

The Charge of Corruption of the Scriptures¹

Introduction

“The Bible is a mix of truths and falsehoods composed over successive time periods.” Thus the author Bassam Daoud Ajak summarizes his position concerning the issue of the corruption of the Scriptures.² Unfortunately this view reflects the position of many Muslims today, both scholars and the general public. It is possible that this issue is connected, in essence, to the subject of divine inspiration and the difference between the Christian and Muslim understandings of this issue. We will not deal with the subject of inspiration and revelation in this article because that subject is dealt with in another article in this volume. Instead we will focus only on the issue of corruption of the Scriptures, starting with its mention in some of the verses of the Holy Quran. Next we will see how the first and then later Muslim commentators understood these verses. Finally we will examine the mention of corruption in polemical and dialogical Islamic writings up until the 14th century A.D. What we intend to show is that the Quranic phrase "corruption" was not understood most of the time to mean “textual corruption”, i.e. changing the words, before the 11th century A.D. Rather Muslims understood the phrase to indicate “corruption of the meaning”, i.e. corruption of the interpretation or explanation, or misunderstanding a specific literary text. A precise literary study of dialogical and polemic Islamic textual discussions with Christians and Jews reveals that the Islamic understanding of the phrase “corruption” to mean textual corruption entered into Islamic thought approximately from the 11th century A.D. onward through the writings of the Zahiri scholar Ibn Hazm al Andalusí. It is noteworthy that this period correlates with the beginning of the Crusades,

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² Ajak, Bassam Daoud, Muslim Christian Dialogue: Principles, History, Subjects, and Goals. Qutayba Publishing House (location unknown), 1998, p.338.

which so negatively impacted Muslim-Christian relations that to this day they have not been overcome. Hence this article invites the Muslim reader to reconsider the contemporary Islamic position, which only understands corruption to mean “textual corruption”. This article also seeks to encourage Christians and Muslims to dialogue about how to understand and interpret the Bible, in order to remove those obstacles and misunderstandings which lead to religious extremism. Religious dialogue is vital in bringing people closer together and in raising them to higher spiritual, intellectual and emotional levels through mutually beneficial interaction.

“Corruption” as understood by the commentators on the Holy Quran

The verb "corruption" or one of its derivatives is mentioned four times in three verses in the Quran. In addition to those unambiguous verses, we also find two additional verses. One of them accuses those "who write the Scripture with their own hands"; the other those "who distort the Scripture with their tongues." We will get to those verses, after we first look at the writings of the most important Muslim commentators on the Quran, both the classic commentaries of: al Tabari, Al Razi, Al Jalalain, Al Zamakhshari, Al Tubrusi, Al Tousi, and Al Fayd al Kashani; and the modern commentaries of Rashid Rida, Sayyid Qutb, *Al Tafseer Al Waseet* (published by some Al Azhar scholars), *Al Tafseer Al Kashif* (by Muhammad Jawad Mughnieh), and *Tafseer Rouh Al Bayan* (by Al Broussawi), in addition to various other commentaries.

The first verse: “So can you [believers] hope that such people will believe you, when some of them used to hear the words of God and then deliberately twist them, even when they understood them?”³

Muslim commentators understand the verb "to corrupt" in this verse to mean: changing the word from its meaning, or misinterpreting it intentionally after having correctly understood it.⁴ Most agree that verse

³ Surat al-Baqara, verse 75.

⁴ See: Al Tubrusi, Abu Ali al Fadl bin al-Hasan, *Majma' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Collection of Explanations in Interpreting the Qur'an), Maktabat al-Hayat Publishing House, New corrected edition, Beirut, Lebanon, First section, pages 316 and 318, see also Al Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an* (The Collector of Explanations in Interpreting the Qur'an), edited by Ahmad and Mahmoud Shakir, Al-Risaala Foundation, 1420 A.H. / 2000 A.D., part 2, pp. 245-256, accounts 1328-1332.

