

**“To Collect Information, Not to Deduce Law”: Al-Biqā‘ī’s (d. 1480) Argument for Interpreting the Quran with the Bible**

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**Abstract**

This paper investigates how premodern Muslim intellectuals understood and utilized Biblical materials in their written works. While some studies have highlighted Muslim use of the Bible for polemical and apologetic purposes, this study shows that medieval Muslim interaction with Biblical passages was not confined to those two approaches, illustrating the complexity of their engagement with the Bible. Taking the fifteenth-century Mamluk Quran commentator Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā‘ī (d. 1480) as a case study, this paper discusses how al-Biqā‘ī sought to quote relevant Biblical passages to offer a more comprehensive narrative of figures and events mentioned only briefly in the Quran. Criticized by his contemporaries, al-Biqā‘ī wrote his Apologia to defend his approaches. Analyzing al-Biqā‘ī’s Apologia reveals the central argument that, for him, interpreting the Quran with the Bible is permissible for narrative and admonitory purposes but not for determining articles of faith and Islamic laws. In the end, he underscores the significant difference between *taḥrīf* (falsification) and *naskh* (abrogation), which should be appropriately understood in dealing with pre-Islamic revelation. Although he implied that certain Biblical passages were safe from textual falsification based on their conformity with the Quran, he supported the concept of abrogation, a widespread idea in medieval times across various religious traditions.

**Keywords:** Al-Biqā‘ī, Apologia, the Bible, Muslim Literature

## Biblical Materials in Muslim Literature<sup>1</sup>

Many studies have shown that medieval Muslim intellectuals incorporated Biblical passages into their works for two main reasons: (i) to refute certain doctrines and practices in Christianity and Judaism and (ii) to claim that earlier revelations foretold the prophethood of Muḥammad (Adang, 2019; Reynolds, 2010). In other words, premodern Muslim scholars employed verses from the Torah and the Gospel for polemical and apologetic purposes. The former found its way through the genre of *al-radd* (refutation) works, while the latter was elaborated in *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* (the signs of Muḥammad's prophecy) epistles. One can list the following texts as belonging to the first category: al-Jāḥiẓ's (d. 869) *al-Mukhtār fī al-radd 'alā al-naṣārā*, Ibn Yaḥyā al-Maghribī's (d. 1175) *Ghāyat al-maqṣūd fī al-radd 'alā al-naṣārā wa al-yahūd*, al-Qurṭubī's (d. 1273) *al-I'lām bimā fī dīn al-naṣārā min al-fasād wa al-awhām*, Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1328) *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ*, Ibn al-Qayyim's (d. 1350) *Hidāya al-ḥayārā ' fī ajwiba al-yahūd wa al-naṣārā*, and *al-Radd al-ḥamīl li ilāhiyyat 'īsā bi sarīḥ al-injīl* attributed to al-Ghazālī (d. 1111). Also, various refutations of Christian or Jewish beliefs and practices are often expounded in Muslim scholars' encyclopedic surveys of multiple religious traditions and sects, as exemplified in Ibn Ḥazm's (d. 1064) *al-Faṣl fī al-milal wa al-aḥwā' wa al-niḥal*.

One of the central arguments that Muslim theologians frequently employed in their refutation of Judaism and Christianity was the claim that Jewish and Christian scriptures, although initially revealed by God, had been textually falsified (*tahrīf*). To prove these scriptures had been distorted, Muslim polemicists pointed to specific Biblical passages where, according to them, it was theologically impossible they had originated from the Divine. One example was Genesis 19:30-36, where the Prophet Lot was said to have had sexual intercourse with his two daughters. For Ibn Ḥazm and other Muslim theologians, the messengers of God were protected from committing such major sins, which could undermine their prophetic missions (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1992, p. 32). The incorporation of this story into the Bible is seen as convincing proof that non-divine speech

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the Bible refers to the Torah and the Gospel.

