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. John C. Reeves (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 150–51; Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 38; Donaldson, "Al-Ya'qūbī's Chapter," 89–90; Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 28.

of Paul includes his conversion and early teaching ministry. The account reads as follows:

Paul was the most violent of men against them and most damaging to them. He used to kill any of them whom he could, seeking them out in every place. He set out for Damascus to gather some people who were there. But he heard a voice calling to him, “Paul, how long will you persecute me?” He was so terrified that he could not see. Then Ananias came to him. He blessed him, until he departed and his eyes were healed. He began to stand in the synagogues, making mention of the Messiah and hallowing him. The Jews therefore wanted to kill him. So he fled from them and joined the disciples in summoning the people and in speaking as they spoke. He displayed such renunciation of this world and scorn for it that the apostles all gave him precedence over themselves and made him their head.

He would rise up and speak, recalling the experience of the Israelites and the prophets. He would recall the matter of the Messiah and would say, “Let us turn to the Nations, just as God said to the Messiah, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Nations, so that you should become a salvation to the corners of the earth.’” Every one of them spoke in favor of his opinion. They said that a law ought to be kept and that someone should be sent to every land to summon to this religion and to prohibit them from sacrificing idols, from fornication, and from eating blood.

Paul left for Antioch with two men to establish the religion of baptism. Then Paul returned. He was arrested and taken to the king of Rome. He stood up and spoke, mentioning the matter of the Messiah. Some people made a pact to kill him for corrupting their religion and for mentioning the Messiah and hallowing him.⁸³

Al-Ya’qūbī’s account appears to be a retelling of Paul’s life as recorded in the Book of Acts, which may indicate that al-Ya’qūbī had access to a copy of it while writing his account of Paul.⁸⁴ He begins with a description of Paul’s persecution of the Christians as a leader among the Jewish community (cf. Acts 8:1–3), which is also a common element of the corruption narrative and is included in the accounts of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī.⁸⁵ Al-Ya’qūbī then provides a description of Paul’s conversion and

⁸³ Al-Ya’qūbī, *The Works of Ibn Wadīh al-Ya-qūbī: An English Translation*, ed. Gordon, 2:343–44. Alternative translations available in Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 170–71; Bilal Muhammad, “Muslim Perspectives on St. Paul,” Berkeley Institute for Islamic Studies, February 9, 2020, <https://bliis.org/research/saint-paul-islam/>.

⁸⁴ See Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 28; R. Y. Ebied and L. R. Wickham, trans., “Al-Ya’qūbī’s Account of the Israelite Prophets and Kings,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29 (1970): 80–82.

⁸⁵ Sayf says that Paul, “being the king in those days killed the Christians, so they fled.” See Sayf *Ridda*, 175. ‘Abd al-Jabbār says that Paul “worked against the Christians.” See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 98. Al-Qarāfī says Paul was “massively intent on combating Christians and killing them.” See al-Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 286–87.

his purported supernatural encounter with Jesus.⁸⁶ As a result of this supposed encounter with Jesus and subsequent conversion, al-Ya'qūbī writes that Paul “displayed such renunciation of this world and scorn for it that the apostles all gave him precedence over themselves and made him their head,” which may be a misunderstanding of Paul’s prominence at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) or a Muslim assessment of Paul’s continuing prominence in the Christian church.⁸⁷

The remainder of al-Ya'qūbī’s account contains a detailed and uncommon description of Paul’s Christian preaching ministry, a feature I have not found in any other Muslim reference to Paul. After Paul’s conversion, says al-Ya'qūbī, he “began to stand in the synagogues, making mention of the Messiah and hallowing him,” something that caused the Jews to want to kill him.⁸⁸ Further, he claims that Paul’s preaching focused on the history of the Israelites and the prophets, and that Paul sought to call people to believe in the Messiah. Al-Ya'qūbī appears to be referring to Paul’s post-conversion preaching recorded in Acts 9:19–22.⁸⁹ After Paul regained his sight and strength, he immediately proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues in Damascus, saying, “He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). In addition, says al-Ya'qūbī, Paul exhorted his followers, the Christian community, to “turn to the Nations, just as God said to the Messiah, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Nations, so that you should become a salvation to the corners of the earth.’”⁹⁰ The

⁸⁶ Paul’s supernatural encounter on the Damascus Road is mentioned in the accounts from Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, al-Qarāfī (second account), and ‘Ali Ibn ‘Asākir, as discussed later in this chapter. See Sayf, *Ridda*,” 176; ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 99; Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 287–89; ‘Ali Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tarikh Medinat Dimishq*, 15:333, quoted in Muhammad, “Muslim Perspectives,” hereafter ‘Asākir, *Tarikh*, “Muslim Perspectives.” For the biblical accounts of Paul’s supernatural encounter, see Acts 9:1–19; 22:1–21; 26:9–23; cf. Gal 1:11–24.

⁸⁷ Ya'qūbī, *Works*, 2:343.

⁸⁸ Ya'qūbī, *Works*, 2:343–44.

⁸⁹ On Paul’s post conversion preaching, see David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 311–15; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 189–96.

⁹⁰ Ya'qūbī, *Works*, 2:343–44.

reference here is to Acts 13:47, where Paul rebukes the Jews at Antioch for not believing in Jesus. As a result, Paul’s ministry will be focused on Gentiles, and Paul cites Isaiah 49:6, which says, “I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Al-Ya’qūbī is the only author I have found who describes Paul’s concern for reaching non-Jews with the message of the Messiah, and he may be drawing from the record of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.⁹¹ In the biblical account, disagreement arises over Gentile inclusion in God’s plan of salvation and to what extent, if any, Gentile believers should be required to observe the Jewish laws, especially circumcision. Peter and Paul argue that this requirement would place an undue burden on the Gentiles who are saved not by keeping the law, but through faith (Acts 15:11). The council eventually agrees that Paul should continue preaching the gospel to the Gentiles and that they should not be required to keep the law (Acts 15:19). However, they should “abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:20). Finally, in the closing sentences of his account, al-Ya’qūbī describes Paul being arrested and extradited to Rome, which follows Acts 21:27–28:31.⁹² The only reference to “corruption” is when al-Ya’qūbī claims that some people made a pact to kill Paul for corrupting their religion and for hallowing the Messiah.⁹³ He perhaps has in mind the Jews who sought to kill Paul in Acts 23:12–22.

Al-Ya’qūbī’s account is unique in its treatment of Paul not only because it so often alludes to the Book of Acts, but also because it includes narrative elements that I have not found in other accounts, such as Paul’s post-conversion preaching and his

⁹¹ Muhammad, “Muslim Perspectives”; Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 171; Michael F. Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives of the Apostle Paul as a Narrative Framework for *Tahrīf*,” in *Arab Christians and the Qur’an from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period*, ed. Mark Beaumont (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 150. On the Jerusalem Council, see Peterson, *Acts*, 417–46; Bruce, *Acts*, 282–300.

⁹² Paul’s arrest and extradition to Rome also appears in the account from ‘Abd al-Jabbār. See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 99–100.

⁹³ Ya’qūbī, *Works*, 2:343–44.

emphasis on Gentiles.⁹⁴ The inclusion of these details is one example of the diversity of thought among Muslims concerning Paul. Each reference to Paul is unique, regardless of whether it includes an explicit claim of corruption. Like Ibn Hishām and al-Ṭabarī, al-Ya’qūbī makes no overt reference to alleged Pauline corruption, nor does he promote a theory of corruption for the biblical texts.⁹⁵ For this reason, Reynolds describes al-Ya’qūbī’s biography of Paul as “the faithful attempt of a historian to report what is known about the life of Paul” rather than a “polemical narrative aimed at proving a certain argument.”⁹⁶

Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923)

Born in today’s Iran in 839, al-Ṭabarī would become one of the most renowned historians and Qur’ān exegetes of the classical period.⁹⁷ As testimony of his intellect, al-Ṭabarī had memorized the Qur’ān by age seven, become an imām at age eight, and studied the traditions of Muhammad at age nine.⁹⁸ After travelling widely as a youth to learn from the leading figures of his day, al-Ṭabarī returned to Baghdad a respected scholar ready to begin his long academic career.⁹⁹ His death came in 923 after more than fifty years of scholarship, and he left behind some fifteen works on law, tradition, the Qur’ān, and

⁹⁴ Pulcini believes that al-Ya’qūbī considered the Jewish and Christian scriptures to be reliable, as evidenced by his extensive use of them in his writings. See Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 28. See also Ebied and Wickham, “Al-Ya’qūbī’s Account,” 80–82. In chap. 4 I will discuss the Muslim doctrine of *tahrīf* (corruption) as it relates to the Pauline corruption narrative. Early Muslims seemed more willing to use Jewish and Christian scripture than did later Muslims. Moreover, use of Jewish and Christian scripture did not automatically indicate that Muslim writers viewed them as authoritative.

⁹⁵ Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 29.

⁹⁶ Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 171.

⁹⁷ See C. E. Bosworth, “Al-Ṭabarī,” in *EP*, 10:11; Franz Rosenthal, introduction to *History of al-Ṭabarī*, by Al-Ṭabarī, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al. (Albany: State University of New York, 1989), 1:15–16, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “Qurānic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr,” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988): 48. For a description of al-Ṭabarī’s works, see Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 39–44.

⁹⁸ Bosworth, “Al-Ṭabarī,” 10:11. See also Rosenthal, introduction to Ṭabarī, *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 1:15–16.

⁹⁹ Rosenthal, introduction to Ṭabarī, *History*, 1:15–21.

history.¹⁰⁰

Al-Ṭabarī's reference to Paul is found in his universal history of the world titled *History of Prophets and Kings*.¹⁰¹ In this vast work, al-Ṭabarī describes the creation of the world, Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, Jesus, Muhammad, Muslim conquests, and early dynasties up to the year 915.¹⁰² The description of historical events centers on the birth of Islam, the most important event for al-Ṭabarī.¹⁰³ In the section on early Christianity and the earthly ministry of Jesus, al-Ṭabarī describes what he alleges happened to Jesus's disciples:

Among the apostles, and the followers who came after them were the apostle Peter and Paul who was a follower and not an apostle; they went to Rome. Andrew and Matthew were sent to the country whose people are man-eaters, a land of blacks, we think; Thomas was sent to Babylonia in the east, Philip to Qayrawan (and) Carthage, that is, North Africa. John went to Ephesus, the city of the youths of the cave, and James to Jerusalem, that is, Aelia. Bartholomew was sent to Arabia, namely, the Hijaz; Simeon to the land of the Berbers in Africa. Judas was not then an apostle, so his place was taken by Ariobus. He filled in for Judas Iscariot after the latter had perpetrated his deed.¹⁰⁴

At first glance, the passage bears resemblance to that of Ibn Hishām, though with one distinction concerning Paul. Ibn Hishām writes that Paul was a follower of Jesus and not a “disciple.”¹⁰⁵ Al-Ṭabarī likewise notes that Paul was a follower of Jesus, but he

¹⁰⁰ Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 42. For more detail on his words, see Ṭabarī, *History*, 1:80–134, 152–54.

¹⁰¹ Bosworth, “Al-Ṭabarī,” in *EP*, 10:13. See also “Tabari, Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Jarir al-,” in *ODI*, 309. Al-Ṭabarī is also known for his *tafsīr*, though it does not contain a reference to Paul. For further discussion of al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, see Devin J. Steward, “Consensus, Authority, and the Interpretive Community in the Thought of Muḥammad b. Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī,” *JQS* 18, no. 2 (2016): 130–79; Mustafa Shah, “Al-Ṭabarī and the Dynamics of *Tafsīr*: Theological Dimensions of a Legacy,” *JQS* 15, no. 2 (2013): 83–139.

¹⁰² Bosworth, “Al-Ṭabarī,” in *EP*, 10:13. Watt includes a helpful summary of the first thousand pages of al-Ṭabarī's history, showing how al-Ṭabarī focuses on Qur'ānic matters and then numerous converts to Islam in Iraq and Iran. See Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters*, 45.

¹⁰³ Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 35–36.

¹⁰⁴ Ṭabarī, *History*, 4:123.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Hishām and Ibn Ishāq, *Life of Muhammad*, 653.

clarifies that Paul was not an “apostle.”¹⁰⁶ Like Ibn Hishām, al-Ṭabarī acknowledges Paul in his reference to early Christian history, but he makes no mention of alleged corruption. However, that al-Ṭabarī was aware of at least one account of alleged Pauline corruption is probable, given his knowledge of and use of the works of Sayf.¹⁰⁷ For example, in the *History of Prophets and Kings*, al-Ṭabarī describes the murder of ‘Uthmān, and he includes the story of Ibn Saba’ and the Saba’īya movement, both taken directly from Sayf’s account.¹⁰⁸ Yet, when it came to early Christianity and Paul, al-Ṭabarī relied instead on the account from Ibn Hishām, for reasons unknown. Al-Ṭabarī does not include any reference to Christ’s followers being led astray, by Paul or anyone else, but that feature is paramount in Sayf’s account of early Christianity. Al-Ṭabarī may have chosen to overlook Sayf’s account of early Christianity altogether because he believed that not all of Sayf’s work was reliable, though he makes no statement to that effect.¹⁰⁹ Rather than describing alleged Pauline corruption, al-Ṭabarī merely provides a passing reference to Paul, which is unusual among all of the accounts that I examine in this dissertation.

¹⁰⁶ Ṭabarī, *History*, 4:123. Paul is not listed as one of the twelve men who were Christ’s disciples and original apostles (Luke 6:12–16), nor was he one of the twelve apostles after Christ’s ascension (Acts 1:12–26). However, he refers to himself as an apostle (Gal 1:1, 11–24) because he had encountered the risen Christ and been commissioned to his service. See A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 115–55; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 51–72; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 20–35.

¹⁰⁷ See Abbas Barzegar, “The Persistence of Heresy: Paul of Tarsus, Ibn Saba, and Historical Narrative in Sunni Identity Formation,” *Numen* 58 (January 2011): 210, 212. See also Bosworth, “Al-Ṭabarī,” in *IEP*, 10:13; Rosenthal, introduction to Ṭabarī, *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 1:6.

¹⁰⁸ See Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 107; Ṭabarī, *History*, 15:181–223; Barzegar, “Persistence of Heresy,” 212.

¹⁰⁹ See Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 107. His n27 lists several authors who critiqued Sayf’s traditions. See also R. Stephen Humphreys, introduction to *History of al-Ṭabarī*, by Al-Ṭabarī, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al. (Albany: State University of New York, 1990), 15:xvi–xvii, for Humphreys’s discussion of why al-Ṭabarī found Sayf so appealing, especially since many other historians did not draw from Sayf. As an example of a modern scholar who rejects the negative view of Sayf, see Ella Landau-Tasseron, “Sayf Ibn ‘Umar in Medieval and Modern Scholarship,” *Der Islam* 67, no. 1 (1990): 6–11. See also Barzegar, “Persistence of Heresy,” 210; Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 167–73, 186–88; Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 155, especially 155n18. For a discussion of how Sayf’s account appears in the work the Andalusian authors Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) and al-Qurtūbī (d. 1273), see van Koningsveld, “Islamic Image of Paul,” 210–16.

‘Ali Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 1176)

Born to a prominent Damascene family in 1105, ‘Ali Ibn ‘Asākir received an excellent education in Arabic grammar, Qur’ān recitation, and *ḥadīth*, and he became known for his keen mind and strong memory.¹¹⁰ Ibn ‘Asākir was a staunch proponent of traditional Sunni teachings and often wrote against Shī’ī doctrines.¹¹¹ He also helped promote commitment to jihad by publishing a collection of forty *aḥadīth* on the virtue of jihad.¹¹² Ibn ‘Asākir died in Damascus in 1176.

Ibn ‘Asākir’s reference to Paul is found in his *History of the City of Damascus*, a biographical dictionary that highlights the importance of Damascus by documenting important people who lived in or visited the city.¹¹³ More than a basic history of the region, Ibn ‘Asākir’s *History* is a theological work, one in which the author portrays Damascus as the central scene in Allah’s interaction with humanity.¹¹⁴ Paul appears in the work because of his purported conversion on the way to Damascus, and Ibn ‘Asākir attributes the story to Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. ca. 725).¹¹⁵ Wahb was a Yemeni narrator and collector of

¹¹⁰ See Suleiman A. Mourad, *Ibn ‘Askair of Damascus: Champion of Sunni Islam in the Time of the Crusades* (London: Oneworld, 2021): 1; Suleiman A. Mourad, “Ibn ‘Asākir,” in *CMR*, 3:683; James E. Lindsay, “‘Alī Ibn ‘Asākir as Preserver of ‘Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’: The Case of David b. Jesse,” *Studia Islamica* 82 (1995): 2; Suleiman A. Mourad, “Ibn ‘Asākir,” in *MIC*, 1:351; N. Elisséeff, “Ibn ‘Asākir,” in *EP*, 3:714.

¹¹¹ Elisséeff, “Ibn ‘Asākir,” in *EP*, 3:714. See also Mourad, *Ibn ‘Asākir of Damascus*, 34–38.

¹¹² Mourad, “Ibn ‘Asākir,” in *CMR*, 3:683; Elisséeff, “Ibn ‘Asākir,” in *EP*, 3:714; Mourad, *Ibn ‘Asākir of Damascus*, 47–52. See also Suleiman Mourad and James Lindsay, *The Intensification and Reorientation of Sunni Jihad Ideology in the Crusader Period: Ibn ‘Asākir of Damascus (1105-1176) and His Age, with an Edition and Translation of Ibn ‘Asākir’s The Forty Hadiths for Inciting Jihad* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

¹¹³ The full title is *History of the City of Damascus and the Mention of Its Merits, with Identification of Those Who Lived in It from among the Exemplars or Those Who Passed by or Lived in Its Environs*. See Mourad, “Ibn ‘Asākir,” in *CMR*, 3:683; Elisséeff, “Ibn ‘Asākir,” in *EP*, 3:714; Mourad, *Ibn ‘Asākir of Damascus*, 61–80; Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 165; Marianne Engle Cameron, “Sayf at First: the Transmission of Sayf ibn ‘Umar in al-Ṭabarī and Ibn ‘Asākir,” in *Ibn ‘Asākir and Early Islamic History*, ed. James E. Lindsay (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 2001), 62–77; Steven C. Judd, “Ibn ‘Asākir’s Sources for the Late Umayyad Period,” in Lindsay, *Ibn ‘Asākir and Early Islamic History*, 78–99.

¹¹⁴ See Lindsay, “‘Alī Ibn ‘Asākir,” 17, emphasis added. See also Mourad, *Ibn ‘Asākir of Damascus*, 67.

¹¹⁵ If original to Wahb, then the account represents one of the earliest Islamic mentions of Paul. However, no definitive connection between Wahb and Ibn ‘Asākir exists. See Judd, “Ibn ‘Asākir’s Sources,”

traditions who served as a salaried preacher, judge, and treasurer, and was known for his interest in Jewish and Christian scriptures and traditions.¹¹⁶ In Ibn ‘Asākir’s account, he does not claim Paul corrupted the religion of Jesus, but he does claim Paul opposed the message of Jesus. Ibn ‘Asākir’s account reads as follows:

Paul was from the leaders of the Jews. He was the harshest among them and the most spiteful among them in rejecting what the Messiah brought . . . he gathered soldiers and went to the Messiah to kill him and prevent him from entering Damascus. So, he (Jesus) sent a meteor to him, and an angel struck him with its wing and blinded him. Thus, he saw a proof for what he had brought . . . resulting in his belief and confirmation of it. So, he met the Messiah upon that, and he asked him to heal his eye. The Messiah said, “How long will you harm me and harm those with me?”¹¹⁷

Ibn ‘Asākir’s description of Paul is brief, and it appears to be a retelling of Paul’s supernatural conversion (Acts 9:1–19). He writes that Paul was a leader of the Jews, but he does not include any details about Paul persecuting Christians (cf. Acts 7:58; Gal 1:14).¹¹⁸ Instead, Ibn ‘Asākir alleges Paul was the harshest and most spiteful among the Jews in rejecting the teachings of Jesus, which may be his interpretation of Acts 26:9, where Paul says, “I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” Paul was so opposed to Jesus, says Ibn ‘Asākir, that he gathered soldiers and sought to kill Jesus and prevent him from entering Damascus. This feature of his account indicates that Ibn ‘Asākir was either unaware of the specific narrative details in the Bible or intentionally combined them. Nowhere in the Bible does Jesus travel to Damascus or state his intentions to do so. However, according to Acts 9:1–

78–99; R. G. Khoury, “Wahb b. Munabbih,” in *EP*, 11:34; Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity in Islamic Exegesis,” 1:36–37; Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 10–11.

¹¹⁶ Guillaume, introduction to *The Life of Muhammad*, by Ibn Hishām and Ibn Ishāq, xv; Khoury, “Wahb b. Munabbih,” in *EP*, 11:34; Michael Lecker, “Wahb ibn Munabbih,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum (Detroit, IL: Thomson Gale, 2007), 20:596; Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity in Islamic Exegesis,” 1:37; Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 10; Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur’ān and Muslim Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 141.

¹¹⁷ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 15:333, quoted in Muhammad, “Muslim Perspectives,” hereafter, ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, “Muslim Perspectives.”

¹¹⁸ See Sayf, *Ridda*, 176; ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 99; Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 287–89; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, “Muslim Perspectives.”

2, Paul was given permission to travel to Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them to Jerusalem.¹¹⁹ Ibn ‘Asākir may have confused these narrative details from Acts, or perhaps he modified the story of Paul to say he was seeking to kill Jesus rather than arrest Christians, based on the belief that Paul was the harshest among the Jews.¹²⁰

The next part of Ibn ‘Asākir’s story concerns Paul’s alleged encounter with Jesus on his way to Damascus, but the details are different from the accounts of Sayf and al-Qarāfi.¹²¹ According to Ibn ‘Asākir, Paul was on his way to Damascus when Jesus sent a meteor to him and then an angel struck him with its wing and blinded Paul.¹²² The detail about an angel striking Paul has an unknown origin, but the meteor may be based on Paul seeing a bright light from heaven (Acts 9:3). The most striking difference between Ibn ‘Asākir and other Muslim writers is that the story of meeting Jesus does not come from the mouth of Paul. Ibn ‘Asākir is the only writer I have examined who includes the encounter in his retelling of Paul’s biography, not in an account of alleged corruption.

Ibn ‘Asākir includes Paul in his history of Damascus because of the alleged supernatural encounter Paul had on his way to the city. The *History* is not a theological work, nor is it a polemical work. Ibn ‘Asākir may have left out any commentary on Paul’s corruption of Christianity because it was unrelated to Damascus or because he was unaware of the tradition. Ibn ‘Asākir’s narrative, therefore, is merely an indication of what one medieval Muslim knew about Paul, but it lacks allegations of corruption.

Conclusion

The three accounts from Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi formed the foundation of this dissertation because of their prominence in modern research, perhaps

¹¹⁹ See also Bruce, *Acts*, 180-81; Peterson, *Acts*, 298–303.

¹²⁰ See also Muhammad, “Muslim Perspectives,” where he observes that the account is a muddling of the post-resurrection period.

¹²¹ Sayf, *Ridda*, 176; Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 288.

¹²² ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, “Muslim Perspectives.”

based on their detailed treatments of alleged Pauline corruption. However, though the accounts I examined in this chapter contain fewer details of Paul's alleged actions, and some make no reference to corruption at all, they are still valuable to this dissertation. The first four accounts from Ibn Qūlawayh, Ibn Bābawayh, Ibn Ḥazm, and al-Shahrastānī do appear to make direct references to alleged Pauline corruption, and as such, they support the accounts of Sayf, 'Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī. Ibn Ḥazm and al-Shahrastānī both describe Paul as a liar and corruptor. For them, Paul allegedly fakes his conversion to Christianity out of greed and a desire for power. They do not provide details of Paul's alleged actions, but their brief treatments of Paul mirror the sentiment from the accounts of Sayf, 'Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī. Similarly, the accounts from Ibn Bābawayh and Ibn Qūlawayh describe the various people who are allegedly in hell for their efforts to oppose the truth. Both accounts list Paul among these people for allegedly importing new doctrines into the religion of Jesus.

The remaining four accounts from Ibn Hishām, al-Ya'qūbī, al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn 'Asākir, do not make any overt references to alleged Pauline corruption. Instead, they appear to be Muslim versions of Paul's biography based on the Book of Acts, though with notable features that do not mirror the biblical text. Al-Ya'qūbī and Ibn 'Asākir describe Paul's conversion, ministry, and opposition. Al-Ya'qūbī's description of Paul's preaching stands out for its clear references to the book of Acts and because it paints Paul as one who called people to follow the religion of Jesus. Ibn Hishām and al-Ṭabarī also do not allege corruption, but instead make only passing references to Paul in a list of figures from the life of Jesus.

While the historiographical references to Paul lack the detail that appears in the polemical writings and *tafsīr*, they are important to the broader understanding of early Muslim claims about Paul. Multiple versions of the same basic story appear across six centuries and all of them are different, which seems to indicate that Muslim writers were interacting with different traditions and crafting their own versions of the Paul story.

Moreover, because some of the historiographical references to Paul lack explicit claims of corruption, they may indicate that either the corruption narrative was not universally known in the Muslim world or not all Muslim authors felt compelled to transmit a version of the narrative. Many Muslims, as in the cases of Ibn Hishām, al-Ya’qūbī, al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn ‘Asākir, described Paul based on their understanding of biblical texts.

In the next chapter, I will turn my attention to accounts of alleged Pauline corruption in the *tafsīr* literature, which is commentary on the Qur’ān. Commentators, in addressing Qur’ān passages that accuse Christians of believing error, identify Paul as the source of that error. For this reason, the accounts I will examine in the next chapter will more closely align with the foundational accounts from Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi than with the accounts of this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

ALLEGED PAULINE CORRUPTION IN QUR'ĀNIC COMMENTARY

In the previous chapter I examined accounts of alleged Pauline corruption from multiple genres of Muslim literature, all within the broader category of historiography. Now, I will turn attention to early Muslim exegesis of the Qur'ān (*tafsīr*). The decision to devote a separate chapter to *tafsīr* is based on two factors. First, most of the secondary scholarship on alleged Pauline corruption has focused on accounts found in genres other than *tafsīr*.¹ The modern writers who do address accounts of Pauline corruption in the *tafsīr* appear to limit their focus to the content of the account rather than the social, religious, or political background of the exegetes that prompted them to utilize the story of Pauline corruption in their exegesis.² No explicit attention is given to how the commentators

¹ For example, Sayf (d. ca. 796) included his account of Paul in his *Book of Conquest and Apostasy*, a history of the early Islamic movement. 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025) and al-Qarāfi (d. 1285) addressed Pauline corruption in their apologetic writings aimed at defending Islam and the prophethood of Muhammad, the *Critique of Christian Origins* and *Splendid Replies to Insolent Questions*, respectively. Also, of the additional accounts I examined in chap. 3, only that of Ibn Ḥazm has received substantial recent attention, and his account appears in a polemical work, *The Book of the Distinction Regarding Religions, Sects, and Heresies*. The other accounts in that chapter include Ibn 'Asākir's (d. 1175) *History of the City of Damascus*, Ibn Bābawayh's (d. 991) collection of *aḥādīth*, *The Rewards and Punishment of Deeds*, and Ibn Hishām's (d. 833) biography of Muhammad, *The Life of Muhammad*.

² For example, Cucarella provides a list of exegetes who utilize the same basic story of Pauline corruption, including al-Tha'labī (d. 1038), al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), al-Samarqandī (d. 983), and al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 1078), but only to highlight the appearance of common features among multiple writers. See Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 193–95. Likewise, S. M. Stern and Sean W. Anthony discuss the corruption account in al-Isfarāyīnī's *tafsīr* as it relates to Sayf's account. See S. M. Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account of How Christ's Religion Was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs," *JTS* 19, no. 1 (1968): 177–80; Sean W. Anthony, "The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account of King Paul and His Corruption of Ancient Christianity," *Der Islam* 85, no. 1 (July 2009): 198–201. Michael F. Kuhn and Gabriel Said Reynolds examine al-Tha'labī's account on its own, but still only discuss the content of the account. See Michael F. Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives of the Apostle Paul as a Narrative Framework for *Tahrīf*," in *Arab Christians and the Qur'an from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period*, ed. Mark Beaumont (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 159–161; Gabriel Said

utilized Pauline corruption in their exegesis of the Qur'ān or what background may have influenced them. My focus on these missing elements will serve as a unique contribution of this study.

The second reason I devote a separate chapter to *tafsīr* is because of the unique relationship that exists between the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption and the Qur'ān, which for Muslims can hardly be understood apart from its traditional *tafsīr*. Unlike authors who wrote about Paul in their polemical works, *ḥadīth* collections, or grand histories of the Muslim world, commentators married their allegations of alleged Pauline corruption to the authority of the Qur'ān by using the corruption story to interpret the Qur'ānic text. For this reason, Pauline corruption in the *tafsīr* deserves focused attention in the present chapter.

I will begin this chapter with an introduction to *tafsīr* as a genre by utilizing modern secondary studies, emphasizing key features of Qur'ānic commentary. Next, I will summarize the Qur'ānic assessment of Christians and Christianity because the general anti-Christian rhetoric of the Qur'ān serves as the textual background for commentators' claims regarding alleged Pauline corruption. In the remainder of the chapter, I will describe various commentators' exegesis of the Qur'ān and how they utilized the Pauline corruption narrative to explain verses pertaining to Christian doctrines. By doing so, I will demonstrate that Qur'ān commentators used the story of alleged Pauline corruption to provide the historical basis necessary to explain how medieval Christianity had deviated from Christ's religion to the point that the Qur'ān claims that Christ's followers believed doctrines that contradicted his own teaching.

***Tafsīr* as a Genre**

Tafsīr is an Arabic word that means the “act of interpreting, interpretation, exegesis, or explanation,” and can refer both to the process of interpretation and to the

Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: Abd al-Jabbar and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 164–65.

literary genre.³ For such a vast genre of literature devoted to the field, the actual word is a *hapax legomenon* in the Qur’ān. *Sūra* 25:33 reads, “They do not bring you any parable, except (that) We have (already) brought you the truth, and (something) better in exposition.” The verse follows one in which the unbelievers are complaining that the Qur’ān was not sent down all at once (Q 25:32). In response to the unbelievers’ arguments and objections, Allah promises to provide an explanation, a *tafsīr*, of the truth.⁴ Whether its appearance in *sūra* 25:33 indicates the origin of *tafsīr* as a technical term, however, is not certain.⁵

What developed from the desire to interpret the Qur’ānic text was an entire genre of *tafsīr* as well as individual works of *tafsīr*. Commentators sought to explain the meaning of words, phrases, or entire verses, sometimes through additional commentary and other times through the addition of extra explanatory words.⁶ Commentaries often follow the text of the Qur’ān from beginning to end, and interpretations are provided word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, or verse-by-verse.⁷ Exceptions do exist, of course, especially in the earliest period of *tafsīr* development and in modern commentaries.⁸ Furthermore,

³ Claude Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur’ān: Classical and Medieval,” in *EQ*, 2:99. See also Andrew Rippin, “*tafsīr*,” in *EP*, 10:83.

