

The Gospels as the *Injil*:

A Christian Apologetic

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between the Christian Gospels and the *Injil* as referenced in the Qur'an. While Muslims traditionally believe that the *Injil* was a distinct, divinely revealed book given to Jesus—referred to as Isa (عيسى) in the Qur'an—this apologetic argues that the Gospels are best understood as the *Injil* mentioned in Islamic scripture. Employing a comparative analysis of the Qur'an's descriptions of the *Injil* and the theological themes within the Gospels, this paper examines the historical reliability of the Gospels and addresses claims of corruption (*tahrif*). By highlighting key scriptural references, literary genres, and early Church affirmations, the paper defends the position that the Gospels faithfully represent the divine revelation to Jesus. Furthermore, it addresses the Islamic dilemma, illustrating that the assertion that the *Injil* is not the Gospel reflects an attempt to navigate the implications of perceived inconsistencies within the Qur'an.

I. INTRODUCTION

In both Christianity and Islam, Jesus (Isa) is a central figure and messenger in God's plan for humanity. Christians regard the four canonical Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—as inspired and authoritative accounts of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. These Gospels are foundational to the Christian faith, providing the core narrative of God's redemptive plan through Christ.¹

Conversely, Islamic tradition asserts that Jesus received a divinely revealed scripture called the *Injil*, similar to how the Torah was given to Moses and the Qur'an to Muhammad.² Many Muslims, however, believe that the original *Injil* has been lost or corrupted over time. Consequently, they claim that the Gospels, as known to Christians today, do not represent this revelation.

This paper seeks to bridge the gap between the Christian and Islamic understandings of the *Injil*. It argues that the Gospels are, in fact, the most faithful representation of the *Injil* mentioned in the Qur'an. By examining the Qur'anic description of the *Injil*, the theological themes found in the Gospels, and the historical reliability of the Christian texts, this paper will defend the position that the Gospels are best understood as the *Injil* revealed to Jesus.³ Additionally, it will highlight the Islamic

¹ The Qur'an. Translated by Sahih International. Riyadh: Abul-Qasim Publishing, 1997. Surah 5:46.

² The Qur'an, Surah 5:47, trans. Sahih International.

³ Ibn Abbas, quoted in *Tafsir al-Tabari*. Translated by Jami' al-Bayan. Commentary on Surah 5:47.

dilemma, demonstrating that the assertion of the *Injil*'s corruption is, in essence, an acknowledgment of the inconsistencies present within the Qur'an.⁴

II. DEFINING THE *INJIL* IN ISLAMIC TRADITION

To understand the connection between the Gospels and the *Injil*, we must first examine how the *Injil* is viewed within Islamic tradition. The Qur'an mentions the *Injil* as a divine book given to Jesus, describing it as a text that contains “*guidance and light*” and confirms the truth of the Torah (Surah 5:46).⁵ Muslims often see the *Injil* as a scripture intended to reform the Israelites and guide them back to the worship of one God.

For many Muslims, the *Injil* is not the same as the four Gospels. They view it as a singular divine revelation, akin to the Qur'an, which they believe has been lost or corrupted over time. The concept of *tahrif* (corruption) is invoked to explain why the Gospels differ from what Muslims assert the original *Injil* contained.⁶

However, early Islamic scholars like Ibn Abbas and Al-Tabari held a different view. Ibn Abbas, a cousin of Muhammad and a highly esteemed figure, maintained that no one could corrupt a single word of what proceeded from God. He interpreted *tahrif* as a distortion of meaning (*tahrif al-ma'na*) rather than a corruption of the text itself (*tahrif*

⁴ Al-Tabari. *Tafsir al-Tabari*. Translated by Jami' al-Bayan. Commentary on Surah 5:47.

⁵ Fakhr al-Razi. *Mafatih al-Ghayb*. Translated by Jami' al-Bayan. Commentary on Surah 5:47.