had contaminated the Bible. Although Muslim polemicists did not pioneer the *tahrīf* argument, for accusations of textual falsification had been, as Lazarus-Yafeh notes, widespread in the world of Late Antiquity and commonly exploited in Jewish-Christian polemics (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1992, p. 32), Muslim *tahrīf* arguments were grounded in several Quranic verses, such as al-Baqarah (2:75), al-Nisā' (4:46), al-Mā'idah (5:13 and 41). In one interpretation of 2:75, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) argues that because of *tahrīf*, previous revelations have been contaminated with errors and falsehood, saying, "they (Jews), in their Torah, have changed permissible into impermissible, impermissible into permissible, truth into untruth, and untruth into truth" (al-Ṭabarī, 2001, p. 141). Based on these Quranic verses, their interpretations, and the alleged problematic narratives found in the Bible, Muslim polemicists were convinced that Jews and Christians had corrupted their scriptures.

However, one crucial issue emerged: had the Torah and the Gospel been distorted entirely or only partly? The Mamluk scholar Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī (d. 1480) informs us that premodern Muslim scholars were divided into four camps concerning the issue: (i) the first group believed the Bible had been corrupted completely, (ii) a second group argued most Biblical passages were forged, (iii) a third group maintained that falsification only occurred in a small number of Biblical passages, while (iv) a fourth group suggested the Bible had been distorted in its meaning (*tahrīf al-ma' nā*) but not its text (*dūna tahrīf al-naṣṣ*) (al-Biqā'ī, 2010, pp. 165–167). Most, if not all, Muslim authors of *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* epistles seem to adhere to the idea that textual falsification only occurred in some parts of Biblical passages. Once a Biblical verse corresponds to and supports a Quranic idea, the former is believed to be authentic. For instance, John 15:26, in which Jesus said, "When the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me," is understood by Ibn Ishāq (d. 767) as predicting the coming of Muḥammad (Bertaina, 2017, p. 100). This Biblical verse is believed to align with the Quranic description of Muḥammad's message as *muṣaddiq* (confirmer) of previous revelations.

To give one more example, al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), author of the famous *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwah*, points to al-Anbiyā' (21: 105),

which corresponds to Psalm 37:29, “the righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever,” as a divine prediction from earlier revelation not only of the prophecy of Muḥammad but also of the triumph of the Muslim community and their successful conquests (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1992, p. 32). The works that had been written on this genre include Abū Nu‘aym al-Aṣḥānī’s (d. 1038) *Dalā’il al-nubuwwah*, al-Māwardī’s (d. 1058) *A’lām al-nubuwwa*, and al-Bayhaqī’s (d. 1066) *Dalā’il al-nubuwwah*. However, one should keep in mind that Muslim use of Biblical materials for polemics and apologetics are found not only in *al-radd* and *dalā’il nubuwwah* genres but also in other works, such as ‘Alī Ibn Rabban’s *Kitāb al-dīn wa al-dawlah* (Ibn Rabban, 1922).

Other studies demonstrate that Muslim engagement with the Bible is more complex, and their quotations of Biblical materials were not exclusively confined to polemical and apologetic purposes. McCoy III has recently classified Muslim use of Biblical data into three aims: (i) to refute Judeo-Christian scriptures, (ii) to argue for the legitimacy of Muḥammad’s prophethood, and (iii) *ghayr dhālik*, that is, something other than the first two plans (McCoy III, 2022, p. xii). In what follows, we will highlight two approaches that fall under the rubric of *ghayr dhālik*. First, Biblical materials that were quoted to provide further detail about the shared history of human beings from the time of creation or about the tales of earlier prophets. While the former was typically illustrated in *Tarīkh* books, the latter can be seen in *qaṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* works. As noted by Adang, the early Muslim historian al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 898) takes his biblical history from the age of Adam and Eve through to the time of Jesus (Adang, 1996, p. 38). Whittingham observes how al-Tha‘labī (d. 1035), in his *‘Arā’is al-majālis fī qaṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* narrated the tale of the Prophet Isaiah, who is mentioned in the Bible but not in the Quran (Whittingham, 2020, p. 113).