⁴ Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur’ān,” 2:100. See also Rippin, “*tafsīr*,” 10:83; John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004), 154–58. For two commentaries on this Qur’ānic passage, see Sayyid Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, trans. and ed. M. A. Salahi and A. A. Shamis (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999), 12:316–18; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, abridged under the supervision of Shaykh Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2003), 7:169–70.

⁵ See Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 154.

⁶ Kees Versteegh, “Early Qur’ānic Exegesis: From Textual Interpretation to Linguistic Analysis,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University, 2020), 638–39.

⁷ Rippin, “*tafsīr*,” 10:84. See also Bruce Fudge, “Qur’ānic Exegesis in Medieval Islam and Modern Orientalism,” *Die Welt des Islams* 46, no. 2 (2006): 116.

⁸ For example, in the formative period, commentaries often focused on a portion of the Qur’ān rather than the whole book, and *tafsīr* collections were more like notebooks with commentary only on selected verses. Modern commentaries often focus on a particular theme rather than following the text verse-by-verse. See Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur’ān,” 2:104; Rippin, “*tafsīr*,” 10:84.

each commentator has unique concerns, goals, methods of interpretation, and sources of authority.⁹

One characteristic of *tafsīr* that is relevant to the discussion of alleged Pauline corruption is the relationship between an exegete's interpretation of the Qur'ān and the historical context in which that exegete writes his commentary. No one lives in a cultural, political, or religious vacuum. As Mu'nim Sirry notes, removing a commentary from its historical, social, and political context inhibits full understanding of both the work *and* the context.¹⁰ When commentators seek to interpret the Qur'ān, they do so in a particular context that will inevitably impact their interpretation. They bring to their exegesis unique aims, preconceptions, tools, and methods of interpretation that can, as Gerald Hawting notes, derive from the interpreter's mind and surrounding society more than from the Qur'ānic text.¹¹ Each of the commentators I examine in this chapter were influenced by their surroundings. Their writings reflect a culture where Muslims encountered Christian claims about Islam, Muhammad, the Bible, and the Qur'ān, and needed to formulate a response that defended Islam and critiqued Christianity.

Ibrahim provides an example of commentators interpreting the Qur'ān differently based on their cultural background in his analysis of Qur'ānic verses that command Muslims to fight against nonbelievers. Examining verses such as *sūra* 2:190 (“fight in the way of God”), *sūra* 2:256 (“there is no compulsion in religion), and *sūra* 9:29 (“fight those who have been given the Book”), Ibrahim demonstrates that commentators interpret these verses using extra-Qur'ānic mechanisms to appeal to their

⁹ Commentators utilize various genres of literature in their *tafsīr*, such as history, grammar, law, theology, and folklore. See Fudge, “Qur'ānic Exegesis,” 117. See also Rippin, “*tafsīr*,” 10:84–85. Rippin includes a list of various sub-disciplines within the larger field of *tafsīr* but notes that the contents of books in these sub-disciplines are often sourced from major works of *tafsīr*.

¹⁰ Mun'im Sirry, *Scriptural Polemics: The Qur'ān and Other Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2014), 9–10.

¹¹ Gerald Hawting, “Qur'ānic Exegesis and History,” in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Jane Dammen McAulliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 408.

readers.¹² Rather than focusing on a clear and simple explanation of the passages, commentators read qualifications and exceptions into the text. Moreover, modern commentators appear to soften the fighting verses to fit the multi-religious context of the modern era with its pluralistic sensibilities. The result of Ibrahim’s enlightening analysis is the conclusion that *tafsīr* reflects the social and political context at the time of writing rather than what the text of the Qur’ān indicates.¹³

The Qur’ānic Assessment of Christianity

The general anti-Christian rhetoric of the Qur’ān serves as the background for commentators’ claims regarding alleged Pauline corruption.¹⁴ In the Qur’ān, some verses appear to speak highly of Christians and say that they are the closest in friendship to the Muslims (Q 5:82; cf. 2:62; 5:69). Other verses, however, indicate that Christians have departed from truth (Q 3:19; 4:171; 61:14). Thus, from a cursory reading, the Qur’ān seems undecided on Christians.¹⁵

Beyond the Qur’ān’s general treatment of Christians as “people of the book” who believe in the basics of monotheism, the prophets, and the scriptures, it seems that the Qur’ān has in mind two different groups of Christians. The first group of Christians are

¹² Ayman S. Ibrahim, *The Stated Motivations for the Early Islamic Expansion (622–641): A Critical Revision of Muslims’ Traditional Portrayal of the Arab Raids and Conquests* (New York: Peter Lang, 2018), 223.

¹³ Ibrahim, *Stated Motivations*, 216. See also Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (New York, Routledge, 2010), 228.

¹⁴ Jews and Christians are combined under the umbrella term *ahl al-kitāb*, or “people of the book” (cf. Q 3:64–71; 5:68; 74:31). See J. M. Feiy, “Naṣārā,” in *EP*, 7:970–73; Muḥammad Azizan Sabjan and Noor Shakirah Mat Akhir, “Early Christian Sects and Schisms in *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*: A Study on Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī,” *Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* 8 (2015): 24; Ismail Albayrak, “The People of the Book in the Qur’ān,” *Islamic Studies* 47, no. 3 (2008): 301–25; Sahaja Carimokam, *Muhammad and the People of the Book* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2010); Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, “Christians and Christianity in the Qur’ān,” in *CMR*, 1:22–25; G. Vajda, “*ahl al-kitāb*,” in *EP*, 1:264–66; Sidney H. Griffith, “Christians and Christianity,” in *EQ*, 1:307–15; Khalifa Ezzat Abuzeid Hassan, “People of the Book: An Analytical Study of Jews and Christians in the Qur’an with Particular Reference to Contemporary Exegetical Discourse” (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2018).

¹⁵ Hämeen-Anttila, “Christians and Christianity,” 1:24.

the “helpers of God” who remained faithful to the religion of Jesus and continued in proper belief (Q 61:14; cf. 3:110). Their beliefs consist of core Islamic doctrines according to *sūra* 3:113–15, including their belief in “God and the Last Day,” and the fact that they “command right and forbid wrong, and are quick in the (doing of) good deeds.” As such, these Christians are “among the righteous” (Q 3:114). The second group of Christians “disbelieved” and did not stand with Jesus (Q 61:14; cf. 3:110).¹⁶

In Muslim tradition, the first group of Christians, the ones who believed what had been revealed to them, were proto-Muslims, despite having lived centuries before Muhammad. They remained faithful to the perennial message of Islam, the same religion practiced by Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and, eventually, Muhammad.¹⁷ Centuries later, Christians who remained faithful to what Jesus originally taught (i.e., Islam) became Muslims when they accepted Muhammad as prophet and submitted themselves to Allah. For early Muslim commentators attempting to harmonize contemporary Christianity with the Muslim belief in an original (Qur’ānic) Christianity, only the group of Christians who accepted Muhammad were considered genuine followers of Jesus.¹⁸

The question early Muslim commentators sought to answer was why one group of Christians believed the “truth” (Islam) and the other group disbelieved. To answer this question, commentators utilized the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption. In their examination of Qur’ānic verses that condemn Christian doctrines, commentators appeal to the story of Pauline corruption to explain the medieval condition of Christianity, namely

¹⁶ In *sūra* 5:65–66, a portion of the people of the book are chastised for not observing the Torah, the gospel, and what had been revealed to them. If they had received these teachings and continued in them, Allah would have forgiven them, but they had not. Some of the people were upright but many were committed to evil. Again, in *sūra* 3:113–15, one group from among the people of the book is “upstanding” and “among the righteous” because they follow what had been revealed to them. The other group, however, are the disbelievers, the “companions of the Fire” (Q 3:115).

¹⁷ See Claude Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity,” in *CMR*, 1:55.

¹⁸ Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, in his commentary on *sūra* 3:55, captures this sentiment well: “People of the religion of Jesus are the Muslims (*al-muslimūn*, those who submit to God) above all the religions.” See Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, ed. ‘A. M. Shihāta (Cairo: n.p., 1988-89), in Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity,” 1:38–39.

that Christianity was not the religion of Jesus. I will examine many of these accounts in the following pages to demonstrate common features of the story, unique elements, and how commentators applied the story to Qur'ānic texts.

Al-Qummī (d. 919)

Like many medieval Muslims, little is known about al-Qummī despite his influence and legacy. Born sometime in the late ninth century, al-Qummī was an Imāmī traditionist.¹⁹ His upbringing and educational background is a mystery, but he was known for his knowledge of traditions and extensive writings.²⁰ More than a dozen works are attributed to al-Qummī but little of his original work survives intact.²¹ He died sometime in AD 919 or later.²²

Despite being known as a traditionist, al-Qummī's reference to the apostle Paul is found in his commentary, *Jewels of the Qur'ān*.²³ The reference appears in a tradition attributed to Ja'far al-Šādiq, the last *imām* recognized by both Twelver and Ismā'īlī Shī'a.²⁴

¹⁹ Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī," in *EF*³, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/*-SIM_0323/. See also Meir M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī-Shiism* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 34. Ibrāhīm ibn Hāshim, al-Qummī's father, was reportedly acquainted with the eighth Imām, 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (d. 202/818), and al-Qummī was a contemporary of the eleventh Imām, al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (d. 260/873).

²⁰ Al-Nadīm (d. 995) mentions him twice, saying he was a Shī'ī author and legal scholar. See Muḥammad ibn Ishāq al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, ed. and trans. B. Dodge (New York: Columbia University, 1970). See also Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 33. On al-Nadīm, see J. W. Fück, "Ibn Al-Nadīm," in *EF*², 3:895–96.

²¹ More than a dozen works are attributed to al-Qummī, but little of his original work survives intact. For a discussion of surviving manuscripts as well as examples of alterations and omissions, see Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 33–45.

²² Amir-Moezzi, "al-Qummī." Bar-Asher says al-Qummī may have lived in the time of al-'Askarī if he was alive in 919 and lived a long life. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 34. A reference by Ibn Bābawayh al-Šādūq (d. 991) says he was alive in 919.

²³ On al-Qummī's *tafsīr*, an important source of Imāmī doctrine, see Amir-Moezzi, "al-Qummī." See also Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 35–36, 46–56.

²⁴ M. G. S. Hodgson, "Dja'far al-Šādiq," in *EF*², 2:374. See also Ron P. Buckley, "Ja'far al-Šādiq," in *EF*³, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/*-SIM_0323/. With the sheer volume of books and sayings attributed to him, no one can know with certainty what is original to Ja'far al-Šādiq, including the reference to the apostle Paul that al-Qummī attributes to him. As I discussed

Ja'far al-Šādiq was born sometime between 700 and 703 in Medina, and his mother was the great-granddaughter of Abū Bakr.²⁵ Known for his intellect, he lived quietly in Medina as an authority on *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, and theology, influencing both Sunni and Shī'ī learners.²⁶ Ja'far al-Šādiq died in 765.²⁷

Al-Qummī refers to Paul in his commentary on *sūra* 6:112, which describes how every prophet has an adversary: “In this way We have assigned to every prophet an enemy—satans of the humans and jinn—some of them inspiring others (with) decorative speech as a deception. If your Lord had (so) pleased, they would not have done it. So leave them and what they forge.”²⁸ According to this verse, each prophet that Allah sends he assigns an enemy to oppose them, some human, and some non-human (e.g., *jinn*).²⁹ Paul appears in al-Qummī's commentary as one of the many adversaries of the prophets. The account reads as follows:

That is Almighty Allah did not send any prophet, except that there were human and jinn satans in his Ummah, some of whom said to others: Don't believe in this prophet as he deceives through embellished statements, and his statements of revelation are lies.

Imam Ja'far Sadiq (a) said: “Almighty Allah did not send any prophet, except that there were two Satans in his Ummah, who caused distress to the prophet and misguided the people. Satans of the period of Nuh (a) were Qantifoos (Faghantighoos) and Qaraam; satans of the period of His Eminence, Ibrahim were

in an earlier section on Sayf claiming his account came from Ibn 'Abbās, what matters for the present study is not the veracity of the attribution but what the later authors said about Paul. Thus, what matters is what al-Qummī wrote about Paul, not whether he drew his material from an earlier author.

²⁵ Buckley, “Ja'far al-Šādiq.”

²⁶ See Buckley, “Ja'far al-Šādiq”; Hodgson, “Dja'far al-Šādiq,” 2:374.

²⁷ Hodgson, “Dja'far al-Šādiq,” 2:374. For further study on Ja'far al-Šādiq, see also Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990), 82–90; S. H. M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000), 259–88; John B. Taylor, “Ja'far al-Šādiq, Spiritual Forbear of the Sufis,” *Islamic Culture* 40 (1966): 97–113; Robert Gleave et al., “JA'FAR AL-ŠĀDEQ,” in *EIr*, fasc. 4, 4:349–66.

²⁸ Muslim teaching recognizes a line of prophets from Adam to Muhammad, each of whom preached the same basic message of monotheism and submission to Allah. See Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār's Account,” 178–79; Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 150.

²⁹ *Jinn* are demonic spirit-beings that oppose Allah and his people (cf. Q 72). See Jacqueline Chabbi, “Jinn,” in *EQ*, 3:43–49.

Makthal (Makeel) and Razaam; satans of the period of His Eminence, Musa (a) were Samari and Maraqqeba (Maratheebea); satans of the period of His Eminence, Isa (a) were Bolus (Yarlees, Yarleesh) and Maritooon (Mariboon); satans of the period of Holy Prophet (s) were Habtar (Jabtar) and Zariq (Zalaam), which is an allusion to the first and the second caliph.”³⁰

Al-Qummī includes in his account not only the prophets of Islamic history but also the adversaries who opposed them. In this way, al-Qummī is comparable to Ibn Bābawayh and Ibn Qūlawayh, who list people who are purportedly in hell for their opposition to Allah’s rule.³¹ According to al-Qummī, Jesus was opposed by Bolus (Ar. *Būlus*, “Paul”) and Maritooon, an unknown figure.³² Each “satan,” including Paul, “caused distress to the prophet and misguided the people,” al-Qummī asserts.³³ Al-Qummī also writes that some of the “satans” warned people not to believe in the prophets, saying, “He deceives through embellished statements, and his statements of revelation are lies.”³⁴ While al-Qummī does include Paul in the list of “satans” who opposed the prophets, he does not explicitly state that Paul was one of the “satans” who openly spoke against Jesus’s teachings, warning people not to follow them. In the broader corruption narrative, while Paul does oppose Jesus’s followers and seek to corrupt his teachings, he does not speak

³⁰ Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, trans. Sayyid Athar Husain S. H. Rizvi (n.p., n.d.), 2:98, hereafter Qummī, *Tafsīr*, 2:98.

³¹ See Al-Qummi (Ibn Qūlawayh, d. 977), *Kamil al Ziarat*, trans. Syed Jazib Reza Kazmi (Lahore, Pakistan: Wilayat Mission, 2014), 482, hereafter Qummi (Ibn Qūlawayh), *Kamil*, 482; Shaykh Sadooq (Ibn Bābawayh), *Sawaabul A’amaal & Iqaabul A’amaal*, trans. Syed Athar Husain Rizvi and Syed Maqsood Athar (Mumbai: As-Serat, 2008), 272–73, hereafter Sadooq, *Sawaabul*, 272–73.

³² Al-Qummī may have had in mind Marcion (d. 160), a theologian denounced as a heretic for his views on Jesus and the Old Testament. See Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984), 1:61–66. Al-Qummī may have also had in mind Mani (d. 276), the founder of Manichaeism. See Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 1993), 160, 169. ‘Abd al-Jabbār, a century later in his *Critique of Christian Origins*, compares Paul’s actions to those of Mani. He writes, “Similar to the deed of Paul in going along with the Romans in their religion and deviating from the religion of Christ is the deed of the priest Mani, the leader of the Manicheans.” ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Said Reynolds and Samir Khalil Samir (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2010), 119.

³³ Qummī, *Tafsīr*, 2:98.

³⁴ Qummī, *Tafsīr*, 2:98.

out against Jesus. Instead, he presents himself as a follower of Jesus and an authoritative teacher.

The reference to Paul in al-Qummī’s list of “satans” who opposed the prophets is brief, so one cannot determine what details of alleged Pauline corruption al-Qummī may have had in mind when he wrote his list. However, the core assertion of the corruption narrative is that Paul sought to lead Christians astray with false doctrines and practices that were not part of Christ’s original religion. In this sense, one can see how al-Qummī could identify Paul as the “satan” that opposed Jesus. Furthermore, while al-Qummī’s account lacks details about Paul’s alleged actions, it does still contribute to one of my central claims for this dissertation, namely that multiple Islamic factions viewed Paul as the corruptor of Christ’s religion. Al-Qummī was a Shī’ī traditionist and commentator, and his *tafsīr* is one of the earliest Shī’ī commentaries.³⁵ His reference to Paul opposing Jesus is an indication that the narrative of Pauline corruption was present in both Shī’ī and Sunni Islam from the earliest periods.

Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 983)

Born in Samarqand in the Earthly tenth century, Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī was a Ḥanafī theologian and legal expert known for his spiritual prowess.³⁶ As one of the chief proponents of Ḥanafī teachings, he helped to maintain the Ḥanafī school’s position as the official orthodox form of Sunni Islam under the ruling Sāmānid dynasty, even

³⁵ See Amir-Moezzi, “al-Qummī.”

³⁶ Ahmad Pakatchi, “Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī,” in *EIs*, trans. Azar Rabbani, ed. Farhad Daftary, accessed November 18, 2023, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-9831_isla_COM_0099. See also J. Schacht, “Abū al-Layth al-Samarkandī,” in *EP*², 1:137; Muhammad Haron, “Abū’l-Layth al-Samarqandī’s Life and Works with Special Reference to His *al-Muqaddimah*,” *Islamic Studies* 33, nos. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1994): 321.

writing a catechism for the school of jurisprudence.³⁷ Al-Samarqandī died in 983.³⁸

Al-Samarqandī's reference to alleged Pauline corruption appears in his commentary on the Qur'ān, titled *The Ocean of Sciences*. Though he was an expert in law, al-Samarqandī's early upbringing appears to have influenced his commentary, which relies heavily on *ḥadīth*.³⁹ Al-Samarqandī provides an account of Pauline corruption in his treatment of *sūra* 5:14–16, a passage that addresses sectarian conflict among Christians:

And with those who say, "Surely we are Christians," We made a covenant, but they have forgotten part of what they were reminded of. So We stirred up enmity and hatred among them, until the Day of Resurrection, and (then) God will inform them about what they have done. People of the Book! Our messenger has come to you, making clear to you much of what you have been hiding of the Book, and overlooking much. Now a light and a clear Book from God has come to you. By means of it God guides those who follow after His approval (in the) ways of peace, and He brings them out of the darkness to the light, by His permission, and guides them to a straight path.

According to this passage, the Christians had neglected a portion of what they had been commanded to uphold, perhaps referring to Christ's original religion.⁴⁰ As a result of their neglecting what they were told, according to *sūra* 5:14–16, Allah created division among the Christians so that they split into sects. Despite early Christian division being Allah's judgment, al-Samarqandī connects that division to the alleged actions of Paul. Thus, for al-Samarqandī, Paul not only corrupted Christ's religion, but he also divided Christ's people. Al-Samarqandī appears to follow the same Jewish tradition that Sayf utilized, which appears in the *Life of Jesus*, and his account reads as follows:

³⁷ Ahmad Pakatchi, "al-Samarqandī." See also Haron, "Life and Works," 321. See also J. van Ess, ABU'L-LAYṬ SAMARQANDĪ," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, December 15, 1983, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abul-lay-nasr-b>.

³⁸ Haron, "Life and Works," 322. Pakatchi, "al-Samarqandī." *EIs* has an alternate date of 985–993.

³⁹ Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 2:111. See also Pakatchi, "al-Samarqandī."

⁴⁰ Al-Qurtubī, whom I will discuss later in this chap., says that what the Christians forgot was belief in Muhammad. In his commentary on *sūra* 5:14–16 he writes, "This refers to belief in Muḥammad, meaning that they did not do what they were commanded and that passion and deviation became a reason for rejecting Muḥammad." See Al-Qurtubī, *Ṭafsīr al-Qurtubī*, trans. Aisha Bewley (Bradford, UK: Diwan, n.d.), 6:84.

We stirred up enmity among them, meaning we sowed discord and hatred among them. It is said that “stirring up” in the original language is adhering. It is said, “I adhered (stirred up) the man,” meaning I stuck to him. It is said that the origin of the enmity that was among them was cast by a man known as “Paulus.” There was conflict between him and the Christians, and as he was originally a Jew, he killed many of them. He intended to deceive them by a trick, to incite fighting among them so that they would kill each other.

He came to the Christians, presented himself as blind, and asked them, “Do you recognize me?” They said, “Yes, you are the one who killed us and did what you did.” He replied, “I did all that, but now I have repented. I saw Jesus, the son of Mary, in a dream descending from heaven. I slapped my face and gouged my eyes. He asked, ‘What do you want from my people?’ I pledged allegiance to him. I came to be among you and teach you the laws of your religion, as Jesus taught me in the dream.” They accepted him, gave him a room, and he would worship in that room. Sometimes they gathered around him, asked him questions, and he answered them through a hole in the wall. Sometimes he would instruct them, gather them, and call to them through that hole, delivering statements that were outwardly objectionable, and they would object. However, he would interpret those statements in a way that pleased them. They all followed him, accepting his words.

One day he said to them, “Gather, knowledge has come to me.” They assembled, and he asked, “Did not Allah create all these things in the world for the benefit of the children of Adam?” They replied, “Yes.” He said, “Why do you deprive yourselves of these things?” Referring to wine and pork, which Allah created for you on the earth. They accepted his words, and they made wine and pork permissible. After some days, he called them and said, “Knowledge has come to me.” They gathered, and he asked, “From which direction does the sun rise?” They said, “From the east.” He asked, “And from which direction do the moon and stars rise?” They replied, “From the east.” He asked, “Who sends them from the east?” They said, “Allah.” He said, “Then know that it is from the east. So, if you pray, pray in that direction.” He changed their prayer direction to the east.

After some days, he called a group of them and told them secretly, “Tonight, I intend to make myself a sacrifice for the sake of Jesus. Knowledge has come to me, and I want to inform you in secret so that you keep it from others and call people to it.” It is also said that one day he woke up and opened his other eye. Then he called them and said, “Jesus came to me last night and said, ‘I am pleased with you.’ He wiped his hand over my eyes, and I was cured. Now, I want to make myself a sacrifice.” Then he said to them, “Can anyone other than Allah revive the dead, cure the blind and the leper?” They said, “No.” He said, “Jesus did these things, so know that he is Allah.” They left him. Then he called another group, informed them similarly, and said, “He was his son.” Then he called a third group, informed them that he was the third of three - Jesus, his mother, and Allah - and told them that he wanted to make himself a sacrifice that night. In the middle of the night, he went out among them.

In the morning, they divided into factions, each group claiming, “He taught me this and that.” Another group said, “You are a liar; he taught me this and that.” Fighting broke out among them, and they killed many people. The enmity among them persisted until the Day of Judgment. There were three factions among them: the Nestorians, who said, “The Christ is the Son of God.” Another group, known as the Mariquites, said, “God is the Christ.” And a group called the Mulkaniyya said, “God

is the third of three—the Christ, his mother, and God.” Thus, enmity and hatred were sown among them until the Day of Judgment.⁴¹

Al-Samarqandī introduces his account of Pauline corruption with a direct connection to *sūra* 5:14–16. In reference to Allah stirring up enmity among the Christians, he writes that the origin of the enmity “was cast by a man known as ‘Paulus.’”⁴² While al-Samarqandī describes Paul’s alleged teachings, his main concern appears to be Paul’s purported role in the division of early Christianity. He writes that Paul was a Jew who had conflict with the Christians, even killing them.⁴³ At some point, according to al-Samarqandī, Paul devises a new plan to inflict greater harm on the Christian community, one in which the Christians turn against each other. Al-Samarqandī asserts that Paul “intended to deceive [the Christians] by a trick, to incite fighting among them so that they would kill each other.”⁴⁴ The goal, then, for Paul, according to al-Samarqandī’s telling of the story, is for the Christians to destroy one another. The “conflict” between Paul and the Jews would be solved not by him chasing after them and killing them, but by them killing each other.

Al-Samarqandī writes that Paul came to the Christians claiming to have converted to their religion because of a supernatural encounter with Jesus. Pretending to be blind, Paul tells the Christians, according to al-Samarqandī, “I saw Jesus, the son of Mary, in a dream descending from heaven. He slapped my face and gouged my eyes. He asked, ‘What do you want from my people?’”⁴⁵ A reference to Paul’s alleged encounter with Jesus is not a unique feature of medieval corruption accounts, as indicated by the

⁴¹ Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-Samarqandī al-musammā Bahr al-’ulūm*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu’awwad et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyya, 1993), 1:423–24, translation generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, accessed November 30, 2023, chat.openai.com/. See also Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 194–95.

⁴² Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁴³ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁴⁴ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁴⁵ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

accounts of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, al-Qarāfi, and al-Bushanjī.⁴⁶ However, al-Samarqandī’s version of the story does include unique details. According to his version, Paul claims to see Jesus in a dream rather than in a physical encounter, yet Jesus allegedly slaps his face and gouges his eyes before asking him what he wanted with the Christians.⁴⁷ The eye gouging may be a more extreme version of Paul being struck blind, and perhaps is intended as a punishment for Paul murdering the Christians.⁴⁸ Also, al-Samarqandī does not include any reference to Jesus asking why Paul is persecuting his followers, though the question of what Paul wants with the Christians may be comparable.⁴⁹

Because al-Samarqandī’s account of Paul’s alleged encounter with Jesus is so different from the account of other Muslim writers, two observations emerge. First, Muslim writers appear to have been aware of multiple versions of the story, or perhaps a basic tradition that they could then embellish. A single uniform story was not necessary, perhaps because the purpose of the story was more important than the content. Second, the fact that so many Muslim writers address Paul’s alleged encounter with Jesus is a strange phenomenon considering that the story serves as the foundation for Paul’s apostolic

⁴⁶ See Sayf, *Kitāb al-ridda wa-l-futūh*, I, pp. 132–35 and II, fols. 62a–64b, quoted in Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 176, hereafter Sayf, *Ridda*, 176; ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 99; Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfi, *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira ‘an al-as’ila al-fājira*, 2nd ed., ed. Bakr Zakī ‘Awad (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1987), 537–43 (321–23), quoted in Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 287–90, hereafter Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 287–90; Al-Hayṣam ibn Muḥammad al-Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Qur’ān al-karīm*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abduh Ḥatāmila and Muḥammad Jāsīm al-Mashhadānī (‘Ammān: [s.n.], 2006), 667–69, quoted in Edward G. Browne, “A Parallel to the Story in the Mathnawī of Jalālu ‘d-Dīn Rūmi, of the Jewish King Who Persecuted the Christians,” *Islamica* 2 (1926): 132–34, hereafter Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 132–34.

⁴⁷ Paul’s alleged encounter with Jesus occurs in a dream according to al-Samarqandī, but other authors seem to indicate a physical encounter. For example, in Sayf’s account, Paul says, “Jesus found me while I was departing from you and took from me my hearing, my sight, and my reason.” See Sayf, *Ridda*, 176.

⁴⁸ For example, Paul claims to be struck blind in ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s account. See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 99.

⁴⁹ For example, see the account of al-Būshanjī, where he writes that Jesus asks Paul, “How long wilt thou afflict my Church?” See Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 133.

authority in the Bible.⁵⁰ By including it in their accounts of Pauline corruption, Muslim writers were perhaps attempting to discredit Paul not only as a false teacher and corruptor of Christ's religion, but also as a non-apostle, one whose alleged encounter with Jesus was a fabrication used to trick the Christians. Thus, with the same account of Pauline corruption, Muslim writers could dismiss Paul outright as a faithful representative of Jesus and his religion.

Al-Samarqandī provides no other details about Paul's alleged encounter with Jesus, but he writes that Paul "pledges his allegiance" to Jesus and commits to join the Christians.⁵¹ Three unique features appear in al-Samarqandī's version of how Paul gains acceptance into the Christian community. First, al-Samarqandī does not refer to Paul's horse and the hamstringing incident, as al-Qurṭubī does, for example.⁵² Rather than appealing to his act of repentance, as evidenced by his hamstringing the horse, Paul instead appeals to his supernatural conversion. Second, in al-Samarqandī's version, Paul comes to the Christians and tells them that his purpose is to "be among [them] and teach [them] the laws of [their] religion" based on what Jesus had taught him in the dream.⁵³

Third, al-Samarqandī's account is unique in that he describes Paul teaching the Christians while he is cloistered for a year. The accounts from al-Qurṭubī, al-Tha'labī, al-Baghawī, and al-Isfarāyīnī do not assert that Paul did any teaching during this time, only that he hid himself and studied the gospel. Al-Samarqandī claims, however, that Paul taught the Christians during this time, even "delivering statements that were outwardly objectionable" but then interpreting those statements "in a way that pleased [the

⁵⁰ In his letter to the Galatian Christians, Paul describes his encounter with Jesus and asserts that the gospel message Paul proclaimed was not man's gospel. He had received it "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:12; cf. Acts 9:1–19). See also Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 20–25; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 51–54.

⁵¹ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁵² Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335.