refers to the Jews who interpreted the word of God incorrectly after having understood it correctly.⁵ Commentators point to two historical events in which the Jews did this reprehensible act. The first was when the Jewish leaders received the word of God from Moses, and the second was when they heard the word of God from the Prophet of Islam in his time. In both cases it is mentioned that a group of Jews misused the word of God which they heard, when they wrongly interpreted it and changed its application. These verses show that the Jews of Medina in the time of the Prophet acted just like the Jews in Moses' time.⁶ The meaning of the phrase "after they understood it" is that the Jews mislead the people not by accident but rather "after they had understood it and comprehended it and had no doubt of its truth."⁷ The inspired revelation was clear; however it was then intentionally corrupted in its interpretation. The commentators point out that the corruption did not happen to the word of God itself, but rather through what some Jews later added to the word which they had heard about God.⁸ The

⁵ Al Tousi, Abu Jaafar Muhammad bin al Hasan, *Al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Exposition of the Interpretation of the Qur'an), edited and corrected by Ahmad Habeeb Qaseer al Amali, Ihya' Turath al Arabi Publishing House, first printing, Beirut, Lebanon, first volume, pp. 312 and 314. Ibn Katheer says about this verse: " 'some of them who used to hear the words of God and then deliberately twist them' which means: interpreting it incorrectly 'even when they understood it' which means: they understood it clearly and yet they violated it with full understanding. They are in error in what they say when they corrupt and interpret the text. This position is like God's saying: "But they broke their pledge, so We distanced them [from Us] and hardened their hearts. They distort the meaning of [revealed] words" [Al-Mai'da 13]. See Ibn Katheer, Abu Fida al Qarshi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim* (Interpretation of the Mighty Qur'an), revised by Sami bin Muhammad Salama, Tiba Publishing and Distribution, 1420 A.H. / 1999 A.D., part one, p. 307.

⁶ See Mughnieh, Muhammad Jawad, *Al-Tafsir al-Kashif* (The Revealing Commentary), Al-Jawad Publishing House, 3rd Printing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1981, Part 1, pp. 131-132.

⁷ See Al Brouswi, Ismail Haqqi, *Tafsir Rouh al-Bayan* (Spirit of Clarification Commentary), Ihya' Turath al Arabi Publishing House, 7th Printing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1985, Volume 1, pp. 166-167; among that which is traditional in books of commentary on this verse: "Saddi said: 'Even when they understood it', in other words they sinned. Ibn Wahb said: Ibn Zayd said in his words: 'some of them used to hear the words of God and then deliberately twist them' He said: The Torah which God sent down to them, they corrupt, making that which was permitted in it forbidden, and the forbidden permitted, and the truth in it falsehood, and the falsehood in it truth; If someone in the right brings a bribe, they take out the Book of God for him, and if some liar brings a bribe that also take out that book for him; for in it he is in the right, and if someone comes asking them something with no truth to it, or bribe, or anything, they will command him what is correct, for God said to them: "How can you tell people to do what is right and forget to do it yourselves, even though you recite the Scripture? Have you no sense?" (Al-Baqara 2:44). See Ibn Katheer, Volume 1, p.308. It is clear that which is ascribed to the Jews here is related to their understanding and interpretation of the Scripture and not related to the words of the Scripture, because the assertion of their being established is clear.

⁸ Refer to Al-Katkani, As-Sayyid Hashim bin As-Sayyid Sulaiman bin Sayyid Isma'il bin Sayyid 'Abd al-Jawwad Al-Husayni Al-Bahrani al-Tubali, *Al-Burhan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Proof in the Interpretation of the Qur'an), Tehran Dehr, Jabkhana Aftab, adjusted printing, Volume 1, p.115.

understanding of Muslim commentators of this verse can be summed up as follows: “A group of Israelites, having returned from Mt. Sinai, said ‘We heard that God said to Moses--Keep my commandants as much as you can, and refrain from keeping them if keeping them becomes too difficult.’”⁹ In all of the commentaries we examined none of the commentators ever understood the word "corruption" in this first verse to mean that the word was altered, but rather that those who heard it were misled due to it being used out of context and incorrectly interpreted.