Second, *ascetic-pietistic* literature often incorporates many Biblical quotations as additional evidence to endorse particular virtues. As observed by Whittingham, early ascetic works, such as *Kitāb al-zuhd wa al-raqā’iq* by Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 797) and *Kitāb al-zuhd* by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), made some use of Jesus as the model ascetic (Whittingham, 2020, p. 114). Tarif Khalidi demonstrates how this

renunciant literature consists of sayings and stories with a Gospel core. For instance, in Ibn al-Mubārak's work, Jesus is depicted as saying, "If he gives with the right hand, let him hide this from his left hand" (Khalidi, 2003, p. 53). This statement parallels Matthew 6:3, where Jesus says, "Your left hand must not know what your right hand is doing" (Khalidi, 2003, p. 33). Furthermore, sayings attributed to Jesus are frequently quoted in classical Sufi texts, such as *Qūt al-qulūb* by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 996) and *Ḥilyāt al-Awliyā'* by Abū Nu'aym al-Isfahānī (d. 1039). Khalidi underscores that by the time of al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), whose *Ḥyā' ulūm al-dīn* contains the most significant number of sayings attributed to Jesus in any Arabic Islamic text, Jesus was celebrated in Sufi circles as the Prophet of the heart *par excellence* (Khalidi, 2003, p. 44).

Nevertheless, one should be cautious about whether these Biblical quotations could be traced back to the written Gospels. Whittingham's analysis of 303 sayings attributed to Jesus, collected by Khalidi from the books of renunciation by Ibn al-Mubārak and Ibn Ḥanbal, yields only 45 sayings with clear connections to the Bible (Whittingham, 2020, p. 115). This could be explained by the fact that Arabic translations of the Bible were not widely available in early Islamic history. Even modern researchers of Eastern Christianity have debated when the Bible was rendered into Arabic for the first time (Isteero, 1991, p. 218; Whittingham, 2020, pp. 9-10). Nevertheless, as some scholars maintain, Biblical stories were indeed transmitted orally, despite the absence of written texts. These sayings and stories, adds Khalidi, belong to "the common age-old fund of wisdom found in the rich traditions of Near Eastern cultures" (Khalidi, 2003, p. 4). In later Islamic history, the Arabic Bible was more visible and more widely available to the broader public. While the earliest Muslims used oral and limited written traditions of Biblical materials, the increasing availability of the Arabic Bible enabled later Muslim authors, such as al-Biqā'ī, to refer to the translated Biblical texts extensively.

Before we examine al-Biqā'ī's incorporation of Biblical passages into his Quran commentary and his defense, we must briefly look at how earlier Quran commentators dealt with Biblical narratives. Some major exegetes, such as al-Tha'labī, often consulted the *isrā'īliyyāt*, the Jewish legends, to gain a more detailed understanding of earlier nations. The sources of

these *isrā'īliyyāt* reports were Jewish and Christian converts, such as 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām (d. 663) and Ka'b al-Aḥbār (d. 655). In other words, they obtained these tales from oral transmissions. However, this does not negate the fact that some commentators consulted written Biblical texts as well, especially when Arabic translations of the Bible were more widely available. Casewit's study illustrates how the twelfth-century Andalusian exegete Ibn Barrajān (d. 1141) quoted the written Arabic Bible in his Quran commentary. Ibn Barrajān, Casewit holds, "seems to be the first Quranic exegete to seriously engage with the Bible non-polemically and through actual extended quotations" (Casewit, 2016, p. 2). As discussed by Casewit, Ibn Barrajān's purpose in quoting the Bible is to "fill gaps in his understanding of Biblical figures and narratives." One more critical point about Ibn Barrajān's engagement with the Bible is his approach to separating what he considers authentic Biblical verses from their allegedly corrupted passages by using the Quran as the standard for measurement. As the Quran claims to safeguard (*muhaymin*) earlier revelations, Biblical materials should be assessed solely based on their alignment with the Quran. Casewit calls this approach the 'Quranic hegemony' principle (Casewit, 2016, p. 3). As we will see later, al-Biqā'ī also grounds his Biblical engagement on this principle.