⁵³ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

Christians].”⁵⁴ No clarification is given on what statements were “outwardly objectionable,” but the reference is perhaps to Paul teaching doctrines that the Christians had never heard. Later in al-Samarqandī’s account, Paul will teach the doctrines of the Trinity and divinity and sonship of Jesus, which are the very doctrines that Christians in al-Qarāfi’s account claim they had never heard.⁵⁵ It seems that, for al-Samarqandī, the doctrines of Paul were in obvious contradiction to the teachings of Jesus, which is a core claim of the corruption narrative. However, because Paul was able to explain his new teachings in a way that pleased the Christians, says al-Samarqandī, they “followed him, accepting his words.”⁵⁶

The next section of al-Samarqandī’s account contains two more details that I have found elsewhere only in the commentary of al-Būshanjī (d. 1074) and the writings of Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi: Paul changing two Christian practices.⁵⁷ First, Paul purportedly allows the Christians to consume pork and wine, a practice Jesus had not permitted, according to Muslim tradition.⁵⁸ Al-Samarqandī writes that Paul gathered the Christians, claiming to have special knowledge. Paul then allegedly points out to them that Allah created all things “in the world for the benefit of the children of Adam,” and that the Christians were depriving themselves of Allah’s good gifts such as wine and pork.⁵⁹ The Christians accept Paul’s argument, according to al-Samarqandī, and consider pork and wine permissible. Second, al-Samarqandī claims that Paul changes the direction

⁵⁴ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁵⁵ Al-Qarāfi’s account describes this event, including the believers being surprised at what Paul taught because they had never heard those doctrines. See Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286.

⁵⁶ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁵⁷ See Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 194–95. See also Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 33; Sayf, *Ridda*, 177; ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 101; Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 288.

⁵⁸ For example, ‘Abd al-Jabbār writes that Jesus “never ate pork, but forbade it and cursed those who eat it, just as the prophets did before him.” See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 88.

⁵⁹ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

of prayer (*qibla*).⁶⁰ Based on the argument that the sun, moon, and stars rise from the east, Paul instructs the Christians to change their direction of prayer from Jerusalem, which had been the practice of Jesus, to the east.

An important question to consider about al-Samarqandī's account is why he includes the additional material about Paul changing these two practices. I have only found these details in two commentaries: al-Samarqandī and al-Būshanjī. One reason these details do not feature prominently in the *tafsīr* literature is perhaps due to the Qur'ānic texts being examined. Most of the Pauline corruption accounts I examine in this chapter appear in commentary on *sūra* 9:30–31 and *sūra* 4:171, both of which speak to Christian doctrines rather than Christian practices. As such, the accounts of Pauline corruption connected to those verses emphasize Paul's role in teaching doctrines that conflicted with Christ's original teaching, rather than detailing his alleged changes to Christian practices. Therefore, when the details about Paul changing the *qibla* or allowing the consumption of pork do appear in the *tafsīr*, as with the case of al-Samarqandī and al-Būshanjī, they may reflect the author's unique purpose in addressing Pauline corruption. For example, al-Samarqandī's emphasis is on Paul's role in creating disunity among Christ's followers and dividing the community into factions. He may have included the additional details about Christian practice to highlight how Paul allegedly not only introduced new errant doctrines into the Christian community, but also led the Christians to abandon the religious practices of Jesus. Those practices would be resumed centuries later by the Muslims who initially prayed toward Jerusalem and prohibited the consumption of pork.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24. On the changing of the *qibla*, see *sūra* 2:144. See also D. A. King, "Ḳibla," in *EF*, 5:82–88.

⁶¹ Following Muhammad's conflict with the Jews, he received new revelation to change the *qibla* so that Muslims prayed toward Mecca. See Angelika Neuwirth, "The *Qibla* of Muhammad's Community Reconsidered," in *Unlocking the Medinan Qur'an*, ed. Nicolai Sinai (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 251–87.

Regarding new doctrines, al-Samarqandī claims that Paul taught the Christians about the Trinity and the divinity and sonship of Jesus.⁶² As support for his new teachings, according to al-Samarqandī, Paul asks each group of Christians that he meets with whether “anyone other than Allah [can] revive the dead, cure the blind, [and cure] the leper.”⁶³ The Christians respond that only Allah can do these things, at which point Paul allegedly points them to the divine nature of Jesus, saying, “Jesus did these things so know that he is Allah.”⁶⁴ Paul then brings in a second group of Christians, according to al-Samarqandī, and, based on the same claims about Jesus doing miracles, teaches them that Jesus “was [Allah’s] son.”⁶⁵ With the third group, says al-Samarqandī, Paul once again teaches them about Jesus’ unique nature and says to them that Jesus “was the third of three—Jesus, his mother, and Allah.”⁶⁶ Notably, al-Samarqandī, like al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Baghawī, and al-Tha’labī, depicts Paul teaching a Qur’ānic presentation of the Trinity rather than a biblical presentation (cf. Q 4:171; 5:116). Thus, for al-Samarqandī, Paul is the source of the three chief Christian doctrines that most conflicted with Qur’ānic teaching: the Trinity and the divinity and sonship of Jesus.

⁶² See Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24. The three individuals—Nestor, Jacob, and Malkun—do not appear in this version of the story, as they do in other *tafsīr* accounts, such as that of al-Qurṭubī. Instead, Paul teaches three groups of Christians, but the result is the same: division. See Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335.

⁶³ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁶⁴ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁶⁵ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁶⁶ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24. For al-Isfarāyīnī, see al-Damīrī (d. 1405), *al-Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad al-Zaqīm al-Suyūfī (Cairo: al-Maṭba’a al-khayrīya bi-Miṣrīya, 1891), 2:187, in Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 178 (hereafter Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178). For al-Baghawī’s account, see Abu Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas’ūd ibn Muḥammad al-Farrā’ al-Baghawī, *Ma’ālim al-tanzīl fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, ed. Abdul Razzaq al-Mahdī (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1999), 2:338–39, translation generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, November 29, 2023, <https://chat.openai.com/>. For al-Tha’labī’s account, see Abū Ishāq Aḥmad al-Tha’labī, *Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār Ihya’ al-Turāth al-’Arabī, 2002), 5:33, quoted in Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 164–65, hereafter Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 164–65.

The closing section of al-Samarqandī’s account describes the fallout in the Christian community after Paul’s death.⁶⁷ Al-Samarqandī writes that fighting broke out among the Christians, with some of them killing each other. This result was Paul’s original intention, as he had “incite[d] fighting among them *so that they would kill each other.*”⁶⁸ As mentioned previously, it appears al-Samarqandī’s main emphasis is Paul’s role in dividing the Christian community. The enmity that grows among the Christians ultimately splits them into three sects: the Nestorians, who said, “The Christ is the Son of God”; the Mariquites [Jacobites], who said, “God is the Christ”; and the Mulkaniyya [Melkites], who said, “God is the third of three—the Christ, his mother, and God.”⁶⁹ According to al-Samarqandī, then, Paul was “the origin of the enmity that was among them,” described in *sūra* 5:14–16.⁷⁰

Al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 1027)

Al-Isfarāyīnī was born in the district of Isfarāyīn (today’s Iran) sometime in the middle of the tenth century. He would become a renowned jurist, Qur’ān commentator, teacher of *ḥadīth*, and the chief propagator of Ash’arite theology in Nishapur (today’s Iran) at the turn of the eleventh century.⁷¹ Al-Isfarāyīnī studied in Baghdad and then taught in Isfarāyīn for a time before accepting an invitation to Nishapur where a *madrassa* was built for him.⁷² He died in 1027 and was buried in Isfarāyīn.⁷³

The reference to alleged Pauline corruption appears in al-Isfarāyīnī’s *Book of*

⁶⁷ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁶⁸ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24, emphasis added.

⁶⁹ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁷⁰ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁷¹ W. Madelung, “al-Isfarāyīnī,” in *EI*², 4:107. See also Angelika Brodersen, “Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī,” in *EI*³, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/*-SIM_0323/.

⁷² As a scholar, al-Isfarāyīnī disputed proponents of other schools of thought and taught *ḥadīth* in the congregational mosque at Nishapur. See Madelung, “al-Isfarāyīnī,” 4:107; Brodersen, “al-Isfarāyīnī.”

⁷³ Brodersen, “al-Isfarāyīnī.”

Commentary on Religion in his treatment of Christianity. Modern scholars, such as Sean Anthony and S. M. Stern, note that the account is connected to Muhammad ibn al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī (d. 763), author of a lengthy but no longer extant commentary on the Qur'ān.⁷⁴ Al-Kalbī was a controversial figure because he advocated pro-Shī'ī sentiments that ran counter to Sunni orthodoxy and used written sources and chains of authority that deviated from typical norms within *ḥadīth* studies.⁷⁵ While modern scholars have connected al-Isfarāyīnī to al-Kalbī, al-Isfarāyīnī does not name the source for his account. Instead, he attributes it to “exegetes and historians” of the Qur'ān.⁷⁶ The connection to al-Kalbī comes from the theologian al-Damīrī (d. 1405).⁷⁷ He quotes the full account in his dictionary of animal lore and attributes it to al-Kalbī.⁷⁸ If al-Isfarāyīnī's account of alleged Pauline corruption did come from al-Kalbī, then it represents one of the earliest known references to Paul as the corruptor of Christianity.⁷⁹ Also, al-Isfarāyīnī appears to base his account on the same Jewish tradition that Sayf does, the *Life of Jesus*.⁸⁰

Al-Isfarāyīnī's account of Pauline corruption is provided in his interpretation of *sūra* 9:30–31. In these verses, Christians and Jews are chastised for claiming that human

⁷⁴ See Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār's Account,” 177; Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 197; W. Atallah, “al-Kalbī,” in *EP*, 4:495. Al-Kalbī's exegesis was often dependent on Ibn 'Abbās. See Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity,” 1:36. Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur'ān,” 2:106; Ayman S. Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam: Competing Themes in Early Islamic Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2021), 116.

⁷⁵ Atallah, “al-Kalbī,” 4:495. The fact that his writings have not survived is perhaps due to his conflict with scholars and scholarship of his day. See also Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam*, 117–18; Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur'ān,” 2:106.

⁷⁶ See also Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 198; Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār's Account,” 177.

⁷⁷ See L. Kopf, “al-Damīrī,” in *EP*, 2:107–8.

⁷⁸ See Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār's Account,” 177–78.

⁷⁹ The origin of the account is unknown but is perhaps connected to the Jewish anti-Christian text, *Toledoth Yeshu* (*Jewish Life of Jesus*). In this work, the Jews persuade Elijah (who calls himself “Paul”) to gain the Christians' confidence and convince them to corrupt their religion. Whether the account is original to al-Kalbī is unknown, but Anthony observes that al-Isfarāyīnī's reference to an “exegete and historian” is consistent with al-Kalbī, even if unnamed. See Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 198.

⁸⁰ Similarities in the accounts of Sayf and Al-Isfarāyīnī (which Stern attributes to al-Kalbī) lead Stern to say that both writers drew from the *Toledot Yeshu*. See Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār's Account,” 179–80.

men were divine:

The Jews say, “Ezra is the son of God,” and the Christians say, “The Messiah is the son of God.” That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before (them). (May) God fight them. How are they (so) deluded? They have taken their teachers and their monks as Lords instead of God, and (also) the Messiah, son of Mary, when they were only commanded to serve one God. (There is) no god but Him. Glory to Him above what they associate!

According to the Qur’ān, Jesus was only a human messenger (Q 4:171; 5:75). Yet, Christians claimed that Jesus was the divine son of God, as is evident in the phrase “they have taken their teachers and their monks *as Lords instead of God* . . . when they were only commanded to serve one God.” By worshiping Jesus, Christians were breaking the commandment to serve only one God (Q 4:48; 20:8; 47:19). Moreover, they were contradicting the core Qur’ānic doctrine of the oneness (*tawḥīd*) of Allah, meaning that Allah is both one in nature and one in person.⁸¹ He is not triune as the Christians say, but is one (Q 4:171). To say that Jesus, the son of Mary, is Allah is to commit blasphemy, a severe transgression known as “association” (Ar. *shirk*).⁸²

From the Muslim perspective, based on the Qur’ān, Jesus never claimed to be divine, nor did he encourage people to worship him as such (Q 5:116). Yet, medieval Christians were adamant in their worship of Jesus. The question for medieval Muslim commentators was how both realities could be harmonized. Their conclusion was that, if Jesus taught his original followers to worship Allah alone but his later followers worshiped him in addition to Allah, then something must have caused this deviation from Christ’s original religion. For al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 1027), like al-Tha’labī (d. 1038) and al-Baghawī (d. 1122), the explanation was Pauline corruption.⁸³ Al-Isfarāyīnī’s account of how Paul

⁸¹ See D. Gimaret, “tawḥīd,” in *EP*², 10:389.

⁸² See D. Gimaret, “shirk,” in *EP*², 9:484–86. See also *sūra* 5:75. This most grievous sin refers to any act or belief that elevates someone or something to the same status as Allah. Allah is supreme, and to “associate” another being with him is to deny that supremacy and honor an inferior being. Allah’s response is to “fight” against anyone who does not worship him alone (Q 9:30).

⁸³ See Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 193–94n52. See also Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 159; Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafṣīr Tradition: The Qur’ān Commentary of al-Tha’labī* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 70.

allegedly corrupted Christ's religion reads as follows:

Al-Kalbi says in his commentary on the verse of the Koran (ix. 31): "And the Christians say Christ is the son of God, that is what they say with their mouths etc.," that the Christians followed the religion of Islam for eighty-one years after the assumption of Jesus, during which time they turned in their prayer towards the *qibla* and fasted in Ramadan. Then a war broke out between them and the Jews. There was among the Jews a brave man called Paul, who killed a great many of the followers of Jesus. One day Paul said to the Jews: "What if truth happens to be with Jesus whom we have denied and we will go to hell-fire? It will be a bad bargain if they go to Paradise and we to Hell! I shall find a way to lead them astray so that they will enter Hell." Paul had a war-horse called al-'Uqab; he hamstrung it and pretended to regret his former hostility and spread dust on his head. The Christians asked him: "Who are you?" Paul answered: "I am your former enemy. A voice from heaven said to me that my repentance would only be accepted if I did become a Christian. So I am truly contrite." The Christians allowed him to enter their church and he remained for a whole year in one of its rooms without leaving it by day or night until he learned the Gospel. Then he came out and said: "A voice said to me that my repentance was accepted by God." They believed him and conceived great love for him. He then went to Jerusalem, but left Nestor as his lieutenant, after teaching him that Jesus, Mary, and God, are the three members of the Trinity. Then he went to the land of the Romans and taught them "Divine Nature" and "Human Nature," saying to them that (Jesus was no man but became man, was not a body, but became a body, and was the son of God). He taught this to a man called Jacob. Then he converted a man called Malkan, and said to him that Jesus was and is God. When he gained ascendancy over them, he called these to him singly and spoke thus to each of them: "You are my intimate disciple. I have seen Jesus in my dream and he expressed his satisfaction with me." He said to each of them that next day he would kill himself (as a sacrifice to God) and that the disciple in question must call upon men to accept his doctrine. Then Paul went into the house of sacrifice and killed himself, saying that he did that in order to please Jesus. Three days later each of the three disciples began to call upon men to adopt his doctrine, and each gained followers. Thus the Christians were divided into three sects, the Nestorians, the Jacobites, and the Melkites, and fought each other about the differences of doctrine.⁸⁴

Al-Isfarāyīnī claims that the early Christian community followed Jesus's teaching, the "religion of Islam," for a period of eighty-one years after Jesus ascended into heaven, then a war broke out between the followers of Jesus and the Jews, and Paul

⁸⁴ Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178. The translation is a combined translation of al-Damīrī but with additional details from al-Isfarāyīnī's version in parentheses. The text from al-Isfarāyīnī is quoted in al-Isfarāyīnī, *al-Tabṣīr fi'l-Dīn*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Cairo: n.p., 1955), 133–34. Al-Isfarāyīnī does not name an author but attributes the account to "exegetes of the Koran and historians." The phrase "Al-Kalbi says" comes from al-Damīrī, not al-Isfarāyīnī. See also P. S. van Koningsveld, "The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 205; Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 159; Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 197. A parallel translation of al-Damīrī's account without the additional material from al-Isfarāyīnī is quoted in Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 198–99.

persecuted Christ's followers.⁸⁵ In al-Samarqandī's account, Paul's motivation for joining the Christians is his goal of dividing them into factions.⁸⁶ In al-Isfarāyīnī's account, conversely, Paul's motivation appears to be mutual destruction. At some point, says al-Isfarāyīnī, Paul becomes worried about the Christians having the truth, meaning that their beliefs concerning Jesus are correct, whereas the Jews are incorrect in their beliefs. However, Paul does not seem to be concerned with believing the truth, as evidenced by the fact that he does not seek further understanding of Christian doctrines. Instead, Paul is worried, says al-Isfarāyīnī, about the possibility of Christians going to heaven and Jews going to hell. His concern is that Christians will fare better than Jews, which would be a "bad bargain."⁸⁷ To ensure that Christians do not enter heaven, al-Isfarāyīnī alleges, Paul decides to "find a way to lead them astray so that they will enter Hell."⁸⁸

According to al-Isfarāyīnī, Paul recognizes that the Christians will not accept him into their community without proof that he was no longer seeking to persecute them. They would need evidence of a changed life and commitment to the ways of Jesus, so Paul devises a plan to prove that his conversion was genuine. As a demonstration that he was no longer committed to war, says al-Isfarāyīnī, Paul hamstringing his war horse and pretends to "regret his former hostility and spread dust on his head."⁸⁹ Though Paul's plan is successful, and the Christians accept his repentance, al-Isfarāyīnī is clear that Paul's regret is pretended rather than genuine. At no point for al-Isfarāyīnī does Paul become a genuine follower of Jesus.

Following his full acceptance by the Christians, al-Isfarāyīnī claims, Paul travels to Jerusalem, but not before teaching a new doctrine to his second-in-command, Nestor.

⁸⁵ Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178.

⁸⁶ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁸⁷ Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178.

⁸⁸ Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178.

⁸⁹ Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178.

According to al-Isfarāyīnī, Paul teaches Nestor, that “Jesus, Mary, and God, are the three members of the Trinity.”⁹⁰ This formulation of the Trinity, notably, is Qur’ānic rather than biblical, and the same feature appears in the accounts of al-Tha’labī and al-Baghawī.⁹¹ After Jerusalem, says al-Isfarāyīnī, Paul travels to the land of the Romans and teaches Jacob about “Divine Nature” and “Human Nature,” saying to them that “Jesus was no man but became man, was not a body, but became a body, and was the son of God.”⁹² The language of Jesus “becoming a body” refers to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, that the divine Jesus took on flesh and became human.⁹³ Finally, says al-Isfarāyīnī, Paul teaches a man called Malkan that “Jesus was and is God.”⁹⁴

Like al-Samarqandī and others, al-Isfarāyīnī claims that the doctrines Paul introduced to the Christians were the precise doctrines that most conflicted with Qur’ānic teaching: the Trinity and the divinity and sonship of Jesus. According to *sūra* 9:30–31, Christians were deluded because they had “taken their teachers and their monks as Lords instead of God, and (also) the Messiah, son of Mary.” The source of this delusion, for al-Isfarāyīnī, was Paul. By teaching the Christians about Jesus’s divine nature, Paul had, according to al-Isfarāyīnī, led the Christians into doctrinal error.⁹⁵ He had tricked them into believing what they should not have believed, and what is in direct contradiction to what Jesus taught (Q 19:36).

As with the account from al-Samarqandī, the second portion of al-Isfarāyīnī’s account describes Paul’s purported attempts to divide the Christians into sects and destroy

⁹⁰ Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178.

⁹¹ On the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, see D. Larry Gregg, “Trinity,” in *EDB*, 1336–37; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 226–61.

⁹² Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178.

⁹³ See F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., “The Incarnation,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2005), 830; D. Larry Gregg, “Incarnation,” in *EDB*, 520–21.

⁹⁴ Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178.

⁹⁵ Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178.

the unity that they had had since the ascension of Jesus. According to al-Isfarāyīnī, Paul calls Jacob and Malkan to meet with him individually and tells each one that he is Paul’s “intimate disciple” and that, following Paul’s death, each one of the men should “call upon men to accept his doctrine.”⁹⁶ After Paul dies, Jacob, Malkan, and Nestor follow Paul’s instructions and begin to call people to follow their doctrines. Al-Isfarāyīnī asserts that, because of Paul’s secret meetings with each disciple, the “Christians were divided into three sects, the Nestorians, the Jacobites, and the Melkites, and fought each other about the differences of doctrine.”⁹⁷ For al-Isfarāyīnī, then, as with al-Samarqandī, not only did Christians believe error because of Paul’s alleged deeds, but they were divided into warring factions as well. Paul, then, is the alleged corruptor of Christ’s religion and the destroyer of Christ’s community.

The feature that al-Isfarāyīnī makes clearer than al-Samarqandī is Paul’s suicide after he finishes teaching new doctrines and practices to the Christians.⁹⁸ Al-Samarqandī only alludes to Paul’s suicide, writing that Paul “wanted to make himself a sacrifice that night.”⁹⁹ Al-Isfarāyīnī, conversely, describes the actual event, claiming that Paul “went into the house of sacrifice and killed himself, saying that he did that in order to please Jesus.”¹⁰⁰ Why Muslim commentators claimed that Paul committed suicide is unknown, though his death does seem to be important. Paul’s absence allows for the Christian community to split into warring factions since Paul is no longer present to be the sole leader. Still, it does seem strange to claim that Paul killed himself. The Bible does not say that Paul died by suicide, and according to historical record, Paul was executed in Rome (ca. AD 62).¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178.

⁹⁷ Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178.

⁹⁸ This detail also appears in the accounts of al-Tha’labī, al-Būshanjī, and al-Qurṭubī. See Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 164–65; Būshanjī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 132; Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335–36.

⁹⁹ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

¹⁰⁰ Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178.

¹⁰¹ See Calvin J. Roetzel, “Paul,” in *EDB*, 1020.

Muslim writers may have concluded that Paul committed suicide based on their misunderstanding of two biblical texts. In Philippians 2:17, Paul describes being “poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering” of the Philippians’ faith. Also, in Colossians 1:24, Paul rejoices in his sufferings and says that, in his flesh, he is “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” The biblical description of Paul’s sufferings and willingness to be a sacrifice may have been what al-Isfarāyīnī was referring to when he claimed that Paul killed himself “as a sacrifice to God.”¹⁰²

Al-Isfarāyīnī’s account parallels that of al-Samarqandī in some of the details, but because the accounts appear in connection with different verses of the Qur’ān, the emphasis of each account is different. Whereas al-Samarqandī’s purpose in writing was to describe how Paul’s efforts were the source of Christian division (Q 5:14–16), al-Isfarāyīnī emphasizes Paul’s role in corruption Christian doctrine (Q 9:30–31). For al-Isfarāyīnī, Paul is determined not only to divide the Christians, but to condemn them. Thus, for al-Isfarāyīnī, Paul is the great deceiver who shows more concern for opposing the Christians than for understanding their message.

Al-Tha’labī (d. 1035)

Born in Nishapur in 961, al-Tha’labī was an influential Qur’ān commentator and *ḥadīth* specialist.¹⁰³ Few details are known about al-Tha’labī other than that he was able to receive a quality education, become a school teacher, and serve in various court roles before dying in 1035.¹⁰⁴ Though he was a scholar in multiple disciplines, and he produced

¹⁰² Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178. On the Muslim reception of the Pauline Epistles in Arabic, see Vevian Zaki, *The Pauline Epistles in Arabic* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 227–67.

¹⁰³ Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur’ān,” 2:111. Al-Tha’labī’s bibliography is extensive, but determining its exact contents is difficult because of duplications and erroneous attributions. See E. K. Rowson, “al-Tha’alībī,” in *EP*, 10:426.

¹⁰⁴ Rowson, “al-Tha’alībī,” 10:426; Saleh, *Formation of the Classical Tafṣīr Tradition*, 35. What details are known are gleaned from scant references in his own writings, the autobiography of his student, al-Wahidī (d. 1076), and a biography written by al-Fārisī (d. 1135). Saleh notes that al-Fārisī’s

works in each of them, al-Tha'labī became best known for his *tafsīr*, even founding a school of exegesis.¹⁰⁵

Al-Tha'labī's reference to the apostle Paul appears in his commentary called *The Unveiling and Elucidation in Qur'ānic Interpretation*.¹⁰⁶ Like al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Baghawī, and al-Razī, al-Tha'labī incorporates the story of Paul's alleged activities into his commentary on *sūra* 9:30–31 to explain the origin of the Christian doctrine of Christ's divinity and to show how the early Christian community descended into sectarian controversy.¹⁰⁷ As with al-Samarqandī, al-Isfarāyīnī, and others, al-Tha'labī appears to base his corruption account on the same Jewish tradition that Sayf uses, the *Life of Jesus*.¹⁰⁸ The full account of alleged Pauline corruption, according to al-Tha'labī, reads as follows:

The [Christians] were all of [one religion] for a year after Jesus was raised. They prayed in the same direction [*qibla*], and they fasted in the month of Ramadan until a war occurred between them and the Jews.

There was among the Jews a courageous man named Paul. He killed a group of the followers of Jesus and then said to the Jews, "If the truth is with Jesus, then we have disbelieved and been neglectful. Hellfire is our destiny. We would be the deceived, the losers, if they entered heaven but we enter hellfire. So I will play a trick so as to deceive them that they may enter hellfire." Now he had a horse that was called *al-'uqab* ("the eagle") upon which he would fight. He hamstrung his horse and made as though he were remorseful, putting soil on his head. The Christians said to

biography forms the foundation for all later medieval biographical dictionaries. See Saleh, *Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 33.

¹⁰⁵ The school of exegesis was formed by three Qur'ān scholars of the eleventh century, all of whom lived in Nishapur: Abū'l-Qāsim Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 1015), his student, al-Tha'labī, and al-Tha'labī's student, al-Wāhidī (d. 1076). On the Nishapuri school, see Walid A. Saleh, "Exegesis viii: Nishapuri School of Quranic Exegesis," in *EI*r, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/exegesis-viii-nishapuri-school-quranic-exegesis>.

¹⁰⁶ On the sources and structure of his commentary, see Saleh, *Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 67–76.

¹⁰⁷ Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 193. On sources for al-Tha'labī's commentary, see Saleh, *Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 70. See also Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 159–60. For other accounts related to Q 9:30–31, see Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178; Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-kabīr wa-mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 16:35–36, translation generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, November 29, 2023, <https://chat.openai.com/>.

¹⁰⁸ See Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 161; Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account," 179–80.

him, “Who are you?” He said, “Paul, your enemy. I have heard from heaven: ‘You can only repent by becoming a Christian.’ So I repented.”

Thus they brought him into the church. He entered a house for a year, not leaving it by day or by night, so that he learned the Injil. Then he went out and said, “It was announced to me: ‘God has accepted your repentance.’” So they believed him and loved him. He went to Jerusalem and took Nastur as a disciple, teaching him that Jesus and Mary and god were three [gods]. Then he went to Rome and taught them about the divinity and humanity [of Jesus]. He said, “Jesus was not human but took on divinity. He had no body but took on a body. He is the Son of God.” He taught this to a man who was called Jacob. Then he called a man who was called Malik and said to him, “Jesus is the god who was and who is.”

When [Paul] got power over them he called these three, one by one, and said to each of them “You are my successor (khalifali). I saw Jesus in a dream and he was pleased with me.” He said to each of them, “Tomorrow I will sacrifice myself, so call the people to your teachings.” Then he went to the altar and sacrificed himself, saying, “I do this to the pleasure of Jesus.” So when it was the third day, each of [the three] called the people to his side and a sect from the people followed each one of them. They differed with each other and have been fighting until our day. All of the Christians are from these three groups.¹⁰⁹

Al-Tha’labī appears to operate from the premise that medieval Christianity was not identical to the religion of Jesus. He writes that the followers of Jesus “prayed in the same direction [*qibla*]” and “fasted in the month of Ramadan.”¹¹⁰ Despite having lived six centuries prior to Islam, says al-Tha’labī, Jesus practiced a form of religion identical to Islam.¹¹¹ He prayed in the same direction as Muslims and followed the same religious practices, such as fasting.¹¹² Barring the efforts of Paul, to follow al-Tha’labī’s thinking, the followers of Jesus would have continued in his teachings up until the advent of Muhammad. However, according to al-Tha’labī, Paul caused them to deviate from Christ’s original religion.

¹⁰⁹ Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 164–65.

¹¹⁰ Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 164.

¹¹¹ Muslim teaching recognizes a line of prophets from Adam to Muhammad, each of whom preached the same basic message of monotheism and submission to Allah. See Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 178–79; Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 150; Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity,” 1:55; Maulānā Muḥammad ‘alī, *The Religion of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Aḥmadiyya Anjuman Ishā’at Islām, 1990), 165–98; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 26; Richard C. Martin, *Islam* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), 30–33; van Koningsveld, “Islamic Image of Paul,” 208–9.

¹¹² See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 86–89.

After a period of one year, al-Tha'labī claims, the Christians came under attack from Paul, whom he describes as a brave and courageous man who fought against the Christians, killing many of them.¹¹³ As in the account from al-Isfarāyīnī, Paul becomes worried, according to al-Tha'labī, that the Christians were correct in their religion and that the Jews would end up in hell while the Christians went to heaven. Notably, as with the account from al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Tha'labī does not indicate that Paul was interested in the veracity of the Christians' message. Paul does not seek to converse with the Christians or evaluate their arguments. Instead, according to al-Tha'labī's account, Paul determines to deceive the Christians so that they will be condemned along with the Jews.¹¹⁴ It may be that Muslim writers describe Paul in this way to bolster their claim that Paul was committed to corrupting Christ's religion, never appearing willing to embrace or even contemplate Christ's religion. The result is that, for authors such as al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Tha'labī, Paul is a devious, malicious corruptor, who was intent on destroying Christ's religion.

As with the accounts from al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Baghawī, al-Tha'labī alleges that Paul gained entrance into the Christian community by hamstringing his horse and then pretending to be remorseful, claiming that he could only repent by becoming a Christian.¹¹⁵ When the Christians accept Paul, says al-Tha'labī, he teaches the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation, and the divinity of Jesus to the typical three Christian figures: Nastur, Jacob, and Malik. The details in al-Tha'labī are so similar to those of al-Isfarāyīnī's

¹¹³ Al-Tha'labī's account relates to that of 'Abd al-jabbār, particularly on biblical origins (war/conflict between Jews and Christians). See Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 165. Reynolds observes that the culprit in one manuscript of al-Tha'labī's account is named Yūnus, the Arabic name meaning "Jonah." However, an alternate manuscript uses the name Būlus, which means "Paul." In his translation, Reynolds chooses to use Būlus. Because al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Damīrī (d. 1405) use Būlus also, the characters appear to be the same. See also Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 159n32; van Koningsveld, "Islamic Image of Paul," 206–7. Van Koningsveld proposes a theory for how Paul came to be associated with a theory on the origin of heretical doctrines regarding Paul the apostle versus Paul of Samosata, known as Bulus al-Shimshati. Anthony disagrees. See Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 195.