The second verse: “But they broke their pledge, so We distanced them [from Us] and hardened their hearts. They distort the meaning of [revealed] words and have forgotten some of what they were told to remember: you [Prophet] will always find treachery in all but a few of them. Overlook this and pardon them: God loves those who do good.”¹⁰

Many Qur’anic commentators tie the issue of corruption in this verse to the Jews’ hardness of heart.¹¹ The Jews' hearts were hardened because God banished them from His mercy as a punishment for breaking their covenant with Him. According to the commentators, this separation explains the phrase "We cursed them."¹² Some commentators¹³ deduce the meaning of corruption in this verse from the phrase, "They forgot what they had been told to do." The commentators point out that their forgetfulness was a result of disobedience. Because of their disobedience the hearts of the Jews were hardened and they stopped observing many things in the Torah. So in this verse "corruption" is understood to mean the inability of the disobedient Jews to keep the Torah. They have forsaken it and hidden the descriptions of

⁹ See Shirazi, Nasir Makarim, *Al-Amthal fi Tafsir Kitab Allah al-Munzal* (The Model of Interpretation of God’s Revealed Book), Ba’atha Foundation for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 1st Printing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1992, Volume 1, pp. 238-240.

¹⁰ Surah al-Ma’ida 5:13

¹¹ Al-Alusi, Abu al-Fadl Shihab al-Din As-Sayyid Mahmoud, *Rouh al-Ma’ani fi Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Azim wa as-Saba’ al-Mathani* (The Spirit of Meanings in the Interpretation of the Mighty Qur’an and The Seven Oft-Recited Verses), Ihya’ Turath al Arabi Publishing House, 4th Printing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1985, Part 6, pp. 89-90.

¹² See Zamakhshari, Jad Allah Mahmoud bin ‘Umar, *Al-Kashshaf ‘an Haqa’iq Ghawamid al-Tanzil wa ‘Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Ta’wil* (The Revealer of Truths of Unclear Scripture Sent Down and Selected Sayings About the Senses of Interpretation), Part 1, pp. 614-616; Al-Shirazi, Nasir Makarim, *ibid*, Volume 3, pp. 569-572.

¹³ Al-Fayd Al-Kashani, Al-Mawla Muhsin, *Tafsir al-Safi*, Al-A’lami Foundation for Publications, 2nd Printing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1982, Part 2, p.21.

Muhammad within it. This does not mean the text was altered or changed. Other commentators interpret "corruption" here to mean that the Jews hid any mention of Muhammad in their Torah through alteration. This is closer to the textual corruption understanding.¹⁴

The third verse: “Messenger, do not be grieved by those who rush into disbelief—those who say with their mouths, ‘We believe,’ but have no faith in their hearts and the Jews who listen eagerly to lies and to those who have not even met you, who distort the meanings of [revealed] words and say [to each other], ‘If you are given this ruling, accept it, but if you are not, then beware!’ –if God intends some people to be so misguided, you will be powerless against God on their behalf. These are the ones whose hearts God does not intend to cleanse—a disgrace for them in this world, and then a heavy punishment in the Hereafter”¹⁵

Qur’anic commentators agree that this verse relates to a group of Jews who asked the Muslims to render judgments in some matters which took place among them. A group of Jews requested Muhammad to settle an issue concerning indemnity between two of their tribes.¹⁶ Some commentators mention another story in which the Prophet of Islam was asked about a case of adultery. He instructed the Jewish leaders to tell their followers to accept his word if it agreed with their legal traditions, which were far removed from the original text of the Torah. If his ruling contradicted the Torah they should refuse it. In this verse the Qur’anic accusation of the Jews' corruption seeks to show how they took latitude with the law of their Torah. The law of the Torah is plain as concerns adultery, and its punishment is stoning.¹⁷ In Muhammad's day the Jews had strayed from this teaching and followed their traditions instead, preferring whipping to stoning. When the Prophet of

¹⁴ *Al-Qur’an al-Karim with the Interpretation of Jalalayn in the Margin*, Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din Publishing House, Damascus, Syria, p.144.

¹⁵ Surah Al-Maida 5:41.

¹⁶ According to Alusi, Abu al-Fadl Shihab al-Din As-Sayyid Mahmoud, *Rouh al-Ma’ani fi Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Azim wa as-Saba’ al-Mathani* (The Spirit of Meanings in the Interpretation of the Mighty Qur’an and The Seven Oft-Recited Verses), Ihya’ Turath al Arabi Publishing House, 4th Printing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1985, Part 6, pp. 135, 140. See also Al-Fayd Al-Kashani, Al-Mawla Muhsin, *Tafsir al-Safi*, Al-A’lami Foundation for Publications, 2nd Printing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1982, Part 2, pp. 35, 37.

¹⁷ *Al-Qur’an al-Karim with the Interpretation of Jalalayn in the Margin*, Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din Publishing House, Damascus, Syria, pp. 149, 150.