In modern scholarship on *tafsīr* studies, Walid Saleh analyzed al-Biqā'ī's uses of Biblical passages to interpret the Quran in his *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa al-suwar*. He found that al-Biqā'ī had quoted the Bible from the very beginning of his *tafsīr* work, as exemplified by his quotation of the first three chapters of Genesis when interpreting Q. 2: 32-34 about the creation of Adam. Having provided his readers with many earlier Muslim interpretations of these verses, al-Biqā'ī proceeded to retell the creation narrative from the Hebrew Bible by saying, "And I saw in a translation of the Torah, and this is taken from its very beginning: 'God created the heavens and the earth, and it was darkness....'." He finished his extended quotation by stating, "This is the text from the Torah," but he neither rejected nor justified the Biblical story; he only re-narrated it (al-Biqā'ī, 1984, pp. 263–271; Saleh, 2008a, p. 673). This example shows that, like Ibn Barrajān, al-Biqā'ī cited Biblical passages to collect more information about human history.

As noted by Saleh, one characteristic of al-Biqā'ī's approach to the Bible was his excessive quoting; he almost quoted more than was necessary. For instance, when interpreting the Quranic verse 21:105, "And We have already written in the Psalms after the [previous] mention that the earth is inherited by My righteous servants," al-Biqā'ī not only cited its parallel Psalms verse but also quoted other verses: Psalms 1, 2, 5, 6, 9 (verses 4-9 only), 13 (he cited the number as 12), 15 (-1), 17 (-1), 18 (-1), 22 (-1), 31 (-1), 34 (-1), 35 (-1), and 37 (-1). Saleh observes that al-Biqā'ī quoted Psalms even when there was no direct connection between the Quran and the psalm quoted (Saleh, 2007, p. 336). However, there were some occasions where the opposite took place. For instance, where the Quran provides a long, detailed narrative of the story of Joseph, al-Biqā'ī quoted only a few Biblical verses (Saleh, 2007, p. 338). Due to his extensive quotation of Biblical passages, al-Biqā'ī was criticized by many of the religious scholars of his time in Cairo, and his *tafsīr* work was blamed for no less than "glorifying the Torah and debasing the Quran" (*izhār al-tawrāt wa ikhfā' al-qur'ān*). It is in this milieu that al-Biqā'ī, to defend his hermeneutics, wrote his *Apologia* entitled *al-Aqwāl al-qawīmah fī ḥukm al-naql min al-kutub al-qadīmah*. The present article aims to closely examine al-Biqā'ī's *al-Aqwāl* and finds that his central argument focuses on his accommodative view of the usability of the Bible to provide more narrative details of past events as well as to promote certain universal virtues. However, when it comes to articles of faith and law, the Bible, al-Biqā'ī asserts, should not be consulted to interpret the Quran.

### **Defending the Use of the Bible: Al-Biqā'ī's *Apologia***

Al-Biqā'ī's *al-Aqwāl* has been preserved in several manuscripts. Al-Azhar University Professor Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyih (d. 2011) edited and published al-Biqā'ī's *al-Aqwāl* based on two manuscripts housed at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya and the Islamic University of Medina (al-Sāyih, 2010, p. 8). Two years prior, Walid Saleh, a professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto, edited al-Biqā'ī's *al-Aqwāl* based on four manuscripts, two copies in Cairo and two copies in North Africa, which are now housed in Escorial. Saleh also informs us that there is proof that an *al-Aqwāl* manuscript was available in Yemen (Saleh, 2008b, p. 3). While the *al-Aqwāl* edited by al-Sāyih was published in 2010 by Maktaba Jazīra

al-Ward in Cairo, the one edited by Saleh was published in 2008 by Brill in Leiden. This tells us that al-Biqā'ī's *al-Aqwāl* has been made available to religious scholars in the Arab-Muslim world as well as among researchers in Western academia.