¹¹⁴ Damīrī, *Hayāt*, 178.

¹¹⁵ Tha'labī, *Tafsīr*, 165.

account, for example, that additional analysis is not needed. As I noted previously, accounts of alleged Pauline corruption may feature multiple different elements, which seems to indicate a larger tradition of corruption that was prominent in the Muslim world. Likewise, to find such similar accounts as those of al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Tha'labī may be further indication of a known tradition, such that later authors did not need to create new accounts of corruption, but instead could draw from earlier authors.

Regarding Christian sectarianism, al-Tha'labī provides additional explanation beyond that of al-Isfarāyīnī. He writes that the three men Paul taught (Nastur, Jacob, and Malik) called Christians to follow them. As a result, al-Tha'labī claims, the Christian community split into three factions because they “differed with each other and have been fighting until our day.”¹¹⁶ Then, al-Tha'labī further states that “all of the Christians are from these three groups.”¹¹⁷ For al-Tha'labī, then, Paul is responsible not only for the importation of new doctrines into Christ's original religion, but also for splitting the Christian community into competing factions that remained into the medieval period. For al-Tha'labī, no group of medieval Christians could claim to be following the religion of Jesus because they all came from the three original groups formed after Paul's death. As such, following al-Tha'labī's logic, the religion of Jesus was lost entirely until the advent of Muhammad, when he called people to follow the same perennial message that all prophets had preached, including Jesus.

Al-Būshanjī (d. Eleventh Century)

Al-Būshanjī was an author and commentator in Nishapur, which perhaps explains how he came into contact with a narrative of Pauline corruption similar to that of al-Tha'labī.¹¹⁸ In addition to being known as an expert in Islamic doctrine and practice,

¹¹⁶ Tha'labī, *Tafsīr*, 165.

¹¹⁷ Tha'labī, *Tafsīr*, 165.

¹¹⁸ Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 195.

al-Būshanjī was known as a devout man and an ascetic who lived in seclusion and private devotion.¹¹⁹ He died in Nishapur in the eleventh century.

Al-Būshanjī's account of alleged Pauline corruption appears in his collection of stories related to the Qur'ān, *Stories of the Noble Qur'ān*, and it appears to be based on the same Jewish tradition that Sayf and other Qur'ān commentators such as al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Tha'labī use, the *Life of Jesus*. Al-Būshanjī uses the story to explain a pair of Qur'ānic verses that describe the Christians arguing with each other (Q 19:37; 43:65). In *sūra* 19:27–33, the infant Jesus speaks to the people about how he is a servant of God and a prophet with a book. *Sūra* 19:34–35 then reads, “That was Jesus, son of Mary—a statement of the truth about which they are in doubt. It is not for God to take any son.” It appears that some of the Christians were claiming Jesus was the son of God and, as a result, the “[Christian] factions differed among themselves” (Q 19:37). Then, in *sūra* 43:63, Jesus says he has “brought to [the people] the wisdom,” and has done so “to make clear to [them] some of [their] differences.” What those differences were is not clear in this context, but they were perhaps also related to the identity of Jesus, the one who “brought the clear signs” (Q 43:63). However, despite the clear signs from Jesus, the “[Christian] factions differed among themselves” (Q 43:65). Al-Būshanjī, in his commentary on *sūra* 19:37 and *sūra* 43:65, identifies Paul as the source of Christian disagreement about Jesus. His full account of Paul's alleged activities reads as follows:

Saith God Most High: “So the sects differed amongst themselves (Qur'an, XIX, 38; XLIII, 65).” Historians say that after God Most High had brought Jesus into Heaven, the Christians followed a good path until Paul misled them. Now he was a man of the Jews who was evilly disposed towards Jesus and those of His Church, and was ever speaking ill of them and showing enmity towards them.

Now when he was [*sic*] grown old he said: “I do not wish that my malice should be cut off from them.” So he put out one of his eyes and asked the Christians: “Do you recognize me?” They answered: “Yes, thou art the worst of God's creatures.” He replied: “Last night I saw Jesus in a dream. He struck me a blow on the eye which blinded me, and said: ‘How long wilt thou afflict my Church?’ I leapt up trembling from sleep. One of my eyes was out of action. I have come to you to adopt your

¹¹⁹ See Gholam-Ali Arya, “al-Būshanjī,” in *EIs*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-9831_isla_SIM_05000048.

Faith and Church, so that Jesus may be satisfied with me, for I cannot bear His reproaches.”

So the Christians received him and took him into a house [of theirs], and he adopted the monastic life, fasting all day and praying all night, so that the people were charmed with him. Then he summoned a group [of the Christians] and said: “Do you not see that the army precedes the King?” They answered: “Yes.” “We see,” continued he, “that the Sun, Moon and Stars come up from the East and go down in the West. Doubtless, therefore, God is in the East.” “Yes,” they answered. “Then,” said he, “it were [*sic*] best that in prayer we should turn our faces towards the East.” So that group turned their faces away from the House of Holiness [Jerusalem] and prayed towards the East. After a while he summoned another group and said: “Hath not God Most High created everything for the benefit of mankind?” They answered: “Yes.” “Why, then,” enquired he, “should the flesh of the cow be lawful, and that of the pig unlawful? I consider that the flesh of the pig is [also] lawful.” So that group made pigs’ flesh lawful to themselves. After a while he summoned another party and said: “To quicken and create is permitted to none save God Most High.” They answered: “No.” “Then,” said he, “Jesus must be God, since He created birds and restored the dead to life.”

[Again] after a while he assembled the people and said: “Last night I saw Jesus in a dream. He said, ‘Now am I well pleased with thee,’ and laid his hand on my face, and through the blessing of His hand God restored my sight. He also addressed to me several sayings, which I should repeat to you. Choose and gather together a number of your doctors and chief men so that I may convey [to them] my message.” They therefore brought before him three of their chief doctors. “Let them approach me one by one,” said he. So first he summoned one and said to him, “Jesus said to me, ‘Why do you call me a servant [of God] when you know that I have restored the dead to life, created birds, and caused those born blind to see? None but God can do these things. I am God, and you must call me God.’” That man agreed thus to speak [of Christ] and went out from before him [Paul]. Then he summoned the second and said to him, “Jesus hath commanded me saying, ‘Tell my Church that I have done things which none but God can do. Why, then, do ye call me the servant of God? I am the associate of God, and you must so believe concerning me.’” The man accepted this statement from him and went out from before him [Paul]. Then he summoned the third and said, “Jesus said to me, ‘I am the Son of God: you have seen and heard what I have created and how I have restored the dead to life. Thus must you read it in the Gospel.’” This man also accepted [this statement] from him, and came out from before him.

Then that very night Paul killed himself. Some say that Paul said: “Since I have delivered His message I will go to Him,” and slew himself before the people. Next day, when the people beheld this matter, they went to those three and said: “What message from Jesus did Paul convey to you?” All spoke, each contradicting the other, so that contention arose between them. Some say that Paul said to all three: “Jesus told me that He was the Son of God.” Then all three disputed, saying: “How can this be?” and for this reason contention arose amongst them. Now one of them was named Nestorius, one Malká, and the other Már Ya’qúb; but since their statements are prolix, and there is no great advantage in [repeating] them, we have not entered into them.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Būshanjī, *Qışaş*, 132–34. See also Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 195n59.

The first portion of al-Būshanjī's account follows the same basic progression as the accounts from al-Isfarāyīnī's and al-Tha'labī. He begins with the assumption that the religion of Jesus was equivalent to Islam, writing that the Christians "followed a good path until Paul misled them."¹²¹ Al-Būshanjī describes Paul as a Jewish opponent of the Christians, but he seems to emphasize Paul's character as the impetus for his animosity toward the Christians. He claims that Paul was "evilily disposed towards Jesus and those of His Church, and was ever speaking ill of them and showing enmity towards them."¹²² For al-Būshanjī, Paul was not only opposed to the Christians, but also to Jesus.¹²³

In other accounts, such as those from al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Tha'labī, and al-Qurṭubī, Paul becomes worried that the Christians were correct in their doctrine and the Jews were incorrect, so he determines to lead them astray for the sake of mutual destruction. In al-Būshanjī's account, however, Paul is not concerned about Christian doctrine being correct or about Christians going to heaven. Paul laments that he will not be able to continue harming Christians forever due to the natural limitations of life. Upon growing old, according to al-Būshanjī, Paul says, "I do not wish that my malice should be cut off from them," meaning that he wants to inflict harm on the Christians even after death.¹²⁴ Here, the supposed malice of Paul is on full display in al-Būshanjī's account. He wants to afflict the Christians even after his death. How Paul intends to harm the Christians will become evident later in the account when he teaches them new doctrines and causes them to divide into three groups.

¹²¹ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 132.

¹²² Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 132.

¹²³ Compare al-Būshanjī's description of Paul to that of al-Shahrastānī, where he writes that Paul "disordered his affair, made himself (Peter's) partner, altered the bases (*awḍā'*) of his knowledge, and mixed it with the arguments of the philosophers and the (evil) suggestions of his heart." See Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. William Cureton (London: Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1842), quoted in William Montgomery Watt, "Ash-Shahrastānī's Account of Christian Doctrine," *Islamochristiana* 9 (1983): 251–52.

¹²⁴ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 132.

Paul’s plan to harm the Christians, says al-Būshanjī, involves him pretending to become a Christian so that he can gain entrance into the Christian community. Al-Būshanjī does not include Paul’s horse or the hamstringing incident in his account, but alleges that Paul “put out one of his eyes” and came to the Christians with a supernatural story.¹²⁵ Paul then tells them the story, says al-Būshanjī, of how he saw Jesus in a dream, and how Jesus struck his eye so that when he awoke his eye was no longer functioning. As a result of this encounter, Paul says, he had come to the Christians “to adopt [their] Faith and Church, so that Jesus may be satisfied with [him], for [he] cannot bear [Christ’s] reproaches.”¹²⁶ The Christians believe Paul, says al-Būshanjī, and they take him into their house, where he “adopted the monastic life, fasting all day and praying all night, so that the people were charmed with him.”¹²⁷

The next section of al-Būshanjī’s account is comparable to that of al-Samarqandī because it includes Paul’s efforts to change the direction of prayer and dietary practices of the Christians.¹²⁸ Al-Būshanjī alleges that Paul convinces the Christians to change their direction of prayer “away from the House of Holiness [Jerusalem] and [pray] towards the East.”¹²⁹ In addition, Paul convinces the Christians to make the consumption of pork lawful because “God Most High created everything for the benefit of mankind.”¹³⁰ In so doing, Paul, according to al-Būshanjī, changes two core practices of the Christian community that were instituted by Jesus.

In addition to changing religious practices, according to al-Būshanjī, Paul also

¹²⁵ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 132–33. For al-Isfarāyīnī, see Damīrī, *Hayāt*, 178. For al-Qurṭubī, see Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335.

¹²⁶ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 133.

¹²⁷ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 133. Al-Būshanjī’s description of Paul’s monasticism and charm is a unique feature, not found in any other accounts I have examined.

¹²⁸ Al-Samarqandī is the only other *tafsīr* author I examine who includes this detail. See Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

¹²⁹ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 133.

¹³⁰ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 133.

gives new teachings to the Christians. In other versions of the story found in *tafsīr*, Paul teaches that Jesus is the son of God and a member of the Trinity, along with Allah and Mary.¹³¹ In al-Būshanjī’s telling of the story, however, Paul seems more focused on convincing the Christians of Christ’s divinity. In addition to Paul meeting individually with three men (Nestorius, Malká, and Már Ya’qúb) to give them secret instruction, Paul first gathers a group of Christians and tells them that the ability to “quicken and create is permitted to none save God Most High,” so “Jesus must be God, since He created birds and restored the dead to life.”¹³² The reference to Jesus creating birds and raising the dead comes from *sūra* 3:49, but the larger context is the angels telling Mary that she will give birth to Jesus and that he will be a sign to his people (Q 3:48–51; cf. 5:110). In this passage, Jesus’s ability to bring clay birds to life and raise the dead is a confirmation that he was a prophet and a “messenger to the Sons of Israel,” but not a divine being.¹³³

In al-Būshanjī’s account of alleged Pauline corruption, Paul gathers the Christians to himself and tells them how he allegedly met Jesus in a dream. For Paul, says al-Būshanjī, that alleged encounter confirmed his authority to teach new doctrines. According to Paul, Jesus had come to him and healed his eyesight “through the blessing of [Christ’s] hand” and then “addressed to [him] several sayings” that he was to repeat to the Christians.¹³⁴ This unique feature of al-Būshanjī’s account was perhaps intended to further discredit Paul’s teachings, because not only would Paul teach doctrines that

¹³¹ See Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24; Damīrī, *Hayāt*, 178; Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 164. On the Trinity in the Qur’ān, see *sūras* 4:171, 5:73, and 5:116. See also Media Zainul Bahri, “Trinity in the Qur’an: A Historical Account,” *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 137 (2018): 51–55.

¹³² Būshanjī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 133.

¹³³ The source of this story of Jesus creating birds from clay is unknown, but a version of it does appear in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. In this story, the young Jesus fashions twelve clay birds and then brings them to life. See Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1995), 107. For two commentaries on the passage, see also Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, 2:163–66; Quṭb, *Shade of the Qur’ān*, 2:75.

¹³⁴ Būshanjī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 133. Compare to al-Qarāfī’s account, where he claims Paul says, “And so I have come to live among you and to teach the Torah and its laws.” See Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 288.

conflicted with what Jesus taught, says al-Būshanjī, but he did so under the pretense of divine appointment.¹³⁵ Al-Būshanjī may have also sought to imply in his account that Paul knew the Christians would not accept his teaching without divine authorization. Nevertheless, according to al-Būshanjī, not only did he corrupt the religion of Jesus, but he did so with the misappropriated authority of Jesus.

The first message Paul teaches as being from Jesus, according to al-Būshanjī, is that Jesus is God. Jesus allegedly asks Paul, “Why do you call me a servant [of God] when you know that I have restored the dead to life, created birds, and caused those born blind to see?”¹³⁶ Jesus then says, “None but God can do these things. I am God, and you must call me God.”¹³⁷ Jesus’s ability to create birds in *sūra* 3 is intended to support his prophethood and confirm his message. Al-Būshanjī, however, has Paul appealing to this same ability, on the authority of Jesus’s own words, as support for the belief that Jesus is divine, which is an “excess” in religion (Q 4:171).¹³⁸

When the second man comes before Paul, Paul also teaches him the divinity of Jesus. According to Paul, Jesus appeared to him and said, “Tell my Church that I have done things which none but God can do. Why, then, do ye call me the servant of God? I am the associate of God, and you must so believe concerning me.”¹³⁹ The argument here is the same: Jesus does things that only Allah can do, so he must be Allah. However, the fact that Paul has Jesus saying he is “the associate of God” is perhaps a reference to the Qur’ān’s condemnation of associating other beings with Allah. For example, in *sūra* 3:64, the prophet is supposed to appeal to the Jews and Christians not to worship other beings,

¹³⁵ Compare al-Būshanjī’s account here to that of al-Qarāfi, where the Christians acknowledge they had never heard what Paul taught. See Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286.

¹³⁶ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 133.

¹³⁷ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 133–34.

¹³⁸ Compare to al-Qurṭubī’s account on *sūra* 4:171. See Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 335–36.

¹³⁹ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 134.

saying, “We do not serve (anyone) but God, and do not associate (anything) with Him, and do not take each other as Lords instead of God.” *Sūra* 4:48 says that Allah “does not forgive (anything) being associated with Him.” Also, in *sūra* 5:72, the people who claim that Jesus is God have associated something with God and God has “forbidden him (from) the Garden, and his refuge is the Fire.” Paul is guilty, then, in al-Būshanjī’s account, of causing the Christians to worship Jesus in addition to Allah.

The third man receives the same instruction from Paul to worship Jesus as divine. In al-Būshanjī’s account, Paul says that Jesus appeared to him and told him he is the “Son of God” and the proof is that Jesus had “restored the dead to life.”¹⁴⁰ This third man, along with the first two men, accepts Paul’s teaching and, after Paul’s suicide, call the Christians to follow his message. As with the accounts from al-Tha’labī, al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Qurṭubī, and others, the result of Paul’s teaching the three men separately is chaos and division in the Christian community. Al-Būshanjī writes, “All spoke, each contradicting the other, so that contention arose between them.”¹⁴¹

As noted previously, al-Būshanjī’s account combines elements from various streams within the broader narrative of alleged Pauline corruption. For al-Būshanjī, Paul was the malevolent persecutor of the Christians, not content to harm them in this life only, but to reap destruction on them even after death. To this end, al-Būshanjī alleges, Paul mutilates his own body to feign a supernatural encounter with Jesus and subsequent conversion. Having gained entrance into the Christian community, Paul then reportedly teaches the divinity and sonship of Jesus on the authority of Jesus’s own words. As a result, says al-Būshanjī, the Christian community disagreed about Jesus and divided into multiple factions characterized by enmity and hatred toward one another, in the same way al-Samarqandī describes in his commentary on *sūra* 5:14–16.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 134.

¹⁴¹ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 134.

¹⁴² Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

Al-Baghawī (d. 1122)

Al-Baghawī was born in 1041 in the village of Baghshūr, near the modern Afghan city of Herat.¹⁴³ He was a Shāfiʿī traditionist and Qurʾān commentator, and in addition to his intellectual abilities he was noted for his piety and asceticism.¹⁴⁴ Al-Baghawī wrote on various subjects, but became best known for two collections of *ḥadīth*.¹⁴⁵ He died at Marw al-Rūdh (today’s Afghanistan) in 1122.

Al-Baghawī’s reference to Paul is found in his lesser-known commentary, *Signposts of Revelation in the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*. Like al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Thaʿlabī and other commentators, al-Baghawī appears to base his corruption account on the Jewish *Life of Jesus* (like Sayf) and includes it in his commentary on *sūra* 9:30–31 to explain how Christ’s followers were allegedly influenced to abandon Christ’s original religion and worship Jesus as God.¹⁴⁶ The full text of his account reads as follows:

Then, a man said, “My father told me, on the authority of my grandfather, that the Torah was placed in a box and buried in a vineyard.” So, they went with him until they dug it out. Ezra opposed it with what he had written. However, they found nothing different. They said, “Allah has not dropped the Torah in the heart of a man except that he is His son.” It was at that point that the Jews said, “Ezra is the son of Allah.” As for the Christians, they said, “The Messiah is the son of Allah.”

The reason for this is that they followed the Islamic religion for eighty-one years after the ascension of Jesus, praying towards the Qibla and fasting during Ramadan. Then, a war broke out between them and the Jews. There was a brave man among the Jews called Bulus (Paul) who killed some of Jesus’ disciples. Then, he said to the Jews, “If the truth is with Jesus, then we have disbelieved, and the Fire is our destination. We are losers if they enter Paradise and we enter the Fire. I will deceive and mislead them until they enter the Fire.” He had a horse called “Al-Uqab” that he used to fight on. He made it rear and exposed its despair. He put dirt on his head. The Christians asked him, “Who are you?” He replied, “Bulus, your enemy.” From the

¹⁴³ Eerik Dickinson, “al-Baghawī, Abū Muḥammad,” in *EF*³, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/*-SIM_0323/. The moniker al-Farrāʾ (“furrier”) could be a reference to his father’s occupation or a nickname.

¹⁴⁴ C. Brockelmann, “al-Baghawī,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1913), 1:561–62. See also J. Robson, “al-Baghawī,” in *EF*², 1:893. Dickinson, “al-Baghawī, Abū Muḥammad.”

¹⁴⁵ Brockelmann, “al-Baghawī”; Dickinson, “al-Baghawī, Abū Muḥammad.” https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/*-SIM_0323/.

¹⁴⁶ See Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178; Thaʿlabī, *Tafsīr*, 164.

heavens, it was announced, “There is no forgiveness for you unless you become Christian and abandon Judaism.”

So, they brought him into the church, and he stayed in a room for a year, not going out day or night until he learned the Gospel. Then, he left and said, “I was called to repent, and Allah has accepted your repentance.” They believed him, loved him, and then he went to Jerusalem. He appointed Nestor over them and taught them that Jesus, Mary, and God were three. Then, he went to the Romans and taught them about divinity and humanity. He said, “Jesus is not a man or flesh but is the son of Allah.”

He taught this to a man named Jacob. Then, he called a man named Malik and said, “Verily, Allah is everlasting, and Jesus is everlasting.” When he was able to convince them of that, they called the three to a place, and he addressed them one by one, and said to each one of them: “You are pure, for I saw Jesus in my dream, and he was pleased with me.” To each one of them, he said: “Tomorrow, I will slaughter myself, so invite the people to your Nahr (slaughtering place).” Then he entered the place of slaughter and slaughtered himself. He said: “I am only doing this to seek Jesus’ pleasure.”

On the third day, each one of them invited the people to their feast, and they followed each of them. They disagreed and fought, and Allah, the Almighty and Majestic, said, “The Messiah is the Son of God, as the Jews said before, Uzair is the Son of God.” That is their statement from their mouths. Mujahid said: “They are imitating the words of the polytheists before who used to say that Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and Manat are the daughters of God.” Al-Hasan said: “He likened their disbelief to the disbelief of those who passed away from the infidel nations, just as he said about the Arab polytheists: Thus did those before them say the likeness of And to them their hearts are similar.” Al-Qutaybi said: “He means that those of the Jews and Christians who were in the era of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, say what he said or O Allah [to them], May God fight them.” Ibn Abbas said: “May God curse them.” Ibn Jurayj said: “That is, God killed them. It was said: It is not in the same way as the word ‘fighter,’ but rather it is in the sense of astonishment, how can they be misled, that is: they are turned away from the truth after the evidence for it has been established.”¹⁴⁷

Like al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Tha’labī, al-Baghawī appeals to alleged Pauline corruption to explain how Christians had come to worship Jesus in addition to Allah. Yet, unlike al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Tha’labī, al-Baghawī provides an additional story about Ezra to explain how the Jews had also allegedly neglected the truth and begun to worship a human alongside Allah.¹⁴⁸ According to *sūra* 9:30, the Jews say, “Ezra is the son of God,”

¹⁴⁷ Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39.

¹⁴⁸ The source material for al-Baghawī’s treatment of the Jews is unknown but appears to be a conflation of two biblical stories: the rediscovery of the Torah during the reign of King Josiah (2 Kgs 22) and the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 1–4). Notably, Ezra does not appear in any of these chapters. For more discussion on Josiah’s discovery of the law and his reforms, see Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, New American Commentary, vol. 8 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 380–92; Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, New American Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 65–165.

and the Christians say, “The Messiah is the son of God,” referring to Jesus. All the other corruption accounts associated with this verse that I have found focus on Christians worshipping Jesus. Al-Baghawī’s account, however, includes the additional explanation for why the Jews supposedly worship Ezra, which may indicate that he was interacting with Jews as well as Christians, or that he borrowed material from an account I have not examined.¹⁴⁹ As noted previously, it appears that Muslim authors were comfortable combining reports and selectively choosing details for their narratives of alleged corruption. According to al-Baghawī, a copy of the Torah was buried in a vineyard for some time and then unearthed. When the people began to read from the Torah, Ezra “opposed it with what he had written,” meaning he put his own words against the Torah as comparison.¹⁵⁰ When the people found no difference between the Torah and Ezra’s own words, they said, “Allah has not dropped the Torah in the heart of a man except that he is His son.”¹⁵¹ Thus, according to *sūra* 9:30, the Jews worshiped Ezra, and so also the Christians worshiped Jesus. The remainder of al-Baghawī’s account is devoted to his explanation of how Christians began to worship Jesus.

Like al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Tha’labī, al-Baghawī assumes a period of time in which Christians followed the religion of Jesus (Islam) before they were allegedly led astray into error. Paul persecutes the Christians for some time, says al-Baghawī, until he begins to worry that Christians might believe the truth and the Jews might be in error. If that were the case, Paul fears, then the Christians would go to Paradise and the Jews would go to hell. So, according to al-Baghawī, Paul determines to “deceive and mislead [the Christians] until they enter the Fire.”¹⁵² For al-Baghawī, then, Paul’s motivation is mutual

¹⁴⁹ See Jonathan Brown, “The Qur’an, the Jews and Ezra as the Son of God,” Al-Madina Institute, July 27, 2016, <https://www.almadina.org/studio/articles/the-quran-the-jews-and-ezra-as-the-son-of-god>.

¹⁵⁰ Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39.

¹⁵¹ Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39.

¹⁵² Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39.

destruction.¹⁵³

Al-Baghawī includes the common story of Paul using his horse to demonstrate his repentance, and states that the Christians accepted Paul into their community and loved him.¹⁵⁴ Once Paul earns the Christians’ trust, he travels to Jerusalem and begins to teach new doctrines to three individuals. To Nestor, Paul teaches that “Jesus, Mary, and God were three”; to Jacob he teaches that “Jesus is not a man or flesh but is the son of Allah”; and to Malik he teaches that “Allah is everlasting, and Jesus is everlasting.”¹⁵⁵ Paul then encourages each of the men to take leadership after Paul’s suicide, and when they do, according to al-Baghawī, the Christians “disagreed and fought.”¹⁵⁶ Paul, then, for al-Baghawī, is the corruptor of Christ’s religion and the source of Christian division and sectarianism.

What makes al-Baghawī’s account unique is that he provides additional commentary on the Christian claim of Christ’s sonship and Christian division beyond what al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Tha’labī provide. He ties his commentary to *sūra* 9:30–31, where Christians are chastised for saying that Jesus is the son of Allah as the Jews before said that Ezra was the son of Allah. Al-Baghawī then includes *ḥadīth* material attributed to five early Muslim authors, the first two of which liken Christians to polytheists or disbelievers, while the remaining three address Allah’s response to Christian disbelief.

First, al-Baghawī includes a saying attributed to Mujāhid ibn Jabr, who died between 720 and 722: “They are imitating the words of the polytheists before who used

¹⁵³ The same motivation appears in the accounts of al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Tha’labī, and al-Qurṭubī. See Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178; Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 165; Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335. See also Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 179–80.

¹⁵⁴ Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39. The horse also appears in Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 165.

¹⁵⁵ Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39.

¹⁵⁶ Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39.

to say that al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat are the daughters of God.”¹⁵⁷ The three “daughters of God” that Mujāhid references were pre-Islamic deities worshiped in the Arab world. They appear in *sūra* 53:19–22 in an incident known as the “Satanic Verses.”¹⁵⁸ According to tradition, Muhammad allowed the people of his tribe to worship these deities, acknowledging their power to intercede with Allah, because he mistook Satan’s words for Allah’s words. Later, the verses were changed to denounce worship of the three daughters to preserve the strict monotheism of Islam.¹⁵⁹

Al-Baghawī does not elaborate on the tradition he attributes to Muhājīd ibn Jabr, nor does he comment further on the “Satanic verses” event. His inclusion of the tradition appears to indicate that he equates Christian worship of Jesus with polytheistic worship of pre-Islamic deities, despite the Qur’ān distinguishing the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) from polytheists (cf. Q 3:67; 5:82; 98:1, 6). The Christians were, says al-Baghawī, “imitating the words” of the polytheists who “used to say that al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat are the daughters of God.”¹⁶⁰

The second tradition that al-Baghawī cites is attributed to al-Hasan, which could be a reference to al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ibn Muhammad, known as al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (d. 874).¹⁶¹ The tradition reads, “He likened their disbelief to the disbelief of those who

¹⁵⁷ Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39. See also G. H. A. Juynboll, “Mujāhid b. Jabr,” in *Encyclopaedia of Canonical Hadith* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 430.

¹⁵⁸ For more information on the “Satanic Verses” incident, see Shahab Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2017). His introduction is helpful in providing a summary of this unique event in Islamic history. He then provides more than fifty examples of primary source accounts describing the event. He does so to document the facticity of the event, or at least its early acceptance as factual, because modern Muslims almost universally claim the story is fictitious.

¹⁵⁹ See al-Ṭabarī’s account of the incident in Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al. (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), 6:107–12.

¹⁶⁰ Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39. On pagan pre-Islamic religion in the Qur’ān, see W. Montgomery Watt, “Pre-Islamic Arabian Religion in the Qur’an,” *Islamic Studies* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 73–79; Patricia Crone, “The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities,” *Arabica* 57 (2010): 151–200.

¹⁶¹ Al-‘Askarī was the eleventh imām of Twelver Shiism. See J. Eliash, “Ḥasan al-‘Askarī,” in *EP*, 3:246–47; Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi’i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver*

passed away from the infidel nations, just as he said about the Arab polytheists: Thus did those before them say the likeness of and to them their hearts are similar.”¹⁶² As with the first tradition, al-Baghawī appears to equate the Christians with the polytheists. He likens Christian belief in Christ’s sonship to disbelief, in the sense that the Christians disbelieve the truth of Islam. Christians are, says al-Baghawī, committing the same disbelief as the “infidel nations” or “Arab polytheists.”¹⁶³

The final three traditions al-Baghawī includes in his commentary refer to Allah’s opposition to the Jews and Christians for not believing the truth. Al-Baghawī includes them in his commentary on the authority of al-Qutaybi (perhaps Ibn Qutayba, d. 889), Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 687) and Ibn Jurayj (d. 767).¹⁶⁴ Viewed together, these three traditions further indicate that al-Baghawī considered Christians to be analogous to polytheists in their beliefs, and deserving of the same judgment that polytheists will receive from Allah. He asserts that Allah will fight the “Jews and Christians who were in the era of the Prophet” because they disbelieved.¹⁶⁵ For al-Baghawī, the Christians deserved Allah’s judgment for their disbelief of Islam and adherence to Pauline teaching.

The last phrase of the tradition attributed to Ibn Jurayj captures the typical Muslim attitude toward Christian beliefs: astonishment that Christians could turn away

Shi’ism (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1987), 44. Determining who al-Baghawī cites is, ultimately, not necessary. As noted earlier in the study, what matters is what the later writers said about alleged Pauline corruption.

¹⁶² Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39.

¹⁶³ Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39.