Islam turned them back to their law, they refused his fatwa because of the hardness of their hearts, so contradicting their Book. Here also it is evident that corruption means corruption of the meaning of the Torah and not of its text.

The fourth verse: “Some Jews distort the meaning of [revealed] words: they say, ‘We hear and disobey,’ and ‘Listen,’ [adding the insult] ‘May you not hear,’ and ‘Ra’ina’ [Look at us],’ twisting it abusively with their tongues so as to disparage religion. If they had said, ‘We hear and obey,’ ‘Listen,’ and ‘Unzurna [Look at us],’ that would have been better and more proper for them. But God has spurned them for their defiance; they believe very little.”¹⁸

Commentators on this verse say that it also refers to the Jews. Daring to oppose the Prophet of Islam, they wronged and challenged him, as the verse clearly states. Concerning the issue of corruption, the commentators indicate that the Jews "changed the word from its intended meaning."¹⁹ In other words, they did not explain the phrases of the Torah as they were supposed to be explained. Some 20th century commentators add that this was not only a Jewish phenomenon, but that "In our time there are those Muslims who -as far as this trait is concerned- compete with the Jews."²⁰ It is clear here that what is meant is corruption of the meaning and not a textual change.

The fifth verse: “So woe to those who write something down with their own hands and then claim, ‘This is from God,’ in order to make some

¹⁸ Surah An-Nisa 4:46.

¹⁹ Qutb, Sayyid, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, Dar al-Shuruq, 7th Legal Printing, Cairo, Egypt, 1978 AD, 5th Volume, pp. 675, 676; and it seems that what is found in *Al-Jami'* of Al-Tabari strongly indicates that the matter of corruption is connected with meanings and not words, as Al-Tabari says: "But as for the interpretation of his words: "they distort the meaning of words" he says: They change its meaning and change it from its correct interpretation." See Al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan*, part 4, p.436. Also refer to Al-Qurtubi, Abi Abdallah Mahmoud bin Ahmad al-Ansari, *Al-Jami' Li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi Publishing House, Beirut, Lebanon, 1965 AD, part 5, pp. 242, 244, and also Committee of Scholars overseen by the Al-Azhar Commission for Islamic Research, *Al-Tafsir al-Waseet lil-Qur'an al-Karim*, The General Organization for Fiscal Presses, First Printing, Cairo, Egypt, 1973 AD, Printing of 1994, Part 5, pp. 822, 823.

²⁰ Qutb, Sayyid, *idem*.

small gain. Woe to them for what their hands have written! Woe to them for all that they have earned!”²¹

This fifth verse is the verse from which commentators extract the meaning of textual corruption more than any other verse. Most of them connect the process of the Jews writing the Torah and ascribing it to God to how the Jews exchanged the true descriptions of the Prophet of Islam for false ones which they added to their Torah. Al Tousi says, "The Jewish rabbis changed the description of the Prophet (PBUH) to create doubt among the more weak-minded of the Jews."²² Al Tabrasi states that, "They wrote with their own hands how they purposefully changed the description of the Prophet in the Torah."²³ Mughnieh points out that, "The slander against Him [that is, God], and His Prophet Is one of the greatest sins most deserving of punishment and torment."²⁴ Al Brousawi tells how when the Jews asked their rabbis about Muhammad's distinguishing characteristics, "They read to them what they had written and found it contradictory to who he (peace be upon him) was, and so did not believe him."²⁵ On this point, Al Katkani writes that God said, "Woe to them, because of what they have written by their own hands,' regarding these corrupted descriptions which contradict who Muhammad really is."²⁶ In spite of the commentators charging the Jews with this accusation, they do not apply it to the whole text of the Torah nor to all of its copies. Instead they accuse the Jews of slandering the Prophet of Islam every time the Muslims ask them about the descriptions of the Prophet

²¹ Surah al-Baqara 2:79

²² Al-Tousi, Abu Jaafar Muhammad bin al Hasan, *Al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Exposition of the Interpretation of the Qur'an), idem.