Al-Biqā'ī's *al-Aqwāl* comprises of an introduction, eight chapters, and concluding remarks. Al-Biqā'ī devoted his introduction to claiming that his critics, all of whom were members of the Shāfi'ī legal school in Egypt, were motivated by jealousy (*ḥasad*). Al-Biqā'ī argued that if his *tafsīr* contained heretical views, as his critics argued, religious scholars of other legal schools would also criticize his work, which was not the case. He also asked why a prominent Shāfi'ī jurist at Mecca did not take issue with his work if his critics were right. The Meccan jurist praised al-Biqā'ī's Quranic commentary instead. Furthermore, al-Biqā'ī argued that his critics were not equal rivals for him because they were not well known for their "religiosity, commanding right and forbidding wrong, virtue, and devotion" (al-Biqā'ī, 2010, pp. 59–60). His claim, however, could be challenged since his critics belonged to equally prominent scholarly circles, as represented by al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497), a leading figure of the professorial religious establishment (Saleh, 2008a, p. 631; Petry, 1981, pp. 8–10).

In the first chapter of his treatise, "On the testimonies of contemporary leading religious scholars concerning (al-Biqā'ī's) Quran commentary in the form of praise and fatwa," al-Biqā'ī collected 13 positive testimonies by Muslim scholars from the four Sunni legal schools to defend his Quranic commentary. The Shāfi'ī jurists whose testimonies he compiled included chief jurist (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad al-Munāwī, Abū Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn Shādī al-Ḥiṣanī, Yūsuf ibn Aḥmad al-Bā'ūnī, the Shāfi'ī jurist of Mecca Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥāhira al-Makhzūmī, 'Uthmān ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusaynī, and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Jawjarī. From the Hanafi school were chief jurist Muḥammad ibn al-Shaḥna al-Ḥalabī, the prominent Ḥanafī scholar Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Kāfiyājī, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Shamanī, Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad al-Aqṣarā'ī, and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Shaykh Yaḥyā. Al-Biqā'ī also managed to obtain positive testimonies from both the Mālikī chief jurist Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn al-Shaykh al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and the Ḥanbalī chief



jurist Aḥmad ibn Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Kanānī (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, pp. 63–86). This list of scholars illustrated al-Biqāʿī's vast intellectual network across Islamic legal schools.

Among these leading jurists, Ḥanafī scholar al-Kāfiyājī offered a more extended justification for al-Biqāʿī's engagement with the Bible. He argued that quoting sayings and stories that contained lessons and examples (*al-ʿibrah wa al-ʿiẓah*) were permissible according to the Sharīʿa, although the authenticity of such reports cannot be confirmed. From this principle, he went further by allowing the quoting of specific Biblical passages to drive deep reflection and admonition (*al-iʿtibār wa al-ittiʿāz*) but not to establish sound belief and legal decisions (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 71). Al-Kāfiyājī then narrated a prophetic tradition in which the Prophet was reported to say, “convey (my teachings) to the people even if it is a single sentence, and tell others the stories of Bani Israel, for it is not sinful to do so.” The editor of al-Biqāʿī's epistle, al-Sāyih, provided a footnote that this prophetic tradition could be found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the most revered hadith collection in Sunni Islam. According to al-Kāfiyājī, hadith scholars understood that this tradition allowed [Muslims] to recount the stories of the Israelites, for the stories of earlier nations might contain lessons and admonition for the believers. The Quranic verse 12: 111, he continues, states, “there was certainly in their stories a lesson for those who understand.” According to al-Kāfiyājī, what is prohibited is quoting Biblical passages other than the stories of earlier nations (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 72).