¹⁶⁴ The difficulty in determining who al-Baghawī referred to as al-Qutaybi may be a result of translating the Arabic text into English. If the reference is to Ibn Qutayba, see Gérard Lecomte, “Ibn Qutayba,” in *EI²*, 3:844–47; Joseph E. Lowry, “Ibn Qutaybah,” in *Arabic Literary Culture, 500–925*, ed. Michael Cooperson and Shawkat M. Toorawa, Dictionary of Literary Biography 311 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 172–183. On Ibn ‘Abbās, see L. Veccia Vaglieri, “‘Abd Allāh b. al-‘Abbās,” in *EI²*, 1:40–41. On Ibn Jurayj, see Harald Motzki, “Ibn Jurayj,” in *EI³*, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/*-SIM_0323/. As with the tradition attributed to al-‘Askarī, the connection to an earlier authority cannot be proven.

¹⁶⁵ Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39. Compare this to al-Samarqandī’s account, where he says that Christian sectarianism (enmity) is Allah’s judgment. See Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

from the truth after the evidence for it has been established.¹⁶⁶ From al-Baghawī's perspective, the truth of Allah's oneness, the prophetic lineage, and the final prophethood of Muhammad were made plain in the preaching of Jesus and later in the preaching of Muhammad. Jews and Christians were without excuse for not accepting what had been taught to them. In *sūra* 2:118, Allah rebukes those people who would say "If only God would speak to us, or a sign would come to us," because he has "already made the signs clear to a people (who) are certain (in their belief)." The signs were sent to them through Muhammad "with the truth, as a bringer of good news and a warner." Likewise, in *sūra* 5:19, the people of the book are told that a messenger had come to them to "make (things) clear" to them after an interval between the messengers. Christian belief in the Trinity and the sonship/divinity of Jesus were, according to al-Baghawī, signs of the same disbelief that led Christians to reject Muhammad's prophethood.

Al-Baghawī's account of alleged Pauline corruption is an example of how Muslim commentators could utilize a core narrative of Paul's alleged activities and then add to it any details that they felt better explained medieval Christianity. Al-Baghawī uses the same basic story as al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Tha'labī but then adds the story of the Torah to explain how Jews came to worship Ezra, as well as additional traditions to explain how Christians were equivalent to polytheists. For al-Baghawī, it seems he was not content merely to identify Paul as the corruptor of Christianity. With the additional material at the end of his account, he appears to dismiss any notion that medieval Christians were innocent victims of Paul's teaching. He likens the Christians to polytheists because of their disbelief in Islam. Though they had been misled, the responsibility was on them to believe what had been made plain to them (Q 2:118) and what had "been established."¹⁶⁷ By continuing in their worship of Jesus, al-Baghawī says, the Christians deserve Allah's curse and judgment.

¹⁶⁶ Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39.

¹⁶⁷ Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210)

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was a Muslim theologian born in Rayy (today's Iran) in 1149.¹⁶⁸ Al-Rāzī started his education by learning from his father and then studied jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, literature, history, and medicine.¹⁶⁹ He wrote on a wide variety of subjects but is best known for his *tafsīr* and theological writings.¹⁷⁰ Al-Rāzī died in 1210.

Al-Rāzī's account of alleged Pauline corruption appears in his commentary on the Qur'ān, *The Great Commentary*.¹⁷¹ Like al-Tha'labī, al-Būshanjī, and al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Rāzī refers to Pauline corruption in his explanation of *sūra* 9:30–31 and appears to base his account on the same Jewish tradition from the *Life of Jesus*. In keeping with the common narrative, al-Rāzī claims that Paul was the source of Christian doctrines and sectarianism. His full account reads as follows:

Indeed, the followers of Jesus (peace be upon him) were initially on the right path after the ascension of Jesus. However, a war broke out between them and the Jews. Among the Jews, there was a courageous man called Paul who killed some of Jesus's disciples. He then said to the Jews, "If the truth is with Jesus, then we have disbelieved, and the fire will be our destination, and we will be the losers if they enter paradise while we enter the fire." Paul plotted to mislead them, but he was eventually punished, humbled himself, and sought forgiveness. He was admitted into the Christian church and spent a year there, learning the Gospel, and the Christians believed and loved him.

Afterward, he went to Jerusalem and was appointed as their leader. He taught them that Jesus, Mary, and God were three in one. He went to the Romans and taught them about theology and consubstantiality, saying that Jesus was not a human being but

¹⁶⁸ See M. Ṣaghīr Ḥasan Ma'ṣūmī, "Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Critics," *Islamic Studies* 6, no. 4 (December 1967): 355.

¹⁶⁹ Muammer Iskenderoglu, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *CMR*, 4:61. See also Frank Griffel, "On Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Life and the Patronage He Received," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 3 (September 2007), 318; Ma'ṣūmī, "Imām Fakhr al-Dīn," 355–70; Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 4.

¹⁷⁰ He secured an income through multiple patronages and was able to spend his time teaching and forming schools. At one point al-Rāzī is said to have had more than three hundred disciples who accompanied him and learned from him. He was also known for getting into theological debates, sometimes even causing riots. See G. C. Anawati, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *EL*², 2:752. See Iskenderoglu, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," 4:61; Shihadeh, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, 5.

¹⁷¹ Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 2:115–16. See also Shihadeh, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, 10. Al-Rāzī's acknowledged source for some of his commentary material was al-Wāḥidī (d. 1076), a student of al-Tha'labī. See Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 194.

God. He taught another man called Jacob this belief. Then, he called a man named Malak (Angel) and told him, “God has never ceased to be and will never cease to be Jesus.”

Paul then appointed each of these three men as his successors, instructing them to invite people to their respective beliefs. He even claimed that he had seen Jesus in a dream, and Jesus was pleased with him. He vowed to sacrifice his own soul to please Jesus and then took his own life as a sacrifice. Each of these three men propagated his teachings.

This is the root of the division and disbelief among Christian sects. This is what was narrated by the one who was mercifully granted knowledge by God. It is closest to my understanding that it should be said that perhaps the term “Son” in the Gospel is used in an honorary sense, just as the term “Friend” is used in the case of Abraham, to honor him. The people, due to their enmity with the Jews and their desire to counter their excesses, responded with an opposing exaggeration on the other side. They went to extremes in interpreting the term “Son” in the literal sense, and this interpretation was accepted by the ignorant. This deviant belief spread among the followers of Jesus (peace be upon him). God knows the reality of the situation.¹⁷²

The basic outline of al-Rāzī’s account is familiar at this point: the assumption that early Christians followed the religion of (proto-) Islam before Paul misled them into error and divided their community into three competing sects. In keeping with the similar account from al-Qurṭubī, al-Tha’labī, and others, al-Rāzī claims Paul became concerned that the Christians believed the truth and the Jews were error. The Jews would be the “losers,” says Paul according to al-Rāzī, if they entered “the fire” and Christians entered paradise.¹⁷³ For this reason, says al-Rāzī, Paul committed to lead the Christians astray for the sake of mutual destruction.¹⁷⁴

One unique feature of al-Rāzī’s account is a brief comment on how Paul came to the Christian community. That Paul would allegedly plot to mislead the Christians is not unusual, but al-Rāzī writes that Paul was “punished” somehow, though he provides no further details. As a result of the punishment, Paul humbles himself and seeks forgiveness. Al-Rāzī does not say that Paul’s conversion and repentance were disingenuous, but he must

¹⁷² Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 16:35–36.

¹⁷³ Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 16:35–36.

¹⁷⁴ The same motivation appears in the accounts of al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Tha’labī, and al-Qurṭubī. See Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178; Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 165; Qurṭubī, *Ṭafsīr*, 5:335. See also Stern, “Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 179–80.

be operating from this assumption. Perhaps he felt that his readers would know that Paul was not genuine in his conversion. Or, in his description of Paul's punishment, al-Rāzī may have been referring to Paul's supposed encounter with Jesus. Paul's alleged miraculous conversion experience after being struck blind is a detail other Muslim commentators include in their accounts but that al-Rāzī does not include.¹⁷⁵ He may have felt that a brief reference to Paul's punishment would suffice given his readers prior knowledge of the Pauline corruption tradition.

Al-Rāzī also describes Paul gaining entrance into the Christian community and spending a year “learning the Gospel, and the Christians believed and loved him.”¹⁷⁶ Following his time of learning, Paul goes to Jerusalem, al-Rāzī says, and teaches the Christians the basic truths of Christianity that Muslims reject: the Trinity (Qur'ānic presentation), the divine nature of Jesus, the incarnation, and the eternity of Jesus.¹⁷⁷ He then, in keeping with the standard narrative, calls three men to be his successor and tells them to promote his teachings. After Paul's suicide, says al-Rāzī, the three men “propagated his teachings” and Christianity split into three sects.¹⁷⁸

The remainder of al-Rāzī's account of alleged Pauline corruption is unique. He provides additional commentary on how Paul's actions were the reason for Christian sectarianism, at least from the Muslim perspective, and he identifies the Christian belief in the sonship of Jesus as the root cause of disbelief and division.¹⁷⁹ I have found this detail only in al-Rāzī's account, which perhaps indicates that he utilized a common narrative of alleged corruption and then added the detail about sonship. If so, it may indicate something

¹⁷⁵ See Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24; Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 132.

¹⁷⁶ Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 16:35–36.

¹⁷⁷ Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 16:35–36.

¹⁷⁸ Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 16:35–36.

¹⁷⁹ Al-Rāzī does not include the doctrine of Christ's sonship in the list of doctrines that Paul allegedly taught, but the connection seems to be implied. The Christians believed Paul's teaching and were led astray, says al-Rāzī, and in their ignorance, they believed in a literal son of Allah.

about the context in which al-Rāzī was writing, perhaps that he was writing to counter the arguments of specific Christians that he encountered. Whatever al-Rāzī had in mind when we wrote, he says that the term “son” in the gospel should be used in a symbolic sense to show honor, as the word “friend” is used of Abraham (Q 4:125).¹⁸⁰ However, Christians had, according to al-Rāzī, exaggerated their belief in Jesus. They “went to extremes in interpreting the term ‘Son’ in the literal sense,” says al-Rāzī, and this interpretation was accepted by the “ignorant.”¹⁸¹

Al-Rāzī claims that the Christians believe Jesus is the literal physical offspring of Allah. He rejects this belief outright, in keeping with Qur’ānic teaching. The Qur’ān repeatedly condemns the notion of Allah having a son because it rejects the belief that Allah would have carnal relations with a woman (cf. Q 6:100–2; 17:111; 18:4–5; 19:88–92). It should be noted, however, that Christians would also reject this notion.¹⁸² Thus, what al-Rāzī rejects is not the Christian doctrine of Christ’s sonship but a Muslim misinterpretation of that doctrine.¹⁸³ Based on al-Rāzī’s understanding of what “sonship” must entail, he condemns this “deviant belief” that “spread among the followers of Jesus,” causing the division and sectarianism.

Al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273)

Al-Qurṭubī was born in Córdoba in al-Andalus (today’s Spain) sometime between 1203 and 1213.¹⁸⁴ He studied various Islamic subjects, such as *fiqh*, *ḥadīth*,

¹⁸⁰ Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 16:35–36.

¹⁸¹ Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 16:35–36.

¹⁸² For the orthodox Christian doctrine of Christ’s sonship, see G. T. Burke, “Son of God,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1125–27.

¹⁸³ Compare this to the Trinity that appears in many corruption accounts. The formulation of Mary, Jesus, and Allah is Qur’ānic rather than biblical. On the Trinity in the Qur’ān, see *sūras* 4:171, 5:73, and 5:116. See also Bahri, “Trinity in the Qur’an,” 51–55.

¹⁸⁴ He came from a modest family, one in which he and his father both worked in manual labor, but he was able to travel throughout al-Andalus and eventually to the Middle East and Mecca. See Delfina Serrano Ruano, “Al-Qurṭubī,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān* Online, edited by Johanna Pink, accessed

grammar, and rhetoric, and was known for his piety, asceticism, and meditation in addition to his intellectual prowess.¹⁸⁵ When Córdoba fell to the Christians in 1236, al-Qurṭubī fled al-Andalus, traveled throughout the Middle East, and settled in the modern city of El Mīnya, Egypt, where he died in 1273.¹⁸⁶

Al-Qurṭubī’s account of alleged Pauline corruption appears in his commentary on the Qur’ān, *The Comprehensive Legal Commentary of the Qur’ān, Shedding Light on the Sunna and the Decisive Verses It Contains*.¹⁸⁷ He is the only commentator I have found in the list under study who refers to alleged Pauline corruption in an explanation of *sūra* 4:171, but like many other commentators, such as al-Baghawī and al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī appears to draw inspiration from the same tradition that Sayf uses, the Jewish *Life of Jesus*. *Sūra* 4:171 provides a summary of the Qur’ānic view of Christians, namely that they have gone too far in their beliefs:

People of the Book! Do not go beyond the limits in your religion, and do not say about God (anything) but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was only a messenger of God, and His word, which He cast into Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, but do not say, ‘Three.’ Stop! (It will be) better for you. God is only one God. Glory to Him! (Far be it) that He should have a

October 27, 2023, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_050504. See also Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, “al-Imām al-Qurṭubī,” in *CMR*, 4:391; Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, eds. and trans., *Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of Religious Literature* (London: Routledge, 2003), 97.

¹⁸⁵ Sala, “Al-Imām al-Qurṭubī,” 4:391; Ruano, “Al-Qurṭubī”; R. Arnaldez, “Al-Ḳurṭubī,” in *EP*, 5:512. See also Vincent J. Cornell, “*‘Ilm al-Qur’ān* in al-Andalus: The *tafsīr muḥarrar* in the Works of Three Authors,” *Jusur* 2 (1986): 76–77.

¹⁸⁶ Ruano, “Al-Qurṭubī.” See also Arnaldez, “Al-Ḳurṭubī,” 5:512. Calder, Mojaddedi, and Rippin say he died in 1272. Calder, Mojaddedi, and Rippin, *Classical Islam*, 97.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Qurṭubī draws from the commentaries of al-Tha’labī as well as al-Samarqandī, al-Baghawī, and others. See Ruano, “Al-Qurṭubī.” See also Cornell, “*‘Ilm al-Qur’ān*,” 64, 76–79; Norman Calder, “*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham,” in *Approaches to the Qur’ān*, ed. Gerald R. Hawting and A. A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 109–10; Calder, Mojaddedi, and Rippin, *Classical Islam*, 97. See also Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2005), 161–62; Arnaldez, “al-Ḳurṭubī,” 5:512.

son! To him (belongs) whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. God is sufficient as a guardian (Q 4:171; cf. 5:77).¹⁸⁸

According to *sūra* 4:171, three core doctrines of the Christian faith are beyond the limits of proper religion: the Trinity and the sonship and divinity of Jesus. Christians are to believe that God is one and desist from saying “three” in keeping with the consistent theme of monotheism in the Qur’ān (cf. Q 2:163–64; 23:91–92). *Sūra* 5:73 condemns anyone who says, “Surely God is the third of three” for having “disbelieved,” and warns them of a “painful punishment” if they do not “turn to God (in repentance) and ask forgiveness from Him.” Even Jesus, according to the Qur’ān, never said he was the third of three but instead directed people to worship only Allah (Q 5:116).

Christians are to cease worshipping Jesus as a divine being because Jesus “was only a messenger of God, and His word . . . and a spirit” (Q 4:171; cf. 5:75). The implication appears to be that, because Jesus was only a messenger, he could not be *more* than a messenger. He could not be divine. Based on *sūra* 5:52, anyone who worships Jesus has disbelieved because the Messiah said “Sons of Israel! Serve God, my Lord and your Lord.” Furthermore, to claim that Jesus is divine is to associate someone with God. Anyone who does such a thing “God has forbidden him (from) the Garden, and his refuge is the Fire” (Q 5:72).

According to *sūra* 4:171, Christians have gone “beyond the limits” of their religion to embrace falsehood by accepting the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity and sonship of Jesus. What is unclear in *sūra* 4:171 is how the Christians had left the original religion of Jesus (i.e., Islam) and exceeded the truth. While the Qur’ān provides no explanation, al-Qurṭubī does, by appealing to the story of alleged Pauline corruption. The full account of Paul’s activities, according to al-Qurṭubī, reads as follows:

It has been said that the Christians followed the *dīn* of Islam for eighty-one years after the ascent of ‘Īsā and prayed towards the qiblah and fasted the month of Ramadan until there was fighting between them and the Jews. The Jews had a bold

¹⁸⁸ In his modern translation of the Qur’ān, M. A. S. Abdel Haleem translates “go beyond the limits” as “do not go to excess.” See M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), 66.

man called Paul who killed a group of 'Īsā's companions. He stated, "If 'Īsā has the truth, then we have disbelieved and denied and will go to the Fire and we will be deceived if they enter the Garden while we enter the Fire. I will deceive them and misguide them and they will enter the Fire." He had a horse called al-'Uqāb. He made an appearance of regret and put dust on his head and said to the Christians, "I was your enemy, Paul. I received a call from heaven saying, 'You have no repentance unless you become a Christian.'" So they brought him inside a room in the church and he stayed there for a year during, which he did not leave either night or day, until he had learned the Gospel. He came out and said, "I received a call from heaven saying, 'God has accepted your repentance.'" People believed him and loved him.

Then he went to Jerusalem and put Nustūr in charge of them and told him that 'Īsā the son of Maryam was a god. Then he went to Rome and taught them about divine nature and human nature. He said, "'Īsā was not human being but took on human form, nor did he have a physical body but took on corporeal form. He was the Son of God." He taught this to a man called Ya'qūb. Then he summoned a man who was called al-Malik and told him, "God still exists and 'Īsā still exists." When he had control of these three men, he summoned them one by one and said, "You are my deliverer. I saw 'Īsā in a dream and he is pleased with me." He told each of them, "I will sacrifice myself tomorrow and use that to draw near to God. Call people to your creed." Then he entered the abattoir and killed himself. On the third day each of them called people to his creed. A group followed each of them and they fought and disagreed until today. All Christians followed one of the three groups. This is said to be the reason for their associating others with Allah. Allah knows best.

This story is what lies behind Allah's words in Sura *al-Ma'ida*: "We stirred up enmity and hatred between them until the Day of Rising" (5:14). It will be discussed there, Allah willing.¹⁸⁹

The bulk of al-Qurṭubī's account follows the typical story that I have described several times, so a summary will suffice. He operates from the assumption that the original Christians followed a form of Islam for eighty-one years until Paul led them astray.¹⁹⁰ Paul begins to worry, says al-Qurṭubī, that the Christians were correct in their religion so he devises a plan to ensure they are condemned to hell because he "hated so much the Christians that it hurt him to think of the possibility of their religion being true and their entering Paradise."¹⁹¹ Following a demonstration of repentance and the declaration that Paul had received a call from heaven telling him to become a Christian, the Christians

¹⁸⁹ Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335–36.

¹⁹⁰ Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335. Compare to the al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Tha'labī, and al-Būshanjī. See Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178; Tha'labī, *Tafsīr*, 165; Būshanjī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 134.

¹⁹¹ Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335. Paul's motive of mutual destruction also appears in the accounts of al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Baghawī, and al-Rāzī. See Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178; Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39; Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 16:35–36.

accept Paul into their community, says al-Qurṭubī.¹⁹² Once Paul gains the trust and love of the Christians, says al-Qurṭubī, he teaches the Christians that Jesus was the son of Allah, that Jesus took on flesh, and that Jesus was eternal. Finally, according to al-Qurṭubī, Paul calls Nuṣṭūr, Ya’qūb, and al-Malik to take leadership over the Christians, which leads to division in the Christian community.¹⁹³

The one unique feature of al-Qurṭubī’s account is how he connects two Qur’ānic passages with his account of alleged Pauline corruption.¹⁹⁴ As noted previously, the account of Paul’s activities appears in al-Qurṭubī’s commentary on *sūra* 4:171 as an explanation of excessive Christian beliefs. However, at the end of his account, al-Qurṭubī says that the story of Pauline corruption is what lies behind the words in *sūra* 5:14, which is the same verse that al-Samarqandī interprets through the lens of alleged Pauline corruption.¹⁹⁵ Al-Qurṭubī writes, “This story is what lies behind Allah’s words in Sura *al-Ma’ida*: ‘We stirred up enmity and hatred between them until the Day of Rising’ (5:14). It will be discussed there, Allah willing.”¹⁹⁶

According to *sūra* 5:14–16, God had made a covenant with the Christians, but they had forgotten part of what they were taught. In his commentary on *sūra* 5:14 al-Qurṭubī writes that the covenant was “regarding *tawḥīd* and belief in Muḥammad since he is mentioned in the Gospel.”¹⁹⁷ The Christians had been reminded by Muhammad but rejected his prophethood because they had forgotten the truth of Christ’s message. What Christians had been reminded of was “belief in Muḥammad, meaning that they did not do what they were commanded and that passion and deviation became a reason for rejecting

¹⁹² Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335.

¹⁹³ Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:336.

¹⁹⁴ That the Pauline corruption account can be utilized to interpret multiple Qur’ānic passages is indication of its utilitarian nature. I will discuss this in more detail in the next chap.

¹⁹⁵ See Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

¹⁹⁶ Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335–36.

¹⁹⁷ Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 6:84.

Muḥammad.”¹⁹⁸ By connecting *sūra* 4:171 and *sūra* 5:14–16 together with the same account of alleged Pauline corruption, al-Qurṭubī appears to say that early Christian division was not solely the work of Paul, but was the judgment of God on Christian disbelief. For their rejection of Christ’s original teaching (i.e., Islam), says al-Qurṭubī, God “commanded enmity and hatred of the unbelievers, each group being commanded to hate the other because they are unbelievers.”¹⁹⁹

Conclusion

When viewed as a collective whole, the accounts of alleged Pauline corruption used in the *tafsīr* literature examined earlier describe two primary accusations against Paul. First, he was allegedly the source of Christian excess in belief (Q 4:171; 9:30–31), namely the doctrines of the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, and the sonship of Jesus. This accusation fits with the broader thesis of the dissertation, namely that early Muslim writers seem to have created the Pauline corruption narrative to refute the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, as well as the Christian practices of consuming pork and withholding circumcision. Only two commentators, al-Samarqandī and al-Būshanjī, include in their accounts the claim that Paul changed the prayer direction and allowed the consumption of pork. Those details do not feature prominently in the *tafsīr* literature but do appear in the accounts from Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī. Qur’ān commentators were perhaps more concerned with Paul’s alleged corruption of Christian doctrine than Christian practices. The Qur’ānic passages that I discuss in this chapter, which commentators connected to alleged Pauline corruption, make no mention of Christian practices such as circumcision or the consumption of pork. Instead, they focus on Christian doctrines such as the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity.

The second accusation made against Paul in the *tafsīr* literature is that he was

¹⁹⁸ Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 6:84.

¹⁹⁹ Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 6:85.

the source of Christian sectarianism. By allegedly imparting new teachings to three men individually, and then telling each of them to assume the mantle of responsibility after Paul's death, Paul caused the splintering of Christ's original community. Thus, for medieval commentators, Paul not only corrupted Christ's religion but destroyed the unity of that community. From the Muslim perspective, Christians were initially united and followed the religion of Jesus, which is equivalent to Islam. Yet, through the efforts of Paul, the commentators say, the Christians were divided into competing factions.

I will now identify four noteworthy features of alleged Pauline corruption that appear in the *tafsīr* accounts that I examined in this chapter. First, medieval Muslim commentators' accounts of alleged Pauline corruption assume that Christians followed the perennial religion of Islam. According to the Qur'ān, Jesus, as a Muslim prophet, taught his followers to worship God and follow the prophets. He taught the Christians the same basic message all prophets before him taught their respective communities, as well as the same message Muhammad would later teach to the Arabs (Q 4:163–64).²⁰⁰ That Paul would worry about the Christians having the truth, a common feature in the *tafsīr* accounts, shows that Paul allegedly corrupted not a false religion, but the true religion of Jesus. This feature does not appear in any of the accounts I examined in the previous chapters, but its inclusion in the *tafsīr* accounts fits the emphasis on Qur'ānic teaching.

Second, Muslim commentators describe Christian beliefs according to their Qur'ānic presentations, not according to biblical teaching. For example, Paul is said to have taught the Christians that the Trinity consists of Mary, Jesus, and God, rather than the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Q 5:116).²⁰¹ Also, the sonship of Jesus is interpreted physically rather than spiritually.²⁰² For medieval commentators, Paul was responsible for

²⁰⁰ On the continuity of prophets, see 'Alī, *Religion of Islam*, 165–98; Rahman, *Islam*, 26; Martin, *Islam*, 30–33; van Koningsveld, "Islamic Image of Paul," 209; Quṭb, *Shade of the Qur'ān*, 1:308–13; Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, 3:48–54.

²⁰¹ For example, see Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 16:35–36; Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 2:338–39; Tha'labī, *Tafsīr*, 164.

²⁰² See Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 16:35–36.

teaching what the Qur'ān says Christians believe, not what Christians believe. This feature of the *tafsīr* is important because it indicates that the purpose of the corruption narrative was more important than the content of the narrative. As I will explain in the next chapter, the purpose of the corruption narrative, in its broadest sense, was to undermine Christianity and promote Islam as the only extant representation of Christ's original religion. By claiming that Paul introduced Qur'ānic versions of Christian doctrine, the authors were not attempting to engage Christian doctrines and practices with scholarly debate. They were promoting the claim of Pauline corruption and false representations of Christian doctrines in accordance with Qur'ānic teaching. Thus, it seems that medieval commentators were constrained by the Qur'ān, in the sense that their narratives of Pauline corruption had to include Qur'ānic depictions of Christianity.

Third, Muslim commentators used the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption to create an alternative history that explained why contemporary Christianity conflicted with Qur'ānic Christianity. The Qur'ān provides no explanation for why the Christians had committed excesses in their religion (Q 4:171), had come to worship Jesus (Q 9:30–31), or had divided into sects (5:14). As a result, commentators had to create a story that linked Islam to an original form of Christianity but that also dismissed medieval Christianity as a false religion. Paul was a natural candidate for the person who corrupted Christ's religion, and the corruption narrative was broad enough to accommodate various details and be applied to multiple Qur'ānic passages. In the following chapter I will highlight possible reasons why the narrative of Pauline corruption emerged and remained a central part of the Islamic worldview for centuries to come.

Fourth, most Qur'ān commentators that I examine in this chapter—all but al-Qummī—appear to base their corruption accounts on the same Jewish tradition that Sayf does, the *Life of Jesus*. Each account has unique features, but all of them build on the basic story of Paul as a disingenuous convert to Christianity who corrupts the religion of Jesus with new practices and doctrines. That so many commentators appear to have relied

on the *Life of Jesus* across multiple centuries may indicate that the Muslim critique of Paul was largely fixed by the tenth century. Based on the accounts that I examine in this dissertation, I observe no major new details after the writings of Sayf and ‘Abd al-Jabbār. In the *tafsīr* literature, though individual accounts have unique features, they share an almost identical outline: Paul pretended to become a Christian so that he could corrupt the religion of Jesus. From al-Samarqandī to al-Qurṭubī, commentators received and transmitted the same basic tradition. Any unique features are minor in importance and were perhaps inspired by other Jewish traditions that circulated among Muslim communities. In the following chapter, I will discuss the origin of the Muslim Pauline corruption narrative and will discuss multiple examples of Jewish traditions that may have influenced Muslim authors.

CHAPTER 5

THE PURPOSEFUL EXPANSION OF THE PAULINE CORRUPTION NARRATIVE

In the second chapter, I analyzed the accounts of alleged Pauline corruption from Sayf ibn ‘Umar, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi to lay the foundation for the dissertation, highlighting common features and summarizing the central claims made against Paul, namely that he corrupted Christ’s original religion. Next, I examined corruption accounts from Muslim historiography (chap. 3) and *tafsīr* (chap. 4) and brought them into conversation with the four accounts from chapter 2. The unique feature of the historiographical accounts is that they provide less detail on Paul’s alleged actions and instead focus on his purported character. The *tafsīr* accounts, conversely, provide lengthy descriptions of Paul’s alleged corruption activities, making them reminiscent of the accounts from Sayf, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfi. Muslim commentators focus their narratives on Paul’s supposed importation of new doctrines and practices into Christianity, such as the Trinity and divinity of Jesus, as well as the consumption of pork and rejection of circumcision.

Whereas my focus in the earlier chapters was the content of the Pauline corruption narrative, I will focus this final chapter on the possible origins of the narrative. The Pauline corruption narrative was arguably created for a specific purpose, perhaps emerging because of a particular historical context in which Muslims felt the need to refute Christian doctrines and practices. In the following pages I will discuss how the Pauline corruption narrative emerged in unique religious and political environments. These contexts appear to have influenced Muslim writers to create not just a general narrative of corruption, but one that was specific to Christian doctrines and practices that conflicted with the Qur’ān. Muslim writers claimed that Paul was the source of errant doctrines and

practices in the Christian community, doctrines, and practices that were not taught by Jesus. The result is that Paul allegedly corrupted the very core of Christ's original religion, led his followers into error, and caused the loss of Christ's revealed book, the *Injīl* (gospel). In essence, Muslim writers—scholars of religion—invited both Muslims and non-Muslims to believe that Christians were practicing a novel form of Christianity based on scriptures that were no longer authoritative.

The Muslim Predicament: Medieval Christianity in Conflict with Qur'ānic Christianity

The rise of the Islamic empire in the Middle East was nothing short of meteoric. Upon Muhammad's death in AD 632, Muslims reportedly controlled only the western part of modern day Saudi Arabia, a swath of land surrounding Mecca and Medina known as the Hijaz.¹ By the year 656, a mere twenty-four years later, the Muslim armies, according to Muslim sources, had conquered lands from Egypt to the West, Syria to the north, and Iraq and Iran to the East.² Within a hundred and fifty years after Muhammad's death, Muslims controlled portions of Spain, North Africa, the Arabian peninsula, and eastward to the Chinese border and the northwest corner of India.³

Much of the lands the Muslim armies conquered had been Christian lands for centuries. In fact, much of the geographical area often today referred to as the “Muslim world”—such as Palestine, Syria, and North Africa—was, in the early centuries of Islam, home to a minority population of Muslims.⁴ At the same time, from the mid-seventh century to the end of the eleventh century, as much as 50 percent of the world's Christians

¹ See G. Rentz, “al-ḥidjāz,” in *EF*², 3:362–64.

² See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Classical Age of Islam*, vol. 1 of *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974), 202.

³ See Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1:202. See also Colin Chapman, “Christians in the Middle East—Past, Present, and Future,” *Transformation* 29, no. 2 (2012): 93.

⁴ See Christian C. Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam: Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2018), 1ff.

lived under Muslim rule.⁵ The rapid expansion of the Muslim empire into previously Christian lands put Muslim and Christians in close proximity with each other, which also brought their two religions into contact.