²³ Al-Tabrasi, Abu Ali al Fadl bin al-Hasan, *Majma' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Collection of Explanations in Interpreting the Qur'an), idem, part 1, pp. 325, 328. Ibn Katheer speaks about this, showing the difference between what the Jews says and what is found with them: "The Almighty says about the Jews...that they buy going astray with guidance, and reject that which God has revealed to his Prophet (SAW), leaving the knowledge they have from the ancient prophets describing Muhammad (SAW) to buy with a small price the wreckage of this world "And they want to go astray" (that is, they want to disbelieve in what was sent to them, believers, and you leave the guidance and useful knowledge you have)." Ibn Katheer, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Adheem*, Part 2, p.323.

²⁴ Mughnieh, Muhammad Jawad, *Al-Tafsir al-Kashif* (The Revealing Commentary), Al-Jawad Publishing House, 3rd Printing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1981 AD, Part 1, pp. 133, 135.

²⁵ Al Brousawi, Ismail Haqqi, *Tafsir Rouh al-Bayan* (Spirit of Clarification Commentary), idem, Part 1, pp. 167, 169.

²⁶ Al-Katkani, *Al-Burhan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, idem, Part 1, pp. 118, 119.

in the Jews' book. Here the meaning of textual corruption is that of orally corrupting the text more than written corruption as it is literally understood.

The sixth verse: “There are some of them who twist the Scripture with their tongues to make you [people] think that what they say is part of the Scripture when it is not; they say it is from God when it is not; they attribute lies to God and they know it.”²⁷

In their commentaries on this verse the commentators speak at length about the meaning of the phrase "Twisting the tongue." Some interpret it to mean, "They corrupt and change the words from what is meant," i.e. they corrupt the meaning "stubbornly opposing the truth and turning away from it to something else."²⁸ Others add that this Quranic verse, "was revealed concerning both the Jews and Christians", who derive from the interpretation of their books false religious doctrines.²⁹ Still others point out that this phenomenon is not only present among the Jews, but also among other religious men "when they become wicked", and "twist the interpretations of passages from their books in order to arrive at certain decisions which they claim are proven from these passages... In fact these decisions oppose the foundational truth of God's religion."³⁰ Some contemporary commentators continue this line of thought, indicating that the Jews wrote another book "and twisted their tongues in their reading of it to make people believe that it was from the Torah." This was after they made their religion only for their nation and opposed every outsider who tried to approach their religion.

²⁷ Surah Al Imran 3:78.

²⁸ Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' Li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, idem, Volume 4, p.121; Al-Tabari says: "Abu Ja'afar says: The Greatly Praised One means by this: The People of the Book, who are the Jews who were around the city of the Prophet of God (SAW) at his time, from the Sons of Israel..." "twist" means corrupting "their tongues with the Scripture so you will consider it to be Scripture" which means: So you will think that those who corrupt it with their words from the Book of God and what he has sent down. God, Great and Glorious, says: "What is this that they twist with their tongues and so corrupt it and insert it into the book of God. They claim that the corruption and lies and falsehood that they twist with their tongues and join to the Book of God is "from God." He says: That which God sent down to his prophets "but it is not from God". He says: That which they twist with their tongues and originate, that which God sent down to one of his prophets, but it is something they originated from themselves, slandering God. God, Great and Glorious, says: "They speak lies about God and they know it" by which he means they intentionally speak lies about God, testifying falsely about him, joining to the Book of God that which is not in it, seeking domination and that which is base of the wreckage of this world." Al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan*, Part 6, pp. 535-536.

²⁹ Committee of Scholars overseen by the Al-Azhar Commission for Islamic Research, *Al-Tafsir al-Waseet lil-Qur'an al-Karim*, idem, Part 3, pp. 603, 604.

³⁰ Qutb, Sayyid, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, idem, Volume 1, pp. 418, 419.

Others note that even "today there are Muslims who do like them." This shows that what is meant by twisting the tongue here is not textual corruption but that the text has been wrongly interpreted and incorrect doctrines have been subsequently formulated. Some even "may corrupt the Quran by interpreting it to support their traditions and heresies, or by avoiding mention of it, saying that they are not required to get their religion from it but rather from their scholars."³¹

Corruption as understood by Muslim writers before the 11th century A.D.