Al-Biqāʿī's opponents, however, referred to another prophetic tradition, which described the Prophet's anger at ʿUmar when the latter held passages of the Torah in his hands. The Prophet is reported to have exclaimed that if Moses were still alive, he would follow Muḥammad's laws. A Shāfiʿī defender of al-Biqāʿī, al-Bāʿūnī considered that this hadith was weak, and even if it was authentic, the Prophet's disapproval was not intended as *tahṛīm* but only *tanzīh*; to prevent Islamic teachings from being contaminated by pre-Islamic laws. Like al-Kāfiyājī, he concluded that what was prohibited was quoting Biblical materials to formulate laws, while recounting their stories was permissible (al-Biqāʿī, 2010, p. 80).

In chapter two, entitled “The Ruling on quoting earlier scriptures to support Islam and to invalidate the doctrines of misguided people,” al-Biqā‘ī argued that making references to the Bible to support the truthfulness of Islam (*ṣiḥḥat dīn al-Islām*) and to refute Judaism and Christianity was an exalted tradition (*sunnah jalīlah*), which God commanded in Q. 3:93. It was also narrated that when a group of Jews came to the Prophet to report fornication committed by a Jewish couple, the Prophet asked them to consult the Torah, which showed that the punishment decreed by their scripture was stoning. This prophetic practice was, al-Biqā‘ī stated, followed by his Companions, Successors, and subsequent generations of religious scholars up to his day because they believed it was a Prophetic tradition (al-Biqā‘ī, 2010, p. 90).

While al-Biqā‘ī invoked the story of the Prophet and his Jewish questioners briefly in chapter two, he re-narrated the story in its more extended version in chapter three, “On the proofs that the quoting of the earlier scriptures for that purpose is an exalted tradition and correct approach.” He demonstrated that these reports were found in the Sunni Muslim community’s most revered hadith collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwud, al-Nasā’i, and Ibn Mājah. Al-Biqā‘ī also recounts that the Prophet said, “Tell others the stories of the Israelites, for it is not sinful to do so,” a tradition that al-Kāfiyājī previously invoked in his defense of the quoting of Biblical materials (al-Biqā‘ī, 2010, p. 97). He titled chapter four “On the evidence to support it [the quoting of the Bible] and the proofs that this practice pleased the Prophet.” This chapter consisted of several reports illustrating the Prophet’s happiness with the conformity between his revelation and earlier messages. For instance, in a report recorded in Muslim’s hadith collection, the Prophet sat on his pulpit, laughed, and then said to his companions, “Do you know why I brought you together?” The companions answered, “God and His Messenger know best.” The Prophet explained, “By God, I did not gather you out of desire or fear but brought you [to tell this]: Tamīm al-Dārī was a Christian, but he came [to me], pledged alliance, and converted to Islam. He told me a story about Jesus that agrees with what I told you about him” (al-Biqā‘ī, 2010, pp. 103-104).

In chapter five, “On the religious scholars’ statements concerning the pieces of evidence,” al-Biqā‘ī collected opinions of earlier scholars about transmitting Biblical materials. As al-Biqā‘ī noted, Shams al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, a commentator of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, explained that the basic principle a Muslim should uphold concerning Biblical materials was to postpone judgment (*tawāquf*); neither accepting nor rejecting them. This principle is grounded on the prophetic saying, “Do not believe the People of the Book, nor disbelieve them” (*lā tuṣaddiqū ahl al-kitāb wa lā tukadhdhibūhum*). Al-Kirmānī underscored the fact that Muslims were commanded to believe in pre-Quranic scriptures revealed to the earlier prophets, but at the same time, Muslims do not know which parts of these scriptures had been falsified, so the best solution was *tawāquf*. Al-Biqā‘ī accepted this explanation but noted that this principle applies only to those Biblical materials whose authenticity could not be determined. However, if the validity or the falsification of those Biblical materials could be measured by their conformity or non-conformity with the Quran, the *tawāquf* principle should not be applied (al-Biqā‘ī, 2010, p. 109). As we have seen before, Ibn Barraĵān preceded al-Biqā‘ī in elucidating this idea of, as Casewit puts it, “the Quranic hegemony” (Casewit, 2016, p. 3).