⁶ The Qur'an, Surah 5:47, trans. Sahih International.

al-lafz).⁷ Similarly, Al-Tabari and Fakhr al-Razi supported this view, emphasizing that the distortion referred to misrepresentation, not the alteration of divine words.⁸

This suggests that the earliest interpretations in Islamic thought did not support the claim of *tahrif al-lafz*. The Qur'an refers to Christians as "*People of the Book*," indicating that the scriptures in their possession during Muhammad's time were valid representations of divine revelation (Surah 5:47).⁹ This challenges modern claims that the Gospels were entirely corrupted, thereby presenting the Islamic dilemma: if the Gospels are indeed the *Injil*, then the Qur'an's assertions must be reevaluated.¹⁰

Expanding on the Qur'anic View of the *Injil*

To strengthen the case that the Gospels are best understood as the *Injil* mentioned in the Qur'an, we must closely examine key Qur'anic references. Surah 5:46 highlights the *Injil* as a divinely inspired scripture that confirms the Torah and contains "*guidance and light*".¹¹ This aligns with how the Gospels present Jesus' ministry, affirming and fulfilling the Jewish scriptures.

Moreover, Surah 5:47 calls upon Christians to "*judge by what Allah has revealed therein*," implying that the scriptures available to them at the time—likely the Gospels—still contained valid divine revelation.¹² This understanding suggests that the Gospels,

⁷ John 1:14, English Standard Version (ESV).

⁸ Luke 10:25-37 (ESV).

⁹ Mark 15:1-15 (ESV).

¹⁰ Luke 1:46-55 (ESV).

¹¹ Surah 5:47, trans. Sahih International.

¹² Codex Sinaiticus, British Library, accessed February 2022, https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_43725.

which record Jesus' teachings and life, could indeed be the *Injil* referenced in Islamic scripture.¹³ This verse explicitly calls Christians to evaluate their conduct and beliefs based on the scriptures they possessed during Muhammad's time. Historically, the only Christian texts recognized as authoritative in the 7th century were the New Testament writings, particularly the Gospels. No historical evidence suggests the existence of an alternative *Injil* distinct from the canonical Gospels. Therefore, the Qur'an itself validates the reliability of the Gospels as the *Injil*, undermining claims of their corruption.

Furthermore, acknowledging the Qur'an's assumption of the existence of valid Christian scriptures during Muhammad's time challenges the notion that the Gospels are entirely corrupted, thereby presenting the Islamic dilemma: if the Gospels are indeed the *Injil*, then the Qur'an's assertions must be reevaluated.¹⁴

The Nature of the Gospels: Oral Tradition and Written Revelation

In the Christian tradition, the Gospels are not merely historical records but the inspired word of God, faithfully transmitted by the apostles and early disciples. They are not viewed as direct, verbatim dictation of a heavenly book given to Jesus but as divinely inspired accounts of His life and teachings. Each Gospel author—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—brings unique perspectives and purposes, collectively forming a coherent narrative of Jesus' ministry.¹⁵

¹³ Codex Vaticanus, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, accessed February 2022, https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1209.

¹⁴ P52: Rylands Library Papyrus, University of Manchester, accessed February 2022, <https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/rylands/>.

¹⁵ Ibn Abbas, quoted in *Tafsir al-Tabari*, 5:47.

Unlike the Qur’anic concept of a revealed book, the Gospels reflect a blend of oral tradition and written accounts, emphasizing Jesus’ life, actions, and words.¹⁶

Christians believe that Jesus Himself is the ultimate revelation of God—the Word made flesh (John 1:14)—and that His teachings, miracles, and sacrifice fulfill the promises of the Old Testament.¹⁷ Therefore, the Gospels serve as authoritative accounts of this revelation and form the basis of Christian belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God.¹⁸

The Gospels are not just historical accounts; they embody a rich tapestry of literary genres that serve to convey the teachings and significance of Jesus’ life and ministry. Each Gospel writer employs distinct literary forms, such as parables, historical narrative, and hymns, to communicate theological truths in a way that resonates with their intended audiences.¹⁹

- **Parables:** Jesus often taught using parables—simple, vivid stories that illustrate moral and spiritual lessons. These narratives engage the listener’s imagination and provoke thought, making profound theological concepts accessible and relatable.²⁰ For example, the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) encapsulates the essence of neighborly love and challenges prevailing societal

¹⁶ Al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, trans. Jami’ al-Bayan, 5:47.