When we look at Islamic and other scientific texts which are not expository, some of them being dialogical, we notice that in addressing the Bible Muslim scholars are not solely concerned with the issue of corruption, but also some of them display a remarkable openness concerning the trustworthiness of the Bible texts. What follows are three examples from the 9th century A.D. The historian Al Yacoubi often cites the Bible and uses texts from the Injil as reliable historical sources. The jurist Ibn Qutaybah uses the texts of the Bible to determine which of the hadiths are authentic and which are not in his famous book *The Interpretation of Conflicting Narrations*. He considers those texts of great authority in the study of hadith. Imam Al Qasim bin Ibrahim al Rassi (the founder of Al Zaidiyah in Yemen) extensively cites the first seven chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, using a Quranic style. While we cannot present here the numerous examples of those beneficial meaning-based translations, one example from Al Qasim al Rassi's book *Answering the Christians* is his mention of the Lord's prayer which Christ taught to his followers (from Matthew 6:9-13):

But if you pray, only pray to God praying

And if you judge anything on earth, do so justly and say:

Our Sustainer is heaven, may your name and wisdom be sanctified

³¹ Rida, Muhammad Rashid, *Tafsir al-Manar*, Volume 3, pp. 344, 345.

May your sovereignty and power be exalted
Show your rule on your earth,
AS you have shown it in your heaven
And provide for us the food we are lacking in our day,
And forgive us our previous wrongdoing,
Just as we forgive whoever wrongs us.
And forgive us in your mercy if we sin.
And do not afflict us, our Cherisher and Sustainer, with trials,
And rid us of abhorrent sins
For to you is the sovereignty and power
And from you is rule and forgiveness,
Forever and ever,
Age to age.³²

Concerning the issue of corruption, if we compare the period before the 11th century and after we discover a clear evolution among Muslim scholars. The 9th century was distinguished, as we have shown, by open-minded attitudes such as those of Al Yacoubi, Ibn Qutaybah and Al Qasim al Rassi. Even in a polemical text such as *Answering the Christians* by Ibn Rabban Al Tabari (a Christian convert to Islam – not the same person as Muhammad ibn Jazir al Tabari), we do not find that Christianity is accused of textual corruption. Instead what we find are references to "the contradictions and the grave offenses...in the laws of their faith", i.e. the creed of the Christian faith which Al Tabari fully mentions. He goes on to explain "the words which they interpret opposite of their meanings," and mentions "the corruption and wickedness found" in the Christians' interpretation of their book. In another book entitled *Religion and State*, Al Tabari argues with those who say that

³² This text was edited and introduced by: Ignazio di Matteo, Ignazio, in "Confutazione contro I cristiani dello zaydita Al-Qasim b. Ibrahim". *Revista degli Studi Orientali* (Rome) 9 (1922): 301-364.

the Quran contains falsehoods. He says, "If that was not possible in the Torah and the Injil, and among those who recalled them, it is also not possible in the Quran or among those who know it by heart."³³

In the 10th century two important books appear, *The Virtues of Islam* by Abu al Hasan al Ameri and *Introduction to the Forefathers And A Summary of Proofs* by Abu Bakr bin al Tayyib al Baqillani. In neither of these books is there any mention of textual corruption. Instead Al Ameri accuses the Jewish and Christian religious leaders of changing the meanings of the symbols in their books because of fear of losing their positions if they recognize the prophethood of Muhammad.³⁴ Furthermore, Al Baqillani only mentions corruption as it concerns the inaccurate translation by the Jews of their Torah from Hebrew to Arabic.³⁵

Corruption as understood by Muslim writers after the 14th century

The great change in the Muslim attitude towards the issue of corruption occurs in the 11th century, specifically beginning with the writings of Ibn Hazm al Andalusi and especially his book *The Separator Concerning Religions, Heresies, and Sects*. In this comprehensive book Ibn Hazm deals with in detail all parts of the Bible, and highlights "the contradictions", "disparities", and matters which, as he understands it, "are incompatible with the logic of reason." It is noteworthy that this book not only criticizes the Bible, Judaism and Christianity, but actually seeks to tear down all religious opinions, as well as Islamic and other sects, that do not adhere to the positions of his sect, "Al Zahiriyah," which rejected all Islamic jurisprudence, only accepting the interpretation of the Qur'an on its surface meaning. We find in Ibn Hazm al Andalusi's attitude a fundamental change from accusing the Jews and Christians of "corrupting the meaning", to actually claiming that they have textually corrupted their books.

³³ Al-Tabari, 'Ali, *Kitab Ad-Din wa Ad-Dawla* (The Book of Religion and State), (Edited and translated by Alphonse Mingana), Manchester, 1923, p.35.