The invading Muslims may have believed that Christians would abandon their faith and embrace Islam as the superior religion, the “religion of truth” (Q 48:28), and Muhammad as the “seal of the prophets” (Q 33:40). However, many Christians maintained their commitment to Christianity and the authority of the Bible. Moreover, conquered Christians began to craft apologetic arguments against Islamic teachings and Muhammad’s prophethood. The clash between Muslim and Christian religious claims was inevitable. From the first century of Islamic rule and for several centuries to come, Muslims and Christians engaged one another in an intellectual battle to prove whose religion and scriptures were superior.⁶ The interactions between Muslims and Christians—with their competing claims about Jesus, religious history, prophets, and texts—served as the backdrop for the emergence of Muslim claims of Pauline corruption. After Islam was proclaimed and rejected, Muslim writers needed to defend their claims and critique Christian claims. Additionally, Muslim writers needed to undermine medieval Christianity as a faithful expression of Christ’s religion. What emerged from Muslim writers was the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption.

Islam Proclaimed and Rejected

When Muslims encountered Christians, they proclaimed the religion of Islam centered around the prophet Muhammad. For the Muslims, the message they proclaimed

⁵ For an introduction to early Muslim-Christian interactions, see the work of Sidney H. Griffith, a renowned scholar in the field. The following examples are only a sample of his extensive writings on Christians living in the Muslim world: Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2008), 11; “Christians and Christianity,” in *EQ*, 1:307; “Christians under Muslim Rule,” in *Early Medieval Christianities, c. 600–c. 1100*, vol. 3 of *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2008), 197–212.

⁶ Griffith, *Church in the Shadow*, 45.

was the same basic religion that all prophets prior to Muhammad had proclaimed, all the way from Adam to Jesus.⁷ God had “raised up in every community a messenger” with the same basic message to “serve God and avoid [idols]” (Q 16:36). Thus, all forms of religion prior to Islam, at least those within the prophetic lineage (namely Judaism and Christianity), were identical to Islam.

In addition to the prophets, each religion before Islam had its own scripture. Yet, in keeping with the Qur’ānic argument, each of those scriptures that was revealed throughout history confirmed the scripture that came before it. Muslims were to believe in what had been sent down to them (the Qur’ān) and what had been sent down before, referring to Jewish and Christian scriptures, or at least to an original, uncorrupted form of them (Q 29:46; cf. 5:48). If the original version of the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’ān could be compared, according to this argument, they would be identical in their core teachings on the nature of God, religious practices, and the prophets.⁸

Moreover, from the perspective of medieval Muslims, the original followers of Jesus were proto-Muslims. All biblical prophets, according to this view, proclaimed the same message as Islam. Because they followed Jesus’s teachings, which mirrored those of Muhammad, the early Christians were believers and Muslims.⁹ According to the Qur’ān,

⁷ On the Muslim view of the continuity of prophets from Adam to Muhammad, see Claude Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity in Islamic Exegesis,” in *CMR*, 1:55; Maulānā Muḥammad ‘alī, *The Religion of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Aḥmadiyya Anjuman Ishā’at Islām, 1990), 165–98; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 26; Richard C. Martin, *Islam* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), 30–33; P. S. van Koningsveld, “The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 208–9; S. M. Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account of How Christ’s Religion Was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs,” *JTS* 19, no. 1 (1968): 178–79; Sayyid Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, trans. and ed. M. A. Salahi and A. A. Shamis (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999), 1:308–13.

⁸ See Michael F. Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives of the Apostle Paul as a Narrative Framework for *Tahrīf*,” in *Arab Christians and the Qur’an from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period*, ed. Mark Beaumont (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 150.

⁹ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islām and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993), 20–21. See also Muḥammad Azizan Sabjan and Noor Shakirah Mat Akhir, “Early Christian Sects and Schisms in Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal: A Study on Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī,” *Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* 8 (2015): 27.

the Christians who remained faithful to the teaching of Jesus, in contrast to those Christians who were led astray by Paul, believed in the Qur'ān. When the text is recited to them, they say, “We believe in [the Qur'ān]. Surely it is the truth from our Lord. Surely we were Muslims before it” (Q 28:52–53).¹⁰ In his commentary on these verses, al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) notes that by affirming the Qur'ān, these proto-Muslims or believers also affirmed Muhammad as prophet based on their own scriptures even before the Qur'ān had been sent.¹¹ Likewise, Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) writes that these early believers were “professors of God’s unity” and were those “whose devotion to God is pure and who are responsive to Him.”¹² Because their devotion was pure, these believers accepted Islam when it was preached to them.

Yet, whereas the Qur'ān assumes a group of Christians who remained faithful to Jesus’s teaching accepting Islam, Muslims in the early centuries of Islamic rule discovered that many medieval Christians were reluctant to accept Islam. Over time, of course, many Christians would eventually flee Muslim lands or convert to Islam, but in the beginning, they rejected Islam.¹³ More than that, many Christians were unwilling to accept the so-called prophet of Islam. Muhammad was the “seal of the prophets” (Q 33:40) and yet Christians rejected him, even authoring apologetic works aimed at refuting his prophethood through examination of his teachings, practices, and signs.¹⁴ As a result, Muslims found themselves authoring their own apologetic works focused on proofs for Muhammad’s

¹⁰ See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991), 244–45.

¹¹ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1984), 20:89, quoted in McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 244.

¹² Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah Muṣṭafā Muḥammad, 1937), 3:393, quoted in McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 246.

¹³ Griffith, *Church in the Shadow*, 20. On the incentives for Christians to convert to Islam, see David Thomas, “Muslim Regard for Christians and Christianity, 900–1200,” in *CMR*, 2:15–16.

¹⁴ See Griffith, *Church in the Shadow*, 97. See also David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* (Boston: Leiden, 2008), 3.

prophethood.¹⁵ In addition, almost every Christian apologetic text from the early Islamic period included a defense of the Trinity and the Incarnation, two doctrines critiqued in the Qur’ān.¹⁶

Christian rejection of Muhammad may have been one factor that contributed to the emergence of the Pauline corruption narrative. According to the Qur’ān, Christians had “forgotten part of what they were reminded of” (Q 5:14) and Muhammad had been sent to them to “make clear” much of what they had been “hiding of the Book” (Q 5:15). In his commentary on these verses, al-Qurṭubī says that what the Christians had forgotten refers to belief in Muhammad. The Christians had not accepted Muhammad, says al-Qurṭubī, which they were supposed to do, because of their “passion and deviation.”¹⁷ Thus, despite the Qur’ānic expectation that Christians would accept Muhammad based on the alleged prophecies concerning him in their scriptures, Christians “forgot” what they should have known and rejected Muhammad. Yet, more than that, Christians rejected what Muhammad stood for: the entire Islamic worldview, complete with acceptance of the Qur’ān as an authoritative book, a new version of Christian historical figures (namely Old Testament prophets and Jesus), and a new presentation of Jesus as a human prophet, not the divine son of God. Muhammad came to the Christians with “the guidance and the religion of truth, so that He may cause it to prevail over religion,” according to *sūra* 48:28, but Christians would not accept Islam as the truth or Muhammad as their prophet.

Medieval Christianity in Conflict with the Qur’ān

Not only did medieval Christians reject Muhammad’s prophethood, but they also practiced a form of Christianity that conflicted with what the Qur’ān said about Jesus

¹⁵ See Thomas, “Muslim Regard,” 2:22.

¹⁶ Griffith, *Church in the Shadow*, 93–94. See also Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 7.

¹⁷ Al-Qurṭubī, *Ṭafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, trans. Aisha Bewley (Bradford, UK: Diwan, n.d.), 6:84.

and his teachings.¹⁸ Keeping the focus on my thesis for this dissertation, Christians were preaching a different Jesus than what is portrayed in the Qur’ān. They worshiped Jesus as the divine son of God and the second person of the Trinity. From the Muslim perspective, then, Christians committed two of the most grievous offenses in Islam. They undermined the oneness of God (*tawhīd*) by worshiping three beings (Jesus, Mary, and God) and they undermined the supremacy of God by associating (*shirk*) another being with him. Thus, Christians committed excesses in their religion (Q 4:171) and ascribe to Jesus qualities that the Qur’ānic Jesus denies (Q 9:30–31).

In addition to Christian doctrines conflicting with the Qur’ān, Christian practices were also at odds with what Muslims believed. Christians allowed the consumption of pork, which Muslims rejected. Christians also did not practice circumcision. From a Muslim perspective, Christians were living contrary to the way Jesus lived and contrary to the example he left his followers. ‘Abd al-Jabbār, for example, writes in the beginning of his account that Jesus “was circumcised and required circumcision” just as Moses, Aaron, and the prophets before him.¹⁹ Moreover, Jesus “never ate pork, but forbade it and cursed those who eat it, just as the prophets did before him.”²⁰ The early Christians, according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, followed the way of Jesus for a time but then began to “make changes, substitutions, and innovations in religion.”²¹ As a result, medieval Christians were, according to Muslim writers, practicing a religion in conflict with what Jesus taught, which is what the Qur’ān taught.

Sūra 10:94 says that Muslims are supposed to “ask those who have been reciting the Book before [them]” if they are in doubt about any of the Qur’ānic revelations.

¹⁸ See Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 72–85.

¹⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Said Reynolds and Samir Khalil Samir (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2010), 87.

²⁰ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 88.

²¹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 89.

The implication is that Christians, the ones who had been reading the scriptures before Muslims, would be able to help Muslims understand the revelation. Of course, this verse assumes that Christian scripture was identical to the Qur'ān, something that Muslims quickly discovered was not the case.²² However, when Muslims came to Christians expecting them to receive Islam as the latest (and final) chapter in prophetic history, they found a group of people who did not believe what the Qur'ān said about Jesus, and who did not practice the same religious norms that the Muslims observed. Despite Muslim appeals to a common history and common theology, medieval Christianity was diametrically opposed to Islam on multiple major religious topics.²³

The Predicament: A Form of Christianity Needed

When Muslims realized that medieval Christianity conflicted with Qur'ānic Christianity, that the Bible was not identical to the Qur'ān, and that Christians would not accept Muhammad as the seal of the prophets, they found themselves in a predicament. They could not merely avoid Christianity or reject it as an outright false religion because they needed Christianity. A core teaching of Islam is that it follows the religions that came before it, namely Judaism and Christianity. The Qur'ān assumes a continuous line of prophets and a common religious text revealed to each prophet. For this reason, medieval Muslims needed to maintain a connection to Christianity for the foundation of Islam. To label Christianity a false religion would be to remove Islam's historical connection to its preceding religious dispensation.

However, while Muslims needed to maintain a connection to Christianity (at least some form of it), they also needed to reject medieval Christianity for the sake of Islam's current and future supremacy. Christian doctrines such as Trinitarianism and the

²² See Sidney H. Griffith, "Arguing from Scripture: The Bible in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in the Middle Ages," in *Scripture and Pluralism: Reading the Bible in the Religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Thomas Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 29–30.

²³ Griffith, *Church in the Shadow*, 157–58.

worship of Jesus, as well as Christian practices concerning circumcision and the consumption of pork, conflicted with the Qur'ān. In short, medieval Christianity was incompatible with Qur'ānic Christianity. As such, Muslims could not look to medieval Christianity as Islam's predecessor.

Medieval Muslims, therefore, found themselves in a predicament. On the one hand, they needed to maintain a connection to Christianity for the sake of the prophet lineage that the Qur'ān describes. On the other hand, they needed to refute medieval Christianity because it conflicted with Qur'ānic teaching. Muslims needed a form of Christianity that did not currently exist, but that had existed at some point in history. Furthermore, they needed an explanation for why this theoretical proto-Christianity no longer existed but instead had been replaced by medieval Christianity. What emerged to fulfill both requirements was the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption.

The Muslim Explanation: Alleged Pauline Corruption

Early Muslim authors began with the assumption, based on Qur'ānic teaching, that the religion of Jesus was identical to the religion of Muhammad. Their messages, texts, and practices were the same. Muslim authors then assessed medieval Christianity and found it was not identical to Islam. If medieval Christianity was not the religion of Islam, which was the religion of Jesus, then something must have happened to Christ's original religion, they reasoned. Muslim writers concluded that the religion of Jesus had been lost, and medieval Christianity was a corrupted form of original Christianity. To say that the religion of Jesus had been corrupted, however, required more than a mere assertion. The claim needed a backstory, meaning that Muslims needed a historiographical account of the alleged corruption activity and a culprit. Based on my research, it appears that Muslims received at least one Jewish tradition of corruption and expanded it to serve a distinctly Muslim predicament.

Jewish Origins of the Muslim Narrative

For at least the first six centuries AD, Jewish references to Christianity appear to be sparse. Daniel J. Lasker observes that anti-Christian material in Rabbinic writings is often allusive and elusive, meaning that Christians are referred to but not always named.²⁴ For example, Harris Hirschberg argues in his article, “Allusions to the Apostle Paul in the Talmud,” that a reference to the enigmatic character named Simon Magus is in fact a reference to Paul, the man, according to the text, whose followers were idolatrous and whose writings were not worth saving from fire.²⁵ Writing in the fourth century, Epiphanius (d. 403) describes how the Ebionites promoted blasphemies against Paul, saying that he was a Gentile who converted to Judaism rather than being a Jew by birth.²⁶ The degree to which these early Jewish claims about Paul influenced Muslim authors is unknown. Moreover, while there appears to be an anti-Pauline and anti-Christian presence in early Jewish writings, the sources lack a full description of corruption such as is found in many Muslim writings.

While the Jewish anti-Pauline and anti-Christian sources are scarce in the first six centuries AD, more writings appear during the early centuries of Islam. As I have noted throughout this dissertation, Muslim writers appear to have expanded a preexisting

²⁴ Daniel J. Lasker, “The Jewish Critique of Christianity: In Search of a New Narrative” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 6 (2011): 4, <https://doi.org/10.6017/scjr.v6i1.1800>. See also Norman Roth, “Polemics, Anti-Christian,” in *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Norman Roth (New York: Routledge, 2003), 532, where he writes that more references to Jesus and Christianity can be found in Midrashic works from the early medieval period.

²⁵ Harris Hirschberg, “Allusions to the Apostle Paul in the Talmud,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 62, no. 2 (June 1943), 73, 77, 80. See also Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 170. The compilation of the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmud collections occurred sometime around AD 400 and AD 500, respectively. See Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 528; S. Safrai, “The Era of the Mishnah and Talmud (70–640),” in *A History of the Jewish People*, edited by H. H. Ben-Sasson, translated by George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd (Harvard University Press, 1976), 312.

²⁶ Epiphanius further writes, “What frightful shrieks and snake’s hisses of the horrid serpents, and what deadly nonsense! Whose word shall I take? Ebion’s and his kind, or St. Peter’s, who says, ‘As my brother, Paul, hath written unto you, which things are deep and hard to be understood, which they who are unlearned and unstable pervert by their own ignorance?’” See Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, translated by Frank Williams, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 152–53. See also Hirschberg, “Allusions to the Apostle Paul in the Talmud,” 74.

Jewish tradition of Pauline corruption to refute the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, as well as the Christian practices of consuming pork and withholding circumcision. Although multiple Jewish traditions circulated among Muslim writers, the one that appears to have influenced most of the Muslim accounts that I examine in this dissertation is the *Life of Jesus*. In addition to features such as the illegitimate conception of Jesus by Mary and a Roman soldier, as well as Jesus using magic to perform miracles, the *Life of Jesus* includes a story that is comparable to the Muslim Pauline corruption narrative.²⁷ According to the anonymous author, first-century Jews were angry that Christians were proclaiming the divinity of Jesus and desecrating the Sabbath. So, to counter them, the Jews persuaded Elijah to pretend to become a Christian, gain the Christians' confidence, and corrupt their religion with new doctrines and practices.²⁸

The earliest Muslim account that appears to draw from the *Life of Jesus* is that of Sayf.²⁹ In his version of the story, Paul pretends to be a Christian, joins the community of

²⁷ On other features of the *Life of Jesus*, see Roth, "Polemics, Anti-Christian," 532.

²⁸ For a summary of the *Life of Jesus*, see Sean W. Anthony, "The Composition of Sayf b. 'Umar's Account of King Paul and His Corruption of Ancient Christianity," *Der Islam* 85, no. 1 (July 2009): 197; Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account," 179; Roth, "Polemics, Anti-Christian," 532. The name of the man who corrupts Christianity is different depending on the edition. Anthony and Stern utilize editions that include Elijah taking on the name "Paul." Conversely, in a 1919 edition, the man who corrupts Christianity is Simeon Kepha (Simon Cephas). See *The Jewish Life of Christ*, edited by G. W. Foote and J. M. Wheeler (London: The Pioneer Press, 1919).

²⁹ Multiple modern authors have argued that the *Life of Jesus* served as the inspiration for at least one version of the Pauline corruption narrative. See Martin Whittingham, *A History of Muslim Views of the Bible: The First Four Centuries* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 145-48; Kuhn, "Perceptions," 170; Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 194, though he does not limit the influence to the *Life of Jesus*; Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account," 179-80; Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 233-36. On the *Life of Jesus*, see *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, ed. and trans. Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); *Toledot Yeshu Revisited*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). As noted in chapter two, Sayf attributes his account to Ibn 'Abbās, but that connection cannot be established. Based on the similarities with the *Life of Jesus*, Sayf appears to have drawn from the Jewish account and attributed the story to Ibn 'Abbās to bolster the story's credibility and authority. Although the first reliable excerpt of the *Life of Jesus* is in a ninth-century Latin work by Agobard (d. 840), bishop of Lyon, the work may have been written in the early Christian centuries. S. Krauss, in his edited edition of the *Life of Jesus*, writes that the work may have existed as early as the time of Justin Martyr (d. ca. 135). See S. Krauss, ed., *Das Leben Jesu* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902), 2-5, editor's introduction. See also Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 233n180; Roth, "Polemics, Anti-Christian," 532. Anthony claims that Sayf's knowledge of Christian sources was not strong enough to consider him the

Christians, and leads them astray with new teachings on the direction of prayer, permissible foods, and the divinity of Jesus.³⁰ The primary differences between the *Life of Jesus* and Sayf's account are due to the fact that the *Life of Jesus*, being anti-Christian, is opposed to Jesus, whereas Sayf believes that Jesus is a true prophet whose religion Paul destroys.³¹ As Stern observes, one need not try to locate a Jewish version of the story more similar to the Muslim version. Muslim authors were capable of embroidering on stories that they had heard.³²

The *Life of Jesus* appears to have influenced other Muslim writers' accounts of Pauline corruption as well, either directly or indirectly (from Sayf). For example, both accounts from al-Qarāfi allege that Paul devised strategies to infiltrate the Christianity community.³³ Also, the same basic outline of Paul being a false convert to Christianity features prominently in the *tafsīr* literature, as I described in chapter four, in the accounts of al-Samarqandī, al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Tha'labī, al-Būshanjī, al-Baghawī, al-Rāzī, and al-Qurṭubī.³⁴ Despite the unique characteristics of each account, the consensus of these

inventor of the Pauline corruption story. Thus, the *Life of Jesus* must have been written prior to Sayf. See Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 194–95.

³⁰ Sayf ibn 'Umar, *Kitāb al-ridda wa-l-futūḥ*, I. pp. 132-35 and II, fols. 62a-64b, quoted in Anthony "Composition of Sayf," 174–80, hereafter Sayf, *Ridda*, 174–80.

³¹ See Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account," 180, for a discussion of the differences between the *Life of Jesus* and Sayf's account.

³² Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account," 180. As one potential example of Sayf drawing from another Jewish source, Anthony observes that his use of the name Abu Saul may have been taken from other Jewish anti-Pauline writings. He notes that, as early as the ninth century, Dā'ūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ refers to Paul as Abba Saul, as does the eleventh-century scholar Tuvia ibn Moses. See Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 200.

³³ Al-Qarāfi, *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira 'an al-as'ila al-fājira*, quoted in Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 286–90, hereafter Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286–290.

³⁴ Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-Samarqandī al-musammā Bahr al-'ulūm*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwaḍ et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1993), 1:423–24, translation generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, accessed November 30, 2023, chat.openai.com/. See also Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 194–95; al-Damīrī (d. 1405), *al-Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad al-Zaqīm al-Suyūfī (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-khayrīya bi-Miṣrīya, 1891), 2:187, quoted in Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account," 178, hereafter Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178; Abū Ishāq Aḥmad al-Tha'labī, *Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī,

Qur’ān commentators is that Paul falsely converted to Islam to lead Christians astray.

In addition, ‘Abd al-Jabbār and Ibn Ḥazm also appear to have been familiar with some version of the *Life of Jesus*. ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *Critique of Christian Origins* does not contain the story of Paul pretending to be a Christian, but he does charge Paul with changing the religion of Jesus by abandoning the Torah and instituting new religious practices.³⁵ ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s depiction of Paul appears to be more closely related to the biography of Nestorius in the *Life of Jesus* than the biography of Simeon Kepha (Simon Cephas).³⁶ In the case of Ibn Ḥazm, he writes that the Jews admitted to the conspiracy to persuade Paul to deceive the Christians, which is perhaps indication that the corruption story he encountered was that of the *Life of Jesus*.³⁷ The fact that ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Sayf, Ibn Ḥazm, and many Muslim commentators appear to be familiar with some version of the corruption account in the *Life of Jesus* is indication that the story was widely circulated in Muslim circles.³⁸

2002), 5:33, quoted in Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 164–65, hereafter Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 164–65; Al-Hayṣam ibn Muḥammad al-Būshanjī, *Qīṣaṣ al-Qur’ān al-karīm*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abduh Ḥatāmīla and Muḥammad Jāsīm al-Mashhadānī (‘Ammān: [s.n.], 2006), 667–69, quoted in Edward G. Browne, “A Parallel to the Story in the Mathnawī of Jalālu ‘d-Dīn Rūmī, of the Jewish King who Persecuted the Christians,” *Islamica* 2 (1926), 132–34, hereafter Būshanjī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 132–34; Abu Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas’ūd ibn Muḥammad al-Farrā’ al-Baghawī, *Ma’ālim al-tanzīl fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, ed. Abdul Razzaq al-Mahdi (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1999), 2:338–39, translation generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, November 29, 2023, <https://chat.openai.com/>; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-kabīr wa-mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 16:35–36, translation generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, November 29, 2023, <https://chat.openai.com/>; Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, trans. Aisha Bewley (Bradford, UK: Diwan, n.d.), 5:335–36. On the prevalence of this story in the *tafsīr* literature, see also Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 197.

³⁵ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 98–103.

³⁶ On the influence of the *Life of Jesus* on ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *Critique*, see Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 233–36. Reynolds observes that the *Life of Jesus* and the *Critique* are fundamentally different but that some features of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s story do appear to be drawn from the *Life of Jesus*. Conversely, Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 182, says that ‘Abd al-Jabbār modified a different Jewish story, not the *Life of Jesus*.

³⁷ See Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 170; Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 105; Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 197.

³⁸ Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 197. See also Philip Alexander, “The *Toledot Yeshu* in the Context of Jewish-Muslim Dialogue,” in *Toledot Yeshu Revisited*, edited by Peter Schäfer, Michael

In addition to the *Life of Jesus*, Muslim authors may also have drawn from Jewish apologetic writings that first appeared in the ninth century, which is after Sayf's death but within the date range of accounts that I examine in this dissertation. Two accounts that make similar assertions about Paul that Muslims make are found in the writings of Dā'ūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ and the anonymous work *The Account of the Controversy with the Bishop*. Al-Muqammiṣ's writings represent the beginning of Jewish anti-Christian polemics, at least based on the surviving texts.³⁹ What little is known of him is preserved in a biography written by the Jewish scholar Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf al-Qirqisānī (d. 10th cent.), who claims that al-Muqammiṣ was originally Jewish but converted to Christianity.⁴⁰ After learning philosophy and the esoteric teachings of Christianity, al-Muqammiṣ converted back to Judaism and wrote multiple anti-Christian works, one of which was a history of Christianity in which he attempts to demonstrate that Christianity is not the religion of Jesus.⁴¹ In a passage preserved by al-Qirqisānī, al-Muqammiṣ describes how Peter, Paul, and Constantine introduced new laws and created the Christian religion:

Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 138, for a discussion of the prevalence of the *Life of Jesus* among Jews living in the Muslim world. Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 197, posits that the migration of a Jewish story to Muslim writings is not difficult to imagine and perhaps occurred along the same channels as Muslim stories about the Israelite people. See also Whittingham, *History of Muslim Views*, 147, who writes that Jewish narratives circulated widely and were borrowed or absorbed by Sayf.

³⁹ Sarah Stroumsa, "Jewish Polemics against Islam and Christianity in the Light of Judaeo-Arabic Texts," in *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, edited by Robert Hoyland (New York: Routledge, 2017), 203–4. See also Roth, "Polemics, Anti-Christian," 525, who observes that little attention was given to apologetics against Christians in the early centuries AD. Prior to this point, as Lasker notes, Jewish reactions to Christianity were muted, and no one wrote the equivalent of an "*Adversus Christianos*." See Lasker, "The Jewish Critique of Christianity," 4. See also Alexander, "The Toledot Yeshu in the Context of Jewish-Muslim Debate," 145. Miriam Goldstein says the *Life of Jesus* was the earliest freestanding composition written by Jews in response to central tenets of Christianity. See Miriam Goldstein, *A Judeo-Arabic Parody of the Life of Jesus* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2023), 1–3.

⁴⁰ Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 237. See also Stroumsa, "Jewish Polemics against Islam and Christianity," 206; Dāwūd al-Muqammas, *Twenty Chapters*, translated by Sarah Stroumsa (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2016), xv, translator's introduction.

⁴¹ Stroumsa, "Jewish Polemics against Islam and Christianity," 206. See also Daniel J. Lasker, "The Jewish-Christian Debate in Transition: From the Lands of Ishmael to the Lands of Edom," in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication and Interaction*, edited by Benjamin Hary, John Hayes, and Fred Astren (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 59.

Dāūd ibn Marwān says: “When the Christians could not find in the Gospels any decisive regulations about certain things, they claimed that Paul and Peter—who is the Jew Abba Saul the fisherman—laid down for them laws and regulations found neither in the Gospels nor in the Torah, excepting those concerning Sabbath, and that these two men commanded them to obey these laws, saying that these laws were divulged to them by Jesus. They made decisions and passed judgments according to these laws (for some time). At the time, however, when the regulations laid down by Paul and Peter were no longer sufficient to provide for their needs, (a company of) bishops assembled in the city of Nicea and laid down for them (new) regulations in addition to those of these (two men). These new laws were accepted and became the standard authority; but there is no mention of them either in the Torah, or in the Gospels, or in the Canon of Peter and Paul. The Christians believe them to be the laws of God and pass judgment according to them, yet there is no (divine) authority back of it.” (Dāwūd) says: “Whoever examines them knows it. Nor was it only these three hundred and eighteen bishops who laid down for them such regulations, on the contrary, various authorities had made similar prescriptions; and they took their direction from whichever of them they wished. . . . These bishops were at the time of Constantine the Leprous, son of the innkeeper Helena. It was he who introduced the (symbol of the) cross and built (many) churches; he killed Arius because the latter asserted that the Messiah is created. These are the men who established the (Christian) religion. They do not consider lawful any prayer, sacrifice, or worship, except the (form of worship) ordained by these men. . . .” This is the statement of Dāwūd b. Marwān al-Muqammiṣ; I have quoted it literally in order that the absurdity and weakness of the doctrines of the Christians might become clear, in fact too clear and evident to require any detailed explanation.⁴²

The account from al-Muqammiṣ bears two key similarities to the Muslim corruption accounts that I discussed in chapters 2–4, which seems to indicate further that Muslim writers expanded on a Jewish tradition of alleged Pauline corruption. The first similarity is the assertion that Paul introduced laws that were not in the Torah or the Gospels, a claim that is one of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s chief critiques of Paul, whom he blames for abandoning the religion of Christ and entering the religion of the Romans.⁴³ Because of Paul’s animosity to the “entirely evil” Torah, says ‘Abd al-Jabbār, he led the Christians to abandon circumcision, allowed them to consume pork, and allowed them to marry unbelievers.⁴⁴ Al-Qarāfī also accuses Paul of leading Christ’s followers to abandon the

⁴² Translation appears in Leon Nemoy, “Al-Qirqisānī’s Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 7 (1930): 366–68. See also Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 237–238.

⁴³ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 98–103. See also Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 170; Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 239, where Reynolds writes that both internal and external evidence indicate that ‘Abd al-Jabbār was aided by the ideas of al-Muqammiṣ.

⁴⁴ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 101.

Torah and the Gospels, allowing the consumption of pork and teaching the Christians to worship Jesus.⁴⁵ Even Paul’s hearers, according to al-Qarāfi, recognized that his teachings were new and had not been taught by Jesus.⁴⁶

A second similarity between the account from al-Muqammiṣ and several accounts that I discussed in earlier chapters is Paul’s alleged appeal to divine inspiration and authority for his new teachings. For example, in al-Būshanjī’s account, Paul says to the Christians, “Last night I saw Jesus in a dream. He said, ‘Now am I well pleased with thee,’ and laid his hand on my face, and through the blessing of His hand God restored my sight. He also addressed to me several sayings, which I should repeat to you.”⁴⁷ Likewise, in al-Samarqandī’s account, Paul tells the Christians, “knowledge has come to me,” and the implication seems to be that the knowledge has a divine source.⁴⁸ Also, in multiple *tafsīr* accounts, such as those of al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Tha‘labī, and al-Qurṭubī, Paul claims that Jesus appeared to him and accepted his repentance, after which Paul reveals his new teachings to the Christians. Again, the implication seems to be that, in addition to accepting Paul’s repentance, God had given Paul knowledge and authority to teach the Christians new doctrines and practices.

Another Jewish anti-Christian text from the ninth century that may have influenced Muslim writings about Paul is the anonymous work *The Account of the Controversy with the Bishop*.⁴⁹ Originally written in Arabic and later translated into Hebrew in the twelfth century, the *Account* was purportedly written by a former Christian

⁴⁵ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286–290.

⁴⁶ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286.

⁴⁷ Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 132–34.

⁴⁸ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24.