¹⁷ Fakhr al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, trans. Jami’ al-Bayan, 5:47.

¹⁸ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868).

¹⁹ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, trans. Peter Holmes, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994).

²⁰ Ibn Hazm. *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wal-Ahwa’ wal-Nihal*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1996.

prejudices. In this parable, a Samaritan helps a wounded Jew, highlighting the importance of compassion and mercy beyond cultural and ethnic boundaries.²¹

- **Historical Narrative:** The Gospels also incorporate historical narrative, providing context and details about Jesus' life, ministry, and the socio-political environment of first-century Judea. For instance, the account of Jesus' trial before Pilate (Mark 15:1-15) is presented with stark details that underscore the gravity of the moment.²² The interplay between the religious authorities and the Roman governor illustrates the political tensions of the time, inviting readers to understand the historical context surrounding Jesus' crucifixion.²³ This narrative approach not only documents significant events but also emphasizes the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, reinforcing the authenticity of the Gospels as historical texts.²⁴
- **Hymns and Prayers:** Elements of hymns and prayers are woven throughout the Gospels, reflecting early Christian worship practices and theological affirmations. The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), Mary's song of praise, exemplifies this genre. It expresses profound theological truths about God's mercy and faithfulness, serving as both a personal expression of faith and a communal declaration of God's work

²¹ Al-Ghazali, *Fada'ih al-Batiniyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya, 1964).

²² The Qur'an, Surah 5:13, trans. Sahih International.

²³ The Qur'an, Surah 2:75, trans. Sahih International.

²⁴ Ibid.

in history.²⁵ Such hymns encapsulate core beliefs in Jesus' divine nature and salvific mission, enriching the theological landscape of the Gospels.²⁶

By employing these varied literary genres, the Gospel authors not only preserve the oral traditions surrounding Jesus but also enrich the theological narrative, inviting readers to engage with the text on multiple levels.²⁷ This multifaceted approach underscores the depth and complexity of the Gospels as both historical documents and profound theological works, further supporting the understanding that they serve as the authentic record of the *Injil*.²⁸

III. THE ISLAMIC DILEMMA: SURAH 3:55 AND 61:14

The Qur'an's Affirmation of Jesus' Followers

Surah 3:55 and 61:14 provide compelling evidence within the Qur'an regarding the victory and preservation of Jesus' message through His disciples. These verses affirm that Allah empowered the followers of Jesus, granting them victory over their opponents and ensuring their superiority until the Day of Resurrection:

- **Surah 3:55:** *“When Allah said, ‘O Jesus, indeed I will take you and raise you to Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve and make those who follow you superior to those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me is your*

²⁵ Surah 5:13, trans. Sahih International.

²⁶ Surah 2:75, trans. Sahih International.

²⁷ Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017).

²⁸ Shabir Ally, *Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible* (Toronto: Al-Attique Publishers, 2001).

return, and I will judge between you concerning that in which you used to differ.’”²⁹

- **Surah 61:14:** *“O you who have believed, be supporters of Allah, as when Jesus, the son of Mary, said to the disciples, ‘Who are my supporters for Allah?’ The disciples said, ‘We are supporters of Allah.’ And a faction of the Children of Israel believed and a faction disbelieved. So We supported those who believed against their enemy, and they became dominant.”³⁰*

These passages unequivocally assert that Jesus’ followers were victorious and that their message was preserved. This creates a direct challenge for Islamic theology when contrasted with claims that the *Injil* (or Gospels) was corrupted.