In chapter six, “About several religious scholars who cited the earlier scriptures,” al-Biqā‘ī mentioned several Muslim intellectuals who referenced Biblical information. One of them was the companion ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar. It was reported that Ibn ‘Umar was asked about the Prophet’s attributes and answered, “By God, the Prophet was characterized in the Torah by the same attributes found in the Quran” (al-Biqā‘ī, 2010, p. 125). He went on to mention other Muslim scholars who also cited Biblical materials, included Companions of the Prophet such as Salmān al-Fārisī and Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and later Muslim intellectuals, such as al-Zamakhsharī, al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, Nūr al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, al-Bayḥaqī, al-Dārimī, Ibn Ḥafar, Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, Ibn Ṣalāḥ, al-Baghawī, Maḥmūd al-Aṣbahānī, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī, and others (al-Biqā‘ī, 2010, pp. 123–162). As discussed above, Muslim scholars before al-Biqā‘ī did cite from the Bible, but primarily for polemical or apologetic purposes, such as al-Bayḥaqī and al-Qarāfī, as mentioned by al-Biqā‘ī above. However, it is worth remembering that some Muslim scholars quoted Biblical stories for admonition, such as Ibn Ṣalāḥ. In his collection of *fatāwā*, for instance, Ibn

Ṣalāḥ opted to cite a statement attributed to the Torah, saying, “It was reported that in the Torah: O son of Adam, whenever you sleep, you die. And whenever you wake up, you are resurrected” (Ibn Ṣalāḥ, 1987, p. 140). Nevertheless, unlike his predecessors, al-Biqā‘ī quoted Biblical passages more extensively.

Al-Biqā‘ī devoted chapter seven to addressing the core of the debate and controversy surrounding his quotation of the Bible, namely the issue of falsification (*taḥrīf*). Had the Bible been textually falsified, as Muslims believe, there would be no need to quote its passages because they were inauthentic. To engage with the issue, al-Biqā‘ī wrote that, based on Ibn al-Mulqan's survey, Muslim scholars disagreed on how much the Bible had been corrupted. The first group believed the Bible had been distorted completely. For al-Biqā‘ī, this was an extreme idea (*wa huwa ifrāṭ*). The second group argued that most Biblical passages were forged. The third group maintained that falsification only occurred in a small number of Biblical passages. A fourth group suggested the Bible had been distorted in its meaning (*taḥrīf al-ma‘nā*) but not its text (*dūna taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*). Some studies suggest that Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) supported the *taḥrīf al-ma‘nā* idea, based on his remark, “*The statement concerning the alteration of the Torah by the Jews is unacceptable to thorough scholars and cannot be understood in its plain meaning, since custom prevents people who have a revealed religion from dealing with their divine scriptures in such a manner*” (Ibn Khaldūn, 2015, p. 62). Al-Biqā‘ī highlighted that the group who supported the *taḥrīf al-ma‘nā* idea often referred to the Quran 6: 34, “And none can alter the words of Allah” (al-Biqā‘ī, 2010, p. 167).