⁴⁹ Sarah Stroumsa, “Jewish Polemics against Islam and Christianity,” 207. Stroumsa notes that, while Leon Schlossberg does claim in his 1880 edition of the text that it was the Arabic version of a sixth-century Syriac treatise, that view has not been accepted. The title of the work is translated in various ways. Lasker, “Jewish-Christian Debate,” 54, translates the title as “Account of the Disputation of the Bishop.” See also Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 239–40.

priest named Nestorius who converted to Judaism and then wrote a critique of Christianity.⁵⁰ The author of the book accuses Christians of corrupting the laws of Judaism that the prophets taught and Jesus observed.⁵¹ A portion of the *Account* concerning the abandonment of Christ's religion reads as follows:

You [Christians] claim that god is Christ and that Christ is God, and that Christ descended upon earth, and that he hid himself from the eyes of humans, in order to guide people and to save them from the error of Iblīs. Tell me now: when he descended in order to guide them, did he guide them with his own law or with someone else's law? If you say, "someone else's law," then woe to you because of [your belief in a] God who requires the law of someone else: how can he be worshipped?! And if you say, "In his own law," then you deny your Gospel, for Christ says [in the Gospel]: "I have not come to abolish the Torah of Moses."

Tell me also this: a person who follows the tradition of Christ, is he to be considered as well-guided or as someone who has gone astray? If you say, "He is well-guided," then you yourself have gone astray, since you do not observe his law, nor do you follow his guidance, for you have reversed everything he ordered you to do. And if you say, "Whoever observes his [i.e. Christ's] law has gone astray," then you disbelieve in Christ and in his brothers, the apostles.

Is it not true that Christ said in the Gospel, "I have not come to abolish the Torah of Moses, nor to deny the prophets; but I have come to fulfill it. Truly I say to you now: the heavens and earth will change and Moses' Torah will not change, but rather, it will be fulfilled in the true works. And whoever abolishes any of its commandments and performs other commandments will be called 'deficient' in the Kingdom of Heaven."

This is what is found in the Gospel concerning anyone who rejects the law of Moses son of Amram. Now only one of two things is true in your case: Either your Gospel and your Christ are false, and because you realize this, you hold as true the contrary of what [Jesus] had said, and you abrogate the commandments of Moess, peace be on him, such as the Sabbath and circumcision and the like. Or you hold the words of Christ and the Gospel to be true, but you do the opposite, spitefully and intentionally; if this is the case, you will quickly bring upon yourself curses, both in this world and in the next, and become deficient in the Kingdom of Heaven.⁵²

⁵⁰ See Daniel J. Lasker, "Popular Polemics and Philosophical Truth in the Medieval Jewish Critique of Christianity," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1999): 244; Stroumsa, "Jewish Polemics against Islam and Christianity," 247; Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 240.

⁵¹ Stroumsa, "Jewish Polemics against Islam and Christianity," 247, says that many arguments and perhaps whole passages in the "Account" were derived from al-Muqammiṣ. Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 239–41, also affirms the dependence upon al-Muqammiṣ. See also Lasker, "Jewish-Christian Debate," 59.

⁵² Nestor the Priest, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, eds. and trans. Daniel J. Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 1996), 58–59.

The central assertion of the *Account*, namely that Christians had abandoned the Torah and embraced pagan Roman practices, is the same argument that ‘Abd al-Jabbār makes in the *Critique*.⁵³ Assessing Christianity, ‘Abd al-Jabbār even concludes that the Christians had become Romans rather than the Romans becoming Christians.⁵⁴ Reynolds observes that the *Account* is hostile to Jesus, unlike the *Critique*, yet both authors form similar arguments against Christian antinomianism and the doctrine of Christ’s divinity. Moreover, both texts condemn Christian veneration of the cross and utilize many of the same biblical passages.⁵⁵ The claim that Christians abandoned Christ’s practices is not made by ‘Abd al-Jabbār alone, however. A common feature of the corruption accounts—from Sayf, al-Qarāfī, and many Qur’ān commentators—is the assertion that Paul allowed the Christians to consume pork and cease the practice of circumcision. Thus, Muslim writers, in their critique of Paul, echoed many of the same claims made by Jewish writers.

Two more examples of accounts that allege the corruption of Christianity appear in the writings of Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200), a historian and judge.⁵⁶ Like the *Account*, Paul is not named in these traditions. However, the similarities between these stories and Sayf’s account are striking. In the first tradition a group of Jewish scholars allegedly meet after the assumption of Jesus to discuss his true nature. During their discussion, says Ibn al-Jawzī, the Jews conclude that Jesus was the divine son of God who came to earth and then returned to heaven. However, in response to these claims, Ibn al-Jawzī alleges, one Jew proclaimed that Jesus was only a servant of God, and the resulting controversy split

⁵³ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 98–103.

⁵⁴ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 103.

⁵⁵ Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 240.

⁵⁶ See Alex Mallett, “Ibn al-Jawzī,” *CMR*, 3:731–35; H. Laoust, “Ibn al-Djawzī,” *EP*, 3:751–52.

the Jews into multiple factions.⁵⁷ In the second tradition, according to Ibn al-Jawzī, three Jewish scholars declare that Jesus is God, that he is the son of God, and that he is part of a Trinity, which splits the Christians into three groups (Jacobites, Nestorians, and Melkites). A fourth Jew, called the “Muslim man,” refutes these claims about Jesus and defends the Qur’ānic view.⁵⁸ The similarities between these two traditions and the account from Sayf and many of the *tafsīr* accounts are apparent. The statements about Jesus being the son of God and a member of the Trinity, the reference to three sects, and the presence of the “believer” (“Muslim man”) who refutes the new teachings about Jesus all seem to indicate, says Anthony, that Ibn al-Jawzī’s traditions are variants of the same tradition that Sayf used.⁵⁹ If this is the case, then it further indicates the prevalence of Jewish traditions related to the alleged corruption of Christianity, traditions which Muslim writers received, passed on, and modified.

Paul: The Natural Culprit

Having received the Jewish tradition of corruption, Muslim writers needed a culprit for the corruption of Christianity. As I noted in the previous section, Muslim writers were familiar with multiple Jewish accounts, only some of which named Paul as the corruptor of Christianity. Moreover, as I have discussed in this dissertation, Muslim writers often combined elements from multiple accounts to create their own unique version of the corruption story. As such, they could have chosen to name someone other than Paul as the chief culprit for the corruption of Christianity. Still, I believe Muslims advocated for Paul as the culprit for three reasons. First, Paul was not one of the twelve disciples or apostles, nor is he mentioned in the Gospels. Ibn Hishām and al-Ṭabarī both

⁵⁷ Summary found in P. S. van Koningsveld, “The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996): 204. See also Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 190–91.

⁵⁸ Summary found in van Koningsveld, “Islamic Image of Paul,” 214. See also Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 190–91.

⁵⁹ Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 190.

state that Paul was a “follower,” not a disciple or an apostle.⁶⁰ The Bible likewise records Paul being converted to Christianity after the death of Jesus, which is more than three years after Jesus called the twelve disciples (cf. Mark 3:13–19; Acts 9). From the Muslim perspective, because Paul was not a disciple, he was not one of the men closest to Jesus. As such, Paul would not have known Christ’s teaching. He was not present for Jesus’s preaching and miracles, nor was he privy to, for example, the extended conversations Jesus had with Peter, James, and John, his closest disciples (Matt 5:37; 17:1; 26:37). For Muslim authors, then, Paul was a natural candidate for the position of corrupter because he was an outsider to the teaching and ministry of Jesus.

Second, Paul was the author of additional books in the New Testament, whereas Muslims claim that Jesus had only received the *Injīl* from Allah. Paul’s epistles not only sought to add new material to the *Injīl*, but also contained elements of Trinitarian theology and highlighted the divinity and sonship of Jesus, all of which conflicted with the Qur’ān.⁶¹ That Christian communities translated, copied, and disseminated Paul’s epistles in Arabic has been well established, and as they sought to engage Muslims in apologetic discourse, they appealed to Pauline writings.⁶² Yet, because Muslims rejected the divine origin or authority of Paul’s epistles, they viewed Paul as a fabricator of religious truths, not the author of scripture.

Third, not only were Paul’s writings not authoritative, according to Muslim writers, but Christians had elevated them to a position that rivaled the *Injīl* in prominence. For Muslims, the Christians should have restricted their focus to the revealed text of Jesus, that which contained “guidance and light” and was an “admonition to the ones who guard

⁶⁰ ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām and Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Alfred Guillaume (1967; Oxford: Oxford University, 2014), 653; Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al. (Albany: State University of New York, 1987), 4:123.

⁶¹ See Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 168; Vevian Zaki, *The Pauline Epistles in Arabic* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 265.

⁶² See Zaki, *Pauline Epistles*, 199–267.

(themselves)” (Q 5:46). However, Christians gave Paul’s writings prominence, much to the chagrin of al-Qarāfi, who writes that Christians “accord [Paul] the greatest honor, and give all their attention to his teachings and doctrines.”⁶³ Likewise, ‘Abd al-Jabbār was incensed that the Christians viewed Paul as greater than all the other prophets and stood up when his epistles were read, something they did not do even for the writings of Jesus or Moses.⁶⁴ Muslim authors were concerned about what they perceived as undue emphasis on Paul (who was not a prophet) and his writings to the neglect of Jesus and the earlier prophets. By claiming that Paul was a usurper and corruptor of Christ’s religion, Muslim authors could undermine not only his authority, but also his writings.

Whatever the reason(s) for choosing Paul as the culprit of the story, Paul became for medieval Muslim authors the chief corruptor of Christianity. As seen in the accounts of al-Tha’labī and al-Qurṭubī, for example, the followers of Jesus had practiced “one religion” or “the religion of Islam” for eighty-one years until Paul appeared and changed their religion.⁶⁵ ‘Abd al-Jabbār and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī also refer to a period of time in which the Christians followed the religion of Jesus, though they do not state an exact number of years.⁶⁶ What emerged in the earliest centuries of Islam was a robust narrative of alleged Pauline corruption, one that included various accusations aimed at proving elements of medieval Christianity that conflicted with the Qur’ān were not taught and practiced by Jesus, but were instead innovations of Paul.

⁶³ Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfi, *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira ‘an al-as’ila al-fājira*, ed. Bakr Zakī ‘Awad, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1987), 552 (328), quoted in Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics across the Mediterranean* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 192, hereafter Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 192.

⁶⁴ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 90.

⁶⁵ See Abū Ishāq Aḥmad al-Tha’labī, *Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2002), 5:33, quoted in Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 164–65, hereafter Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 164–65; Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335–36.

⁶⁶ See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 89; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-kabīr wa-mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 16:35–36, translation generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, November 29, 2023, <https://chat.openai.com/>.

Corruption of Christian Scriptures

Despite Muslim accusations of religious corruption, medieval Christians appealed to the Bible as an authority on the doctrines and practices of Jesus. As a result, the notion of Pauline corruption came to be applied not only to the religion of Jesus, but also to the text of Jesus. The various stories about Paul do not mention his influence on the Gospel of Jesus, nor do they make any assertions about the historical transmission or preservation of the original *Injīl*. However, as medieval Muslim authors engaged with Christians in apologetic discourse during the first centuries of Islamic rule, they found it necessary to explain why the Gospels of Jesus—and by extension the New Testament as a whole—conflicted with the Qur’ān. The resulting explanation was the doctrine of scriptural corruption (*tahrīf*).

The Arabic word *tahrīf* means “change” or “alteration,” referring to words, and it became in Muslim thought the foundational accusation made against Jewish and Christians’ scriptures.⁶⁷ While the term *tahrīf* does not appear in the Qur’ān, the verb *yuharrifūna* (“they corrupt”) does (Q 4:46; cf. 2:75; 5:13, 41), usually in reference to the Jews.⁶⁸ The Qur’ān affirms the authority of precedent scriptures, namely the Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David, and the Gospel of Jesus. The Muslims are to say that they believe in the scripture revealed to them and in what had been sent down to the “prophets

⁶⁷ See Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, “*tahrīf*,” in *EP*, 10:111. See also Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1992), 19; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, “Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity,” *Harvard Theological Review* 89, no. 1 (January 1996): 64–66; Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity,” 1:41; Ghulām Ḥaider Āsā, “Muslim Understanding of Other Religions: An Analytical Study of Ibn Ḥazm’s *Kitāb al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā wa al-Nihal*” (PhD diss., Temple University, 1987): 13; Abdullah Saeed, “The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures,” *Muslim World* 92 (Fall 2002), 421; Sandra Roenies Keating, “Revisiting the Charge of *Tahrīf*: The Question of Supersessionism in Early Islam and the Qur’ān,” in *Nicholas of Cusa and Islam*, ed. Ian Christopher Levy, Rita George-Tvrtković, and Donald Duclow (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 212; Gordon Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur’ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Gordon Nickel, “Early Muslim Accusations of *Tahrīf*: Muqātil ibn Sulaymān’s Commentary on Key Qur’anic Verses,” in *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 207–24.

⁶⁸ See Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 83ff. See also Gabriel Said Reynolds, “On the Qur’anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (*tahrīf*) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130, no. 2 (April–June 2010): 192–95; Gabriel Said Reynolds and Samir Khalil Samir, introduction to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, xlix.

[before them] from their Lord” (Q 2:136; cf. 5:48). According to *sūra* 3:34, the earlier scriptures were sent down as guidance, but as medieval Muslims interacted with Christians, they discovered that the Bible contradicted the Qur’ān. Moreover, Christians were unwilling to acknowledge that the Bible predicted the coming of Muhammad.⁶⁹ Muslims began to realize that something must have been wrong with the scriptures that medieval Jews and Christians possessed.⁷⁰ Differences in how Jews, Christians, and Muslims interpreted the same passages led to the charge of scriptural falsification, that somehow Jews and Christians had changed their scriptures (cf. Q 3:78).⁷¹ This charge would become, as Ignaz Goldziher observes, the “crux of Muhammedan polemic.”⁷²

The doctrine of scriptural corruption or falsification, *tahrīf*, exists in two forms. The first reflects the initial accusation that Jews and Christians had distorted the meaning of their texts (*tahrīf al-ma’nā*) but the actual texts were, at least in theory, still reliable and authoritative.⁷³ The charge of distorting the meaning of the texts came most often in response to Jews and Christians rejecting Muslim interpretations of their texts. Central to Muslim apologetics, particularly those of Christian converts to Islam, was the claim that previous scriptures, namely the Bible, foretold Muhammad’s prophethood and the rise of

⁶⁹ See Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 20; Āasī, “Muslim Understanding,” 16-17; Griffith, “Arguing from Scripture,” 36ff.; Keating, “Revisiting the Charge of *Tahrīf*,” 208–9.

⁷⁰ See Martin Accad, “The Gospels in the Muslim and Christian Exegetical Discourse from the Eighth to the Fourteenth Century” (PhD diss., Oxford University, 2001), 379–80. See also Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 22; Saeed, “Charge of Distortion,” 422–23; Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 8.

⁷¹ Griffith, “Arguing from Scripture,” 30. See also David Thomas, “The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7, no. 1 (1996): 30.

⁷² Ignaz Goldziher, “Über muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-kitāb,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländische Gesellschaft* 32 (1878): 364, quoted in Ryan Schaffner, “The Bible through a Qur’ānic Filter: Scripture Falsification (*Tahrīf*) in 8th- and 9th-Century Muslim Disputational Literature (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2016), 39, hereafter Goldziher, “Polemik,” 39.

⁷³ See Lazarus-Yafeh, “*tahrīf*,” 10:111; Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 151; Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), 190; Reynolds, “Qur’anic Accusation,” 189; Goldziher, “Polemik,” 40; Saeed, “Charge of Distortion,” 423–28.

Islam.⁷⁴ For example, the “prophet like [them]” (Deut 18:18) and the “helper” (John 14:16) were thought to be prophecies of Muhammad rather than of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, respectively. When the Jews and Christians rejected those interpretations, they were charged with corrupting the meaning of those passages that allegedly referred to Muhammad. This sentiment is seen in the words of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī (d. ca. 860), a ninth-century convert to Islam, when he writes in the opening of his refutation of Christianity, “With the help of God Most High, I will interpret the words—which [the Christians] have explained in a way contrary to their meanings—as I describe their *tahrīf*.”⁷⁵

Over time, the second form of falsification emerged, known as the *tahrīf al-lafẓ*. Whereas the first form of *tahrīf* recognized the reliability of the Jewish and Christian texts, at least in principle, this second form did not. The doctrine of *tahrīf al-lafẓ* refers to the corruption of the actual texts, which has been the most common understanding from the eleventh century to modern times.⁷⁶ The degree to which they were allegedly corrupted and which parts were corrupted was not always clear.⁷⁷ How the earlier scriptures became corrupted was also not clear, though Muslims claimed various reasons, such as the corrupting work of Paul or through lack of faithful transmission (*tawātur*).⁷⁸ However it happened, Muslims who embraced *tahrīf al-lafẓ* viewed the earlier scriptures as irretrievably altered, leaving only the Qur’ān as the sole record of Jesus and earlier prophets.

⁷⁴ See Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 47.

⁷⁵ ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī, “Ar-Radd ‘alā-n-Naṣārā,” ed. I.-A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, *Mélanges de l’université Saint Joseph* 36 (1959): 120, quoted in Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 84. See also David Thomas, “al-Ṭabarī, ‘Alī b. Rabban,” in *EP*, 10:17–18; David Thomas, “‘Alī l-Ṭabarī,” in *CMR*, 1:669–74; Rifaat Ebied and David Thomas, eds., *The Polemical Works of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1–24, 41–169; Schaffner, “The Bible through a Qur’ānic Filter,” 314–19.

⁷⁶ See Lazarus-Yafeh, “*tahrīf*,” 10:111; Goldziher, “Polemik,” 41.

⁷⁷ Lazarus-Yafeh, “*tahrīf*,” 10:111; Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 151; Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 84.

⁷⁸ Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 190. See also Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 169; Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 167–70.

Though it appears contradictory, Muslim polemicists were willing to accuse the Bible of being corrupted while also appealing to it to support Muslim claims, such as the doctrine of *tawhīd* and the prophethood of Muhammad.⁷⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, for example, argues that the Bible is not the genuine revelation given to Jesus because of the apparent contradictions, but also uses the Bible to defend Islamic claims.⁸⁰ For many Muslim writers, if a particular passage allegedly pointed to Muhammad, for example, that passage had been preserved from corruption.⁸¹

From the twelfth century on, however, Muslims appealed to the biblical text less and less in their arguments for Islam and Muhammad’s prophethood. Instead, they turned their attention to proving the complete unreliability of the texts.⁸² Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) represents the pinnacle of this approach, for he was the first Muslim author to employ a systematic approach to the Bible to prove its corruption.⁸³ Earlier Muslims accused the biblical text of being corrupted but failed to give detailed examinations with specific examples. Ibn Ḥazm, on the other hand, took the issue of *tahrīf* to “hitherto unknown levels of detail and rancor” by listing what he considered errors and contradictions.⁸⁴

Though the efforts of apologists such as Ibn Ḥazm led to Muslims utilizing the biblical text less, and despite the accusation that previous scriptures were unreliable, not all references to Jewish and Christian figures disappeared from Muslim writings. Characters from the Old Testament and the New Testament continued to appear in Islamic religious

⁷⁹ See Zaki, *Pauline Epistles*, 265–66.

⁸⁰ Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 95. See also Thomas, “The Bible,” 29.

⁸¹ See Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 48, as well as pp. 75–110 on Muslim exegesis of the Bible to predict Muhammad’s coming. See also Martin Whittingham, “The Value of *Tahrif Ma’Nawi* (Corrupt Interpretation) as a Category for Analysing Muslim Views of the Bible: Evidence from *Al-Radd Al-Jamil* and Ibn Khaldun,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22, no. 2 (2011): 209–22.

⁸² See Griffith, “Arguing from Scripture,” 31–33, 56.

⁸³ Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 26.

⁸⁴ Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse*, 190. For a summary of those accusations, see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 28–35.

discourse, primarily in stories and legends found in the *ḵiṣāṣ al-anbiyā'* (stories of the prophets) and *Isrā'īliyyāt* (stories about the Jews).⁸⁵ In these accounts, the biblical names are familiar, but the details of each character are often quite different from what is presented in the Bible. The stories are told from a Muslim, Qur'ānic perspective in a way that supports and conforms to the Muslim perspective. The emphasis on legendary presentations of Christian figures even produced the Gospel of Barnabas, an "Islamicizing Gospel" that tells the story of Jesus in a way that conforms to the Qur'ānic presentation of him.⁸⁶

The notion of scriptural corruption (*tahrīf*) is closely related to the narrative of Paul's alleged corruption of Christ's religion. As noted previously, Muslim writers needed to explain not only why medieval Christianity conflicted with Qur'ānic Christianity, but also why Jews and Christians would not accept Muhammad based on Muslim interpretations of the previous scriptures. They concluded that, like the religion of Jesus, the book of Jesus had been corrupted. Furthermore, just as Paul was seen as the corruptor of Christ's religion, he also became the source of scriptural corruption.

As Kuhn notes, Paul was the natural culprit for the doctrine of *tahrīf* because of his writings on the divinity of Jesus, one of the Christian beliefs most in conflict with the Qur'ān and most egregious to medieval Muslims.⁸⁷ The general claim from Muslim writers is that Paul's influence in the Christian community caused the followers of Jesus to change their religion slowly over time. For example, 'Abd al-Jabbār provides the most detailed explanation of this slow shift. He notes that Jesus came to revive the Torah and put it into practice, as evidenced by the fact that Jesus observed ritual purity, made ablutions, recited words from the Torah and Psalms in his prayers, prayed to the west toward Jerusalem, fasted, practiced circumcision, and prohibited the consumption of

⁸⁵ See Griffith, "Arguing from Scripture," 57.

⁸⁶ See Griffith, "Arguing from Scripture," 57.

⁸⁷ Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 169–70; See also Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 11.

pork.⁸⁸ Following Jesus’s death, according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, the disciples followed the religion of Jesus, as did the generation after them. Then, the Christians “began to make changes, substitutions, and innovations in religion, in pursuit of leadership, seeking favor with the people through the things that they desire, outwitting the Jews, and satisfying [their] rage against them, even if this meant leaving the religion.”⁸⁹ They exchanged Jesus’s teachings and practices for those of Paul, ‘Abd al-Jabbār says, although they “knew that Christ acted according to the Tawrāt and urged people to act accordingly.”⁹⁰ ‘Abd al-Jabbār also includes an account of how new gospels were written but the authors left out much of the original material. The group of Christians writing the gospels “knew many matters that were in the correct Injīl,” but they “concealed [them] in order to establish their leadership.”⁹¹ As a result, ‘Abd al-Jabbār asserts that the religion of Christ and the religions of the Messengers were not “modified and substituted all at once, but rather one portion after another, in every age and period, until the change was complete. The party of truth continually grew smaller. The party of wrong grew larger until they prevailed and the truth died because of them.”⁹²

Paul’s efforts to change the religion of Jesus also explains, at least for Ibn Ḥazm, how the biblical text became corrupted. One of Ibn Ḥazm’s charges against the Christian scriptures is that the text was not reliable because it lacked faithful transmission (*tawātur*), an accusation not found in the Qur’ān.⁹³ When Paul corrupted the religion of Jesus with new doctrines and practices, he led the Christians into error. A side effect of that error, as

⁸⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 87–89. See also Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 85; Lazarus-Yafeh, “Some Neglected Aspects,” 71.

⁸⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 89.

⁹⁰ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 91.

⁹¹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 94.

⁹² ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 92.

⁹³ See Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 169; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 41; Keating, “Revisiting the Charge of *Tahrīf*,” 215-16.

well as the sectarian division that ensued, was that the Christians did not faithfully preserve Christ's original message, the biblical text.⁹⁴ Paul, the Gospel writers, and later priests changed the biblical texts through addition, subtraction, and falsification, thus leaving the Christian community with not only a different religion, but a different scripture.⁹⁵

Each nation throughout history had received a prophet and a message (Q 10:47; 16:36; 40:5) leading up to the final prophet and message: Muhammad and the Qur'ān. Each of these prophets, including Jesus, preached the same basic message of Islam. Many of them even received a heavenly book, such as the Torah of Moses or the Gospel of Jesus.⁹⁶ However, the doctrine of *tahrīf*, when applied broadly, teaches that each nation prior to Muhammad failed to preserve the teachings of its prophet and corrupted the book it received.⁹⁷ As a result, according to medieval Muslim thinking, the only incorrupt religion and text were Islam and the Qur'ān.⁹⁸

A Self-Serving and Self-Authorizing Story

From a critical standpoint, the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption is advantageous for Muslim writers. It bolsters their claims of being the one true religion and derives its authority through its connection to the Qur'ān in the *tafsīr*. After having examined multiple accounts of alleged Pauline corruption, I have observed that the narrative simultaneously accomplishes five major goals in the Muslim critique of Christianity, both medieval and modern. Taken together, these five goals provide a

⁹⁴ See Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 43–47, on Ibn Ḥazm's claim that the Old Testament had not been preserved.

⁹⁵ Lazarus-Yafeh, "Some Neglected Aspects," 71. See also Gilliot, "Christians and Christianity," 53.

⁹⁶ New Testament books other than the Gospels were thought to be interpretations of the Gospels and additions to them, so they were thought to be of less relevance. See Zaki, *Pauline Epistles*, 233.

⁹⁷ See Reynolds and Samir, introduction to 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, xlix.

⁹⁸ Kuhn, "Early Islamic Perspectives," 169–70. See also Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 11; Tarif Khalidi, ed. and trans., *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2001), 12–17.

popular and powerful Islamic argument for the superiority of Islam.

The first goal the Pauline corruption narrative accomplishes is that it establishes an alternative Christian history based on the Qur’ān instead of the biblical text. The magnitude of this change is important to notice. The corruption narrative not only dismisses Christian doctrines and Christian scripture, but even Christian history as it is described in the Bible. This alternative history presents Jesus as a human prophet (not divine) who proclaimed the same message as Muhammad and called his followers to submit to Allah. Jesus in the Qur’ān, the same Jesus assumed by the writers of the Pauline corruption narrative, never proclaimed his divinity, sonship, or association with Allah. He practiced the religion Allah revealed to him and spoke the revelation of the *Injīl*.⁹⁹ His followers, however, deviated from his teachings and practices due to the efforts of Paul, according to Muslim writers. Thus, as Khalidi observes, Jesus is the only Qur’ānic prophet who is “deliberately made to distance himself from the doctrines that his community is said to hold of him.”¹⁰⁰

The second goal the Pauline corruption narrative accomplishes is that it identifies medieval Christian sectarianism as proof of Paul’s alleged corruption activities and the judgment of Allah. *Sūra* 5:14 indicates that the Christians had “forgotten part of what they were reminded of,” meaning they had neglected to obey some of the teachings of Jesus.” Al-Qurṭubī, in his commentary on this verse, says what the Christians had forgotten was belief in Muhammad, perhaps referring to the notion that the Bible prophesied Muhammad’s coming.¹⁰¹ As a result of the Christians neglecting what had been entrusted to them, according to *sūra* 5:14, Allah “let enmity and hostility arise between them until the Day of Judgment” as a judgment on them. The Pauline corruption narrative provides the historiographical account of this “enmity and hostility.”

⁹⁹ See Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 154.

¹⁰⁰ Khalidi, *Muslim Jesus*, 12. See also Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 82.

¹⁰¹ Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335–36.

When Paul told three different individuals that each of them would be his successor, he caused infighting and sectarian strife in the early Christian community, according to the common Pauline corruption narrative. That infighting was, according to *sūra* 5:14, not only the natural consequence of Paul’s actions, but Allah’s judgment on the Christians for believing false doctrines and forgetting what Jesus had taught them. Al-Qurṭubī finishes his account of Pauline corruption by noting this very detail: “This story is what lies behind Allah’s words in Sura *al-Ma’ida*: ‘*We stirred up enmity and hatred between them until the Day of Rising*’ (5:14). It will be discussed there, Allah willing.”¹⁰² The Pauline corruption narrative thus explains medieval Christianity existing in multiple sects (Jacobites, Nestorian, Melkites) and the sectarianism proves the veracity of the corruption narrative.¹⁰³ Medieval Christians, then, regardless of what branch or group of Christianity they followed, were following a splintered and corrupted form of Christ’s religion and were, unknowingly, experiencing Allah’s judgment.

The third goal the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption accomplished was that it connected medieval Islam to a remnant of Christ’s followers through the character known as the “believer.” Many of the Muslim accounts, such as those from al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 1078), al-Būshanjī (d. 1074), al-Tha’labī (d. 1038), and al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), describe Paul teaching his new doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus to three men: Nestor, Jacob, and Malkūn.¹⁰⁴ These men become the namesakes for three sects of

¹⁰² Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:336.

¹⁰³ See Griffith, *Church in the Shadow*, 13; Griffith, “Christians and Christianity,” 1:313.

¹⁰⁴ Stern provides a combined translation of the account as preserved by al-Damīrī but with additional details from al-Isfarāyīnī’s version in parentheses. Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 178. I will utilize this combined translation, hereafter, Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, 178. The text from al-Damīrī is quoted in al-Damīrī, *al-Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad al-Zaqīm al-Suyūfī (Cairo: al-Maṭba’a al-khayrīya bi-Miṣrīya, 1891). The text from al-Isfarāyīnī is quoted in al-Isfarāyīnī, *al-Tabṣīr fi ’l-Dīn*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Cairo: n.p., 1955), 133–34. See also Abū Ishāq Aḥmad al-Tha’labī, *Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-’Arabī, 2002), 5:33, quoted in Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 164–65, hereafter Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 164–65; Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335–36; Al-Haṣam ibn Muḥammad al-Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Qur’ān al-karīm*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abduh Ḥatāmīla and Muḥammad Jāsīm al-Mashhadānī (‘Ammān: [s.n.], 2006), 667–69, quoted in Edward G. Browne, “A Parallel to the Story in the Mathnawī of Jalālu ‘d-Dīn Rūmī, of

Christianity, the same three sects Muslim writers encountered.¹⁰⁵ In the corruption narrative, the three men gladly accept Paul’s new teachings as authoritative, though not something they had before been taught. For example, al-Qarāfi writes that the king to whom Paul entrusted the doctrine of Christ’s divinity “kept to this, although he had not heard such a thing before that day.”¹⁰⁶

Two accounts of alleged Pauline corruption include a fourth individual: the “believer.” Sayf and al-Qarāfi include this character to show that not all of Christ’s followers were led astray with false doctrines. When Paul teaches the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, the believer is horrified and says that Paul has “attempted nothing other than your corruption,” referring to the three other individuals.¹⁰⁷ The believer is incensed that the Christian men would listen to Paul’s teaching instead of Jesus’s teaching. He says to them, “We were the companions of the Messiah before him. We saw Jesus (peace be upon him) and we transmitted his words.”¹⁰⁸ The Christians, unlike Paul, were “amazed and what [they] accepted from” Jesus.¹⁰⁹ The implication is that the Christians, not Paul, had been the true companions of Jesus. Paul was an outsider. Moreover, he did not stand in amazement at Christ’s words, but instead wanted to insert

the Jewish King who Persecuted the Christians,” *Islamica* 2 (1926): 133–34, hereafter Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 133–34.