³⁴ Al Ameri, Abu Al-Hasan Muhammad, *Kitab al-'Ilam bi-Manaqib al-Islam* (edited by Abd al-Hameed Ghurab), Cairo, 1967, p. 202.

³⁵ Al Baqillani, Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn At-Tayyib, *Kitab Tamheed al-Awa'il wa Takhlees ad-Dala'il* (Edited by Fr. Richard MacCarthy), Beirut, 1957, p. 181.

Most of the Muslim writers after Ibn Hazm adopted the same attitude towards the Bible, taking Islamic-Christian interaction from the realm of discussing interpretation to that of arguing about the trustworthiness of the written texts. We find this for example in *Gratifying Ill Will through Alteration* by Abu al Ma'ali al Juwayni at the end of the 11th century, and *Superior Answers to Godless Questions* by Shihab ad-Din al Qarafi in the 13th century, and *Guidance to the Confused of the Christians and the Jews* by Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyah in the 14th century.

What do Muslims and Christians today think about this subject?

What is the Muslim position today vis-à-vis the accusation of corruption against the Jews and Christians?

Most Muslims today have adopted the idea of "textual corruption." It is an accusation which Muslims have passed on from generation to generation since the time of Ibn Hazm. It is obvious that this position does not leave an opportunity for constructive dialogue, because it eliminates the written basis for theological and doctrinal Islamic – Christian interchange. The purpose of this article is to highlight alternate, constructive positions which the most important Muslim scholars adopted previous to the 11th century. In so doing we desire to present to the Muslim reader examples of dialogue about this topic other than the extreme model so prevalent today.

In conclusion, we refer to the opinion of him who is known as "The Sheik of Islam, that great man and master, the pious, the worshipper, the ascetic" Taqieddine Ahmad bin Taymiyyah. He was able to transcend the extremist "textual corruption" position, in spite of the fact that he lived in the 14th century. In his book *The True Answer to Those who Changed the Religion of Christ*, he (as he states in the title) accuses the Christians of changing the religion of Christ by wrongly interpreting its words. Undoubtedly he knew the writings of Ibn Hazm, Al Juwayni and Al Qarafi, and he was the sheik of Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyah in Damascus. However, in spite of his being aware of the two possible Islamic positions--that of textual corruption or that of corruption of the meaning--he clearly refused to adhere to the textual

corruption position. Ibn Taymiyyah was a man of dialogue and knew that the extremist position kills dialogue. He demonstrated his position when he said: "It was known that the Torah, which was available after the destruction of Jerusalem, after Nebuchadnezzar, after Christ was sent, and after Muhammad was sent, contains the wisdom of God. During the era of the Prophet of God, the Jews of Medina had the Torah. It was said that after it was sent some of its words had been changed. We can't confirm that this happened to every copy in the world, as we don't know and anyway this is not feasible. However, it is possible that many copies were changed and circulated by [the Torah's] followers to the extent that many people only have what was later changed. Even so many of the copies of the Torah and the Injil are primarily in agreement, with only insignificant differences."³⁶

He however concentrated his criticism on the accusation of corrupting the meaning, and here his position was definitive: "If it was known that all of the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian sects had confirmed that these books had had their meanings, interpretations and laws corrupted and changed, then that would be sufficient."³⁷

We conclude by noting that there is a basic fundamental difference between the Christian and Muslim understanding of their respective books. Christians focus on how the Bible points to Christ, and on how he himself is the eternal Word of God. Most of them do not hold to the understanding of written revelation being "sent down", as do Muslims believe regarding their book. Rather the Bible is a trustworthy testimony, which God revealed to his messengers in order to lead people to a knowledge of Him. People of faith should always strive to dialogue and have beneficial interaction as they seek to discover the deep and rich meanings in this written word.

³⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al Jawab as-Sahih li-man Baddal Din al-Masih* (The True Answer to Those who Changed the Religion of Christ), edited by Dr. 'Ali Hasan Nasir and Dr. Abd al-'Aziz Ibrahim al-'Askar and Dr. Hamdan Muhammad, Al-'Asimah Publishing House, 1st Printing, Riyadh, 1414 AH, Volume 2, p.419.

³⁷ Idem, Volume 2, p. 413.

Note to researchers, historians, and religious scholars: If you have any manuscripts of the Torah, the Zabur, or the Injil which contradict what now exists, please make them known publicly.