Al-Biqā‘ī did not subscribe to the first and the fourth groups since he believed some parts of the Bible were authentic while others were inauthentic based on their compatibility and incompatibility with the Quran. Next, al-Biqā‘ī reproduced arguments made earlier by other scholars whose testimonies he collected in the first chapter of his *Apologia*, such as the idea that the Prophet's dislike toward ‘Umar's holding of pages of the Torah meant *tanzīh*, not *taḥrīm*. To this, he adds his argument that the prohibition on reading and citing the Bible applied only to lay Muslims but not to the scholarly class, especially when the

situation required them, such as during polemics, to argue in support of Islam and against other religions (al-Biqā'ī, 2010, p. 173). We see from this line of argument that al-Biqā'ī grounded his understanding of the issue in the medieval hierarchy of *'ām-khāṣṣ* (the lay people and the elites).

From these chapters, al-Biqā'ī's argument can be summarized as follows: the validity and invalidity of Biblical materials are to be assessed through their compatibility and incompatibility with Quranic verses. If they align with the Quran, they are authentic and thus can be accepted and be used to interpret the Quran. However, if they do not, they should be refuted. In the last chapter, al-Biqā'ī illustrated a situation when compatibility or incompatibility with the Quran could not be established. What should be done in such circumstances? Al-Biqā'ī employed an analogy that since Islamic scholarly tradition often used weak hadith for admonitory purposes, Biblical narratives could also be used in this manner. Since weak hadith cannot be used to formulate articles of faith (*'aqīdah*) and laws (*aḥkām*), Biblical materials also could not be consulted in such matters. Al-Biqā'ī equated Biblical materials whose authenticity could not be proved through the Quran with weak hadith; both are accepted for admonitory purposes only but not for producing legal decisions and establishing sound belief. Al-Biqā'ī maintained that the purpose of citing the Bible was not to rely on it but to gather more information only (*li-anna al-maqṣūd al-isti'nās lā al-i'timād*) (al-Biqā'ī, 2010, pp. 179-182).

Although al-Biqā'ī considered certain parts of the Bible authentic, he believed that the coming of the Quran as the final revelation superseded earlier divine scriptures. In his conclusion, al-Biqā'ī contended that the status of Biblical passages authenticated through their alignment with the Quran was equal to that of abrogated Quranic verses (*mansūkh*). They were divine and thus should be respected; e.g., somebody with no ritual purity was prohibited from holding them, but their laws were no longer applicable (al-Biqā'ī, 2010, p. 186). Like the abrogated parts of the Quran, the Bible could be quoted only to provide more information or for admonitory purposes, but not to deduce Islamic beliefs and laws.

## Conclusion

Al-Biqā'ī's case, as examined in this paper, illustrates that medieval Muslim interaction with the Bible was more complex than widely assumed. While we cannot deny that many premodern Muslim theologians engaged with Biblical materials for polemical and apologetic purposes, we equally cannot dismiss that some Muslim scholars used the Bible non-polemically. Several Muslim intellectuals cited certain Biblical narratives to fill the gaps in their knowledge of previous prophets and their peoples, which might contain valuable lessons and admonitions for Muslims, as Quran 12: 111 asserts. Although quoting Biblical passages for narrative purposes was permitted by al-Biqā'ī and several other Muslim scholars, the classical Muslim intelligentsia surveyed in this study agreed that referring to them to determine articles of faith and Islamic law (*ḥukm*) was not acceptable.

This paper also shows medieval Muslims' attempts to examine the authenticity and inauthenticity of Biblical passages through their alignment with data in the Quran. For al-Biqā'ī, the idea that the whole Bible had been falsified, which had been championed by some Muslims, was an extreme position. He maintained that certain parts of the Bible were still authentic based on their compatibility with Islamic scripture. Despite their authenticity, al-Biqā'ī believed the coming of the Quran superseded the Bible. This conviction that one's religion supersedes other religions was not unique to al-Biqā'ī or even Muslim theologians more broadly, for it was shared by other religious communities. It was part of what von Grunebaum referred to as "the mood of (medieval) times," when "each civilization was convinced of its spiritual superiority, of possessing the unadulterated truth...." (Friedmann, 2003, p. 34).

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