¹⁰⁵ The chronology and historical accuracy of this claim are problematic. The namesakes for the Jacobites and Nestorians lived centuries after Paul, and Malkūn is an unknown figure. The Melkites were a Christian group loyal to the Byzantine emperor. See Sidney Griffith, “‘Melkites,’ ‘Jacobites,’ and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria,” in *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 9–56; John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church 450–680 A.D.* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1989), 280–92; Robert Merrihew Adams, “Nestorius and Nestorianism,” *Monist* 104, no. 3 (July 2021): 366–75; Robert L. Wilken, “Tradition, Exegesis, and the Christological Controversies,” *Church History* 34, no. 2 (June 1965): 123–45; Carl E. Braaten, “Modern Interpretations of Nestorius,” *Church History* 32, no. 3 (September 1963): 251–67.

¹⁰⁶ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 286.

¹⁰⁷ Sayf ibn ‘Umar, *Kitāb al-ridda wa-l-futūḥ*, I. pp. 132–35 and II, fols. 62a–64b, quoted in Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 179, hereafter Sayf, *Ridda*, 179. See also Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 289.

¹⁰⁸ Qarāfi, *Ajwiba*, 289. See also Sayf, *Ridda*, 179.

¹⁰⁹ Sayf, *Ridda*, 179.

his own words into the Christian community.

When the believer refuses to follow Paul's teaching, al-Qarāfī says, Paul begins to persecute him and the other Christians who remained faithful to Christ's religion. Paul then says to his followers, "Rise up with us and let us combat this Mu'min and kill him and his companions. Otherwise, he will corrupt your religion."¹¹⁰ To escape Paul's persecution, says al-Qarāfī, the believer and his companions flee to Syria where they live as monks in hermitages.¹¹¹ There, the community lived for hundreds of years until the advent of Islam. They allegedly followed the teachings and practices of Jesus as proto-Muslims and lived in the Middle East as the forerunners of Islam. Then, when Muhammad proclaimed his message, they accepted him as the prophet foretold in their scriptures.¹¹²

The "believer" character is important—though he appears in only two accounts I have found (Sayf and al-Qarāfī)—because it establishes a continuous link between the original followers of Jesus and the Muslims. As al-Attas observes, the followers of Jesus were the ones referred to in the Qur'ān as the "nearest in love to the Believers in Islam" because they, despite the efforts of Paul, did not profess belief in the Trinity, the Incarnation, or the divinity of Jesus (Q 5:82).¹¹³ The believer and his followers represent the fundamental Qur'ānic doctrine of the continuity and unity of the prophetic message.¹¹⁴ Jesus taught his followers to worship Allah, just as Muhammad did. Christ's followers practiced an early form of Islam for centuries before Muhammad came along.

¹¹⁰ Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 289. Though 'Abd al-Jabbār does not include the "believer" in his account, he does write that the people who followed the religion of Christ "suffered in the worst possible way. They took up venerating the Cross, eating pork, and following the religious practices of the Romans. Whoever did not eat [pork] was killed." 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 111.

¹¹¹ Qarāfī, *Ajwiba*, 289.

¹¹² Gilliot, "Christians and Christianity," 43. See also Al-Attas, *Islām and Secularism*, 20–21; Sabjan and Akhir, "Sects and Schisms," 27.

¹¹³ Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 20–21. See also Sabjan and Akhir, "Sects and Schisms," 27.

¹¹⁴ See van Koningsveld, "Islamic Image of Paul," 208–9.

As Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), the famous Muslim theologian and legal expert, says, “All of the prophets and their communities were Muslims, believers, monotheists. God has never accepted any religion other than Islam.”¹¹⁵ Thus, when medieval Muslims call Christians to Islam and the prophethood of Muhammad, they are calling them not to a new religion but to the ancient religion that all the prophets proclaimed, including Muhammad. For medieval Christians to keep following the teachings and practices of Paul was to spurn the faith of Jesus, as well as the commitment and sacrifice of the remnant.¹¹⁶

The fourth goal the Pauline corruption narrative accomplishes is that it allowed early Muslim authors to dismiss medieval Christianity *en masse* as a deviation from the religion of Jesus. The entire narrative is predicated on the assumption that the religion of Jesus was Islam. Therefore, any medieval form of Christianity that was not Islamic (not Qur’ānic) was not considered the religion of Jesus. More specifically, any practice or doctrine that conflicted with the Qur’ān was rejected as an innovation of Paul.

In the earlier chapters of this dissertation, I noted the common features of the Pauline corruption narrative as they relate to the thesis. Paul is charged with corrupting the teachings of Jesus by creating the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus. He is also charged with corrupting the religious practices of Jesus leading the Christians to allow the consumption of pork and to abandon circumcision. It seems like too great a coincidence that the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus directly contradict the Qur’ānic presentation of Jesus (Q 4:171; 9:30-31). Furthermore, by not practicing circumcision and allowing the consumption of pork, medieval Christians contradicted Islamic practice, which positioned itself as a continuation of what Jesus practiced. These doctrines and practices, through the Pauline corruption narrative, were rejected as innovations.

¹¹⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Radd ‘alā l-mantiqiyīn* (Lahore, Pakistan: Idārat Tarjumān al-Sunna, 1976), 290, quoted in Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 87.

¹¹⁶ See Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 20–21; Sabjan and Akhir, “Sects and Schisms,” 27.

Even other doctrines and practices were grouped into this same category.¹¹⁷ For example, in ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *Critique*, he chastises the Christians for praying without the proper ablutions, and also for praying in the wrong direction.¹¹⁸ The Christians observed religious feasts and holidays that were not part of Christ’s religion, and they neglected the Torah and the Psalms in their prayers, instead preferring new words, namely the epistles of Paul.¹¹⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār also accuses Paul of allowing divorce and the consumption of meat sacrificed to idols.¹²⁰ The implication is that the other changes to Christ’s religion also came from Paul’s activities. Al-Samarqandī (d. 983) accused Paul of allowing Christians to drink wine.¹²¹ Al-Tha’labī (and others) blamed Paul for teaching the doctrine of the incarnation.¹²² Finally, multiple commentators, including al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), al-Samarqandī, al-Būshanjī (d. 11th century), and al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 1078), accuse Paul of teaching the doctrine of Christ’s sonship, which is closely related to the doctrine of Christ’s divinity.¹²³

The Pauline corruption narrative identifies Paul as the ultimate source of all difference between Christian and Muslim doctrines and practices.¹²⁴ Furthermore, as more and more Christian doctrines and practices were rejected as innovations from Paul,

¹¹⁷ On the ability of the Pauline corruption narrative to include a range of diverse accusations, see Abbas Barzegar, “The Persistence of Heresy: Paul of Tarsus, Ibn Saba, and Historical Narrative in Sunni Identity Formation,” *Numen* 58 (January 2011): 225.

¹¹⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 86–87.

¹¹⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 87.

¹²⁰ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 89–90, 101.

¹²¹ Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-Samarqandī al-musammā Bahṛ al-’ulūm*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu’awwad et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyya, 1993), 1:423–24, translation generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, November 30, 2023, chat.openai.com/. See also Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 194–95.

¹²² Tha’labī, *Tafsīr*, 164–65.

¹²³ See Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, 5:335–36; Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:423–24; Būshanjī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 132–34; Damīrī, *Hayāt*, 178.

¹²⁴ See Anthony, “Composition of Sayf,” 182; Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 185.

it became apparent that, according to Muslim thinking, the entire religion of Christianity was a deviation from the truth. As ‘Abd al-Jabbār summarizes in his *Critique*, his aim was not to show that Christianity was wrong, but that Christians had “deviated from the religion of Christ and opposed it in both doctrine and practice,” even though they had full knowledge of the truth.¹²⁵

The fifth and final goal the corruption narrative accomplishes is that it leaves Islam the only surviving expression of Christ’s original religion because medieval Christianity was a corrupted form of what Jesus taught.¹²⁶ In the *Critique*, ‘Abd al-Jabbār emphasizes this very assertion. He writes that the Christians claim to be the “most determined in God’s world to venerate Christ, to testify to him, and to love him.”¹²⁷ Moreover, the Christians claim that they are Christ’s “faction and followers, that they are the people most obedient to him, that they follow his precedent, that they emulate him, and that they act according to his commandments.”¹²⁸ However, according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Muhammad said that the Christians “lied about [Jesus], changed His religion, and annulled His commandments, and that they imitated with their statement those who disbelieved before them.”¹²⁹ As a result, according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār and the other Muslim authors I have examined in this dissertation, the only true expression of the ancient religion practiced by all of the prophets, including Jesus, was Islam. If one wanted to know what Jesus’s religion looked like, one could only look to the Muslims. If one wanted to know what Jesus preached, one could only look to the Qur’ān.

With these five goals in mind, the Pauline corruption narrative was created to

¹²⁵ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 161. ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s closing remarks in this section include a list of authors that he recommends for examination and refutation of Christian claims. See also Stern, “‘Abd al-Jabbār’s Account,” 153.

¹²⁶ See Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 169–70; Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 11.

¹²⁷ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 27.

¹²⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 27.

¹²⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Critique of Christian Origins*, 28.

be a self-serving and powerful apologetic argument for early Muslim authors. The narrative explained why medieval Christianity did not match Qur'ānic Christianity, and the fact that it differed from the Qur'ān. Moreover, with the narrative, medieval Muslim authors could argue that the only way to know the teachings and practices of Jesus was to read the Qur'ān and look at the religion of Islam. If Christians were to appeal to the Bible, Muslim authors needed only to remind them that the Bible was corrupted. As such, Christians had no authority to which they could appeal. The Qur'ān was the only authoritative book. Christians, thus, had no ability to refute the claims of the Pauline corruption narrative. Their history, their scripture, and even their view of Jesus were deviations from the one true religion of the prophets: Islam.

Conclusion

My goal for this chapter was to demonstrate possible reasons for the emergence of the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption in the medieval period. The narrative emerged not by chance, but as a direct response to Christian rejection of Islam, Muhammad, and the Qur'ān. Many Christian doctrines and practices were the target of Muslim polemic, but the chief issues were the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus and the Christian practices of eating pork and withholding circumcision. As noted, Muslim authors expanded a preexisting Jewish tradition about the corruption of Christ's religion to dismiss those Christian elements as innovations of Paul rather than features of Christ's original religion. Despite the variety of details in the various accounts, the collective argument against Paul serves as a hybrid of theology and history, one that served to undermine Christian teachings and bolster Islamic teachings.¹³⁰

When understood properly, the Pauline corruption narrative is a created history to support presupposed theological positions. As Cucarella notes, the narrative

¹³⁰ Anthony, "Composition of Sayf," 202. See also Barzegar, "Persistence of Heresy," 225.

theologoumena, “the historicizing of what was originally a theological statement.”¹³¹

Muslim writers included elements of Christian history in the Pauline critique but presented them through a Muslim lens. For example, the corruption narrative describes Paul as a Jew who persecuted Christians, something the biblical text affirms. However, Muslim writers then use the historical story of Paul’s conversion to Christianity as the basis for his corruption of Christianity, claiming his conversion was not genuine. Referring to Sayf’s account in particular, Kuhn observes that the account is “Islamic interpolation of Paul’s character with virtually no consideration of New Testament Pauline sources.”¹³² The Pauline corruption narrative is, then, religious conviction written as historical events.¹³³

The Pauline corruption narrative is a story that *has* no historical basis and—for Muslims—*needs* no historical basis. Medieval Muslim authors who developed various versions of the Paul story created theological history to explain Christianity’s alleged departure from the original religion of Jesus, which was the perennial message of all the prophets. Additionally, from the Muslim perspective, the fact that no historical basis exists for the Pauline corruption narrative is proof of the narrative’s veracity because everything from the time of Jesus—including his teachings, his religious practices, and his scripture—has been lost. For Muslims, then, the only way to know what Jesus said or did is to look to Islam and the Qur’ān.

¹³¹ Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 198–99.

¹³² Kuhn, “Early Islamic Perspectives,” 158–59. For further consideration of the Qur’anic portrayal of Christian figures or doctrines, see Gabriel Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 39–199. Reynolds provides several case studies.

¹³³ Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian Polemics*, 198–99.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: THE PERSISTENCE OF THE PAULINE CORRUPTION NARRATIVE

Thirteen centuries after the earliest surviving Muslim accounts of alleged Pauline corruption of Christianity, Paul continues to be arguably the vilified Christian figure in Muslim writings. Whether in the earliest account from Sayf ibn ‘Umar (d. ca. 796) or the modern writings of Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), Paul is depicted as the corruptor par excellence. For Muslim authors across the centuries, from various contexts, and writing in various genres of literature, no one is more responsible than Paul, they say, for the current form of Christianity. According to the authors of the Pauline corruption accounts that I examined in this dissertation, Paul corrupted Christ’s original religion sometime after the earthly ministry of Jesus. Thus, these Muslims say, Christianity has been a false religion and a deviation from the truth, from the first century to the twenty-first century.

This claim, though, of alleged Pauline corruption, did not appear without cause. As Muslim armies spread into Christian lands, they found themselves not only fighting for control of the land, but also defending their religious claims about Muhammad’s prophethood and the superiority of Islam. Muslims encountered various forms of Christianity, all of which contradicted the Qur’ānic portrayal of Jesus as a human prophet who largely proclaimed the perennial message of Islam (Q 2:136). As a result, they realized the need to refute Christianity. Specifically, early Muslim writers needed to refute the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus. These two doctrines are foundational to Christianity and, at the same time, egregious to Muslims because they contradict explicit Qur’ānic teaching about Allah’s oneness and the prohibitions about associating anyone or anything with Allah (Q 2:163–64; 4:48, 116; 23:91–92). In addition, Muslim writers needed to refute two Christian practices at odds with Muslim practices:

consuming pork and withholding circumcision. To counter these doctrines and practices, Muslim writers developed the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption based on a preexisting Jewish tradition. According to this narrative, Paul was a false convert to Christianity who corrupted Christ's original religion with new doctrines and practices, so much so that Christ's religion was lost. Medieval Christianity, for these Muslims, was an entirely different religion, one that claimed a connection to Jesus, but was a creation of the false apostle Paul.

My thesis is that early Muslim writers expanded a preexisting Jewish tradition of Pauline corruption to refute the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, as well as the Christian practices of consuming pork and withholding circumcision. Given that Muslims and Christians interacted with each other for centuries while narratives of alleged corruption were written, other Christian doctrines and practices may also have influenced the emergence of the corruption tradition. However, these two doctrines and two practices appear most often in the corruption accounts, which is an indication that they were of unique interest to Muslim authors seeking to counter Christianity. My thesis for why the corruption narrative emerged is not novel, as indicated by the survey of prior scholarship I provided in the introduction to this dissertation. Yet, the goal of my dissertation has not been to make a new claim, but to bring additional accounts of alleged Pauline corruption into conversation with the accounts that had previously received extensive scholarly analysis. By doing so, I aimed to determine what these additional accounts contribute to the broader discussion of Paul in Islam, and whether they offer any new insights.

With this goal in mind, I devoted the second chapter to the four corruption accounts from Sayf, 'Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī (two accounts). Much modern scholarship has been devoted to these accounts, perhaps because they are so detailed that researchers have ample material to examine. Utilizing full translations of the accounts and secondary research, I analyzed each account, identifying common features and

unique elements. This analysis served as the foundation for the dissertation, not because the four accounts are more important than any others, but because of the extensive prior research each account has received. Together, these four accounts demonstrate the consistent claim that Muslim writers make: Paul corrupted Christ's original religion with new doctrines and new practices.

In chapter 3, I began interacting with additional accounts of alleged Pauline corruption found in Muslim historiographical writings. The first prominent difference between these accounts and the four accounts in chapter 2 is that the historiographical Muslim references to Paul are brief in detail and focus more on Paul's purported character than his alleged deeds. Ibn Qūlawayh and Ibn Bābawayh include Paul in a list of people who are reportedly in hell for their opposition to Allah's truth. Likewise, Ibn Ḥazm and al-Shahrastānī allege that Paul intentionally neglected the truth he knew and intended to lead the Christians astray. I also included accounts in chapter 3 that do not address Paul's alleged activities or character, such as the accounts from Ibn Hishām and al-Ṭabarī. While these accounts do not address corruption, I included them because they provide further indication of the collective Muslim view of Paul. Even though the accounts in chapter 3 do not provide detailed descriptions of alleged corruption activities, they do confirm the core claim of the traditional narrative, as well as my thesis, namely that Paul was the corruptor of Christ's religion.

The fourth chapter of my dissertation was devoted to accounts of alleged Pauline corruption in the *tafsīr* literature. Like the accounts from Sayf, 'Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī, the *tafsīr* reports are detailed descriptions of how Paul allegedly pretended to be a Christian so he could enter the Christian community and corrupt it. The most common claims against Paul in these accounts are that he was the origin of the doctrines of the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, and the sonship of Jesus, and that by teaching these doctrines, Paul split the Christian community into warring factions. The most important feature of the *tafsīr* accounts, and the reason I devoted a separate chapter to them, is how

Muslim commentators interpreted Qur'ānic passages *through* the lens of alleged Pauline corruption, thereby marrying the narrative to the authority of the Qur'ān. Commentators such as al-Tha'labī, al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Baghawī, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī appeal to the story of Paul in their commentary on *sūra* 9:30–31, a passage that condemns Christians for worshiping Jesus as God. Likewise, al-Qurṭubī blames Paul for creating the doctrine of the Trinity, which *sūra* 4:171 rejects as excessive. Furthermore, al-Samarqandī and al-Būshanjī provide corruption accounts to support their claim that Paul was the source of Christian division (Q 5:14–16; 19:37; 43:65). Together, the *tafsīr* accounts appear to indicate the ease with which commentators could utilize the same basic story of alleged Pauline corruption to interpret any Qur'ānic denunciation of Christian doctrine. Any Christian doctrine, or any feature of medieval Christianity, that appears in the Qur'ān could be explained as an innovation of Paul, including the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, as I state in my thesis.

In chapter 5, I focused on the questions of why Muslim writers promoted a narrative of corruption, why they identified Paul as the culprit, and to what extent Jewish traditions may have influenced the Muslim accounts. The apparent need for a corruption narrative was a result of Christian rejection of Islam, Muhammad as prophet, and the Qur'ān. Muslims proclaimed a Qur'ānic form of Christianity, one that mirrored Islam in its beliefs and practices, and anticipated Muhammad as prophet. However, Muslims found that Christian beliefs and practices conflicted with the Qur'ānic portrayal of Christianity. Therefore, Muslim writers modified a preexisting Jewish tradition to explain how the original religion of Jesus (i.e., Islam) was allegedly corrupted, such that medieval Christianity was a false religion. The culprit for this alleged corruption, Muslim writers claim, was Paul. Because Paul was not one of the twelve disciples or apostles, because his writings were added to the Gospels, and because Paul had such prominence in the Christian communities, he was a natural candidate for the corruptor of Christianity. By claiming that Paul was the culprit, Muslim writers could not only undermine Christian

doctrines and practices, but its most influential figure and authoritative voice after Jesus.

Having now examined the additional accounts, I will make four observations regarding new insights from the study. First, I was intentional in this dissertation to examine accounts from across six centuries, the broader geographical region of the early Islamic empire, and different Muslim sects and schools of jurisprudence. This strategy has confirmed my thesis but has moreover indicated the universal appeal of the narrative among Muslims. Whether it was Sayf using the story of Paul to warn about the threat of sectarian division like caused by Ibn Saba', al-Shahrastānī describing Paul's character as a wicked deceiver, or al-Būshanjī explaining why Christians disagree about Jesus, Muslim authors were able to appeal to the same basic story to explain any feature of Christianity that conflicted with Islam. With one created tale, Muslim authors were able to critique and dismiss any Christian doctrine or practice that conflicted with the Qur'ān. The result was, as I noted in chapter 5, a complete dismissal of medieval Christianity as a fabrication of Paul.

The second observation concerns the unique elements of individual Muslim accounts and how they are not harmonized by the different authors. Though the claim of Pauline corruption can be summarized as in my thesis statement, the tradition of Pauline corruption is a broad collection of various accounts and details. Sometimes, Paul appears concerned that Christians have the truth, such as in the account of al-Qurṭubī, while at other times Paul fakes his conversion to Christianity out of a desire for power and influence, as in the account from Abd al-Jabbār. Al-Ya'qūbī describes Paul's conversion and ministry in terms that appear religiously neutral, while al-Qummī says Paul is a devil sent to harm Jesus. None of the writers I examine in this dissertation seek to harmonize different elements of the narrative. Even al-Qarāfī, who includes two different accounts of corruption in his writings, simply lets the accounts stand on their own. By not attempting to harmonize the different accounts, Muslim authors indicate that the importance of the Pauline corruption narrative is not historical accuracy or even literary uniformity. The

importance of the narrative is its purpose in the Muslim community. What the corruption narrative does is more important than whether its assertions are true, and what it does is undermine Christianity as a powerful apologetic argument.

A third observation from the inclusion of new material is that Muslim writings sometimes reflect a disparaging view of Paul and a knowledge of the corruption narrative without an explicit reference to the act of corruption. For example, Ibn Ḥazm and al-Shahrastānī do not provide detailed accounts of Paul's efforts and instead only provide short summary statements on how Paul changed the religion of Jesus. Their purpose is to comment on Paul's character as a liar and corruptor, and they assume a wider knowledge of exactly what Paul allegedly did. Likewise, Ibn Bābawayh and Ibn Qūlawayh include Paul in a list of people who are in hell for their opposition to Allah's truth. They describe Paul's alleged character, as do Ibn Ḥazm and al-Shahrastānī, while assuming their readers have knowledge of the broader corruption narrative. These examples indicate that the details of Paul's alleged corruption activities are not as important as the overall Muslim attitude toward Paul as the corruptor of Christ's original religion. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, these examples seem to indicate that Muslim writers were operating from a common memory of Pauline stories. No singular account of alleged Pauline corruption exists. Rather, multiple written accounts exist, and the examples from chapter 3 indicate that even more accounts in the medieval era existed in the minds of Muslims. Muslim writers could, therefore, craft their own accounts as they selectively chose details from various traditions.

The fourth observation comes from the chapter on Pauline corruption in Qur'ānic commentary literature. While the accounts often mirror the same basic claims made by Sayf or 'Abd al-Jabbār, for example, what makes these accounts unique is that they appear in the context of Muslims attempting to interpret the Qur'ān. Thus, the accounts from commentators such as al-Samarqandī, al-Tha'labī, or al-Rāzī indicate medieval exegetes' understanding of Qur'ānic texts concerning Christians. Commentators

used the Pauline corruption narrative to explain the presence of two Christian groups in the Qur'ān as well as the disparity between Muslim and Christian views of Jesus. Then, because the story made sense of the Qur'ān, the story became authoritative because of the Qur'ān. Commentators had no need to defend the historicity of the corruption narrative. The story explained what they read in the Qur'ān so it must have been true. As I discussed in chapter 5, the Pauline corruption narrative became a self-serving and self-authorizing apologetic argument against Christianity.

The fifth observation is that the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption is not a relic of the past, but a feature of contemporary Muslim writings. The depiction of Paul as the corruptor of Christ's religion emerged as early as the eighth century, but it has persisted into the modern era. Perhaps one reason for the continuation of the claims against Paul is the fact that Muslims and Christians continue to interact with one another, and they continue to make exclusive truth claims about the nature of God, scripture, the person of Jesus, the prophets, and more. Contemporary Muslims still need to refute Christian claims, so they appeal to the centuries-old narrative of Pauline corruption. The narrative continues to be characterized by inconsistent stories and a dearth of historical evidence, but those features appear unimportant for modern Muslims, just as they appeared unimportant for medieval Muslims. The narrative is still advantageous for Muslims today because it undermines Christianity, the apostle Paul, and the reliability and authority of the Bible. As I observed in chapter 5, the Pauline corruption narrative enables Muslims to dismiss Christianity as a false religion based on the teachings of Paul, leaving only Islam as the correct religion.

As demonstrated in my dissertation, modern Muslim claims of Pauline corruption appear in popular writing and academic writing, which indicate that the narrative is not a fringe belief, or one only promulgated by the uninformed or uneducated. Prominent Muslim thinkers continue to identify Paul as the corruptor of Christ's religion, such as Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) and 'Ata'ur-Rahim in the twentieth century. Modern

Muslim apologists such as Ahmed Deedat and Bilal Philipps identify Paul as the true founder of Christianity, a false religion that elevates the human Jesus to a divine figure. In the realm of popular literature, Reza Aslan and Mustafa Akyol claim that Jesus was a mere human, and that Christians—through the leadership of Paul—created a new religion after Jesus’s death. Finally, modern scholar Shabir Akhtar (d. 2023) adds a measure of perceived credibility to the corruption narrative when he claims that Paul destroyed monotheism and created the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus.

These examples of Pauline corruption indicate that the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption is present in the modern era. Whether in popular literature, apologetics, or academia, Muslims continue—even fourteen centuries later—to depict Paul as the corruptor of Christ’s original religion. For this very reason, my research has an important missiological implication for Christians. Because contemporary Muslims are still critiquing Paul, contemporary Christians need to understand that critique and be prepared to respond to it with a defense of Paul’s teachings, Christianity, and the Bible. As the global Muslim population grows, Christians will encounter Muslims more often, which means more opportunities for evangelistic witness. However, Christians must be prepared to face strongly held Muslim beliefs, including the rejection of Christ’s divinity and the Trinity, as well as the rejection of the Bible as an authoritative book. Included with these doctrines is the alleged role of Paul to corrupt the religion of Christ.

One possible suggestion for Christians might be to avoid the Pauline corruption topic entirely by not reading from Pauline letters or discussing any Pauline theology in their conversations with Muslims. However, two problems arise with this suggestion. The first problem with avoiding Paul is that Christians would be hard pressed to communicate many of the core Christian doctrines without, at some point, referring to Paul’s explanation of those doctrines. Granted, Paul’s letters are not the only New Testament documents that teach Christian doctrines, but our understanding of doctrines such as atonement, the divinity of Jesus, justification by faith, and the Trinity, for example, is

enriched greatly by Paul's writings. He did not create these doctrines, as Muslims claim, but rather explained and developed them through his apostolic writings. While Christians may have many non-Pauline conversations with Muslims about various doctrines and practices, at some point, Paul's influence on Christianity is sure to emerge. Thus, his importance to Christian theology—including the doctrines that Muslims reject based on the Pauline corruption narrative—prevents Christians from avoiding him entirely in their religious dialogue with Muslims.

The second problem with avoiding Paul in conversations with Muslims is that Christians would still face the Muslim claims that the Bible is corrupted, that Jesus was a human prophet, and that Islam is the only true religion. The larger claims of the Pauline corruption narrative are, therefore, unavoidable. If Christians are going to engage Muslims in religious dialogue, and if they are going to promote Christian theological tenets, then they must be prepared to respond to the Pauline corruption narrative. To that end, Christians should understand its origin, history, and content. They also need to understand the historical context that produced the narrative and its self-serving and self-authenticating nature. Yet, more than merely understanding the Pauline corruption narrative, Christians must also be prepared to respond to the narrative with a defense of Paul, Christianity, and the Bible.

For more than twelve centuries now, Muslims have claimed that Paul corrupted Christ's original religion. The claim assumes that Jesus was a Muslim prophet who proclaimed the same perennial message of all the prophets, namely belief in one God and submission to his rule. When medieval Muslim authors encountered a Christianity in conflict with the Qur'ānic portrayal of Jesus and the Muslim religion, they created the narrative of alleged Pauline corruption to refute the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, as well as the Christian practices of withholding circumcision and eating pork. No historical basis was needed for this assertion, as I discussed in the last chapter. The purpose of the narrative was to undermine Christianity, so historicity was not

an issue. Through the claims of the corruption narrative, a self-serving and self-authorizing story, Muslim writers were able to dismiss Christianity entirely as a product of Paul. The true religion of Jesus, they claimed, was lost to time, as was his scripture. Thus, the only way to know Jesus was to read the Qur'ān, and the only way to live like Jesus lived was to follow the religion of Islam.

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ABSTRACT

A CRITIQUE OF THE EARLY ISLAMIC CHARGE THAT PAUL CORRUPTED CHRIST'S ORIGINAL RELIGION

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This dissertation is a critique of the early Islamic charge that Paul corrupted Christ's original religion with doctrines and practices that Jesus did not promote. Muslim writers in the first six centuries of Islam claimed that core Christian doctrines and practices were inventions of Paul, namely the doctrines of the Trinity and Christ's divinity and the practices of consuming pork and abstaining from circumcision. In chapter 1, I introduce the dissertation by surveying modern research on the topic of alleged Pauline corruption, stating the original contribution of my research, and then outlining the study. In chapter 2, I lay the foundation for my dissertation by examining the accounts of Sayf ibn 'Umar (d. ca. 796), 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), and al-Qarāfī (d. 1285), three men whose accounts of alleged Pauline corruption have received the majority of modern research. In the following two chapters, I make my original contribution, which is to bring additional accounts of alleged Pauline corruption into conversation with the accounts from Sayf, 'Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī to highlight similarities and differences. In chapter 3, I examine corruption accounts in Muslim historiographical writings, and in chapter 4, I examine corruption accounts in Muslim commentaries on the Qur'ān. Then, having brought these additional accounts into conversation with the accounts of Sayf, 'Abd al-Jabbār, and al-Qarāfī, I devote chapter 5 to the question of why the story of alleged Pauline corruption emerged in Muslim thinking. My analysis of corruption accounts from multiple authors, genres, geographical locations, and time periods led me to the conclusion that

early Muslim authors expanded a preexisting Jewish tradition of corruption into the Muslim Pauline narrative to undermine Christian doctrines and practices. Through the narrative of alleged corruption, Muslim writers were able to dismiss the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, and the practices of eating pork and withholding circumcision as innovations of Paul, not elements of Christ's original religion. Finally, in chapter 6, I summarize the findings of my research and address the missiological implications of the dissertation. Because modern Muslims continue to allege Pauline corruption of Christ's original religion, Christians must understand the content and origin of the corruption narrative so that they can critique Muslim claims and defend Paul's apostleship and teachings.

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