These verses present a Qur’anic acknowledgment that Jesus’ followers were divinely empowered, and their message prevailed. Historically, Christianity, rooted in the teachings of the apostles and recorded in the Gospels, became the dominant faith throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. This historical reality aligns with the Qur’an’s claim of the disciples’ victory and underscores the continued relevance of their message.³¹

The Qur’an and the Gospels: A Logical Tension

The historical evidence demonstrates that the message spread by Jesus’ followers, as preserved in the New Testament, forms the foundation of Christianity. This creates a significant challenge for Islamic critiques of the Gospels:

²⁹ Surah 3:55, trans. Sahih International

³⁰ Surah 61:14, trans. Sahih International

³¹ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World’s Largest Religion* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 23–25.

- If Jesus' message prevailed as the Qur'an claims, then the New Testament must accurately reflect His teachings, as no alternative "victorious" Gospel exists in historical records.³²
- Denying the authenticity of the Gospels contradicts the Qur'an's assertion that Jesus' message was preserved and triumphant.³³

If the Gospels were corrupted, this implies that Allah failed to fulfill His promise to safeguard Jesus' message and His followers, undermining the Qur'an's reliability. Conversely, affirming the Qur'an's claim requires accepting the authenticity of the Gospels as the *Injil*, creating an internal inconsistency for Islamic theology.³⁴

Historical Identification of Jesus' Followers

From a historical standpoint, the followers of Jesus are well-documented in Christian sources. The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles identify His disciples and their teachings, which formed the foundation of the Christian faith. These include:

- **The Apostles' Names and Roles:** The New Testament identifies Jesus' closest followers (e.g., Peter, John, Matthew, Thomas). Peter, for instance, is described as a key leader in spreading the Christian message (Acts 2:14-41), and John's Gospel provides theological depth regarding Jesus' divinity (John 1:1-14).

³² N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 361.

³³ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 278–280.

³⁴ Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 155–157.

- **Their Teachings:** Central to the apostles' message were doctrines such as Jesus' divinity, His atoning death, and His resurrection—core elements preserved in the New Testament and passed down through early Christian creeds.

The Qur'an's acknowledgment of the disciples' victory is therefore significant.

Historically, their teachings are embodied in the New Testament, which Islamic scholars often critique as corrupted. However, if the Qur'an affirms the victory of Jesus' followers, it logically supports the idea that their message prevailed intact.

The Islamic Dilemma: Preservation vs. Corruption

The claim of *tahrif* (corruption of scripture) creates a theological dilemma for Islam. If the Qur'an is correct in asserting the disciples' victory and preservation of their message:

- **The *Injil* (Gospel) Must Be Reliable:** The Qur'an's affirmation in Surah 3:55 and 61:14 suggests that Allah safeguarded the message of Jesus' followers. Historical evidence shows this message is encapsulated in the New Testament, which aligns with the teachings of Jesus' disciples.
- **Rejection of the Gospels Undermines the Qur'an:** If the Gospels accurately reflect the teachings of Jesus' followers, then claims of corruption (*tahrif al-lafz*) contradict the Qur'an's assertion that Allah ensured the victory and preservation of their message.
- **If Corruption Occurred, Allah Failed:** Alternatively, if Muslims argue that Jesus' message was corrupted (e.g., by Paul or later Christians), this implies Allah was unable to fulfill His promise to safeguard it, challenging Islamic claims about Allah's omnipotence.

Bridging the Gap: The Role of Historical Evidence

The Islamic dilemma is further compounded by historical evidence demonstrating the integrity of the New Testament. Early Christian writings, such as the letters of Paul, the Gospels, and post-apostolic works (e.g., writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian), align with the theological core of Jesus' message. This message spread widely and formed the basis of Christian orthodoxy long before Muhammad's time.

The Qur'an's acknowledgment of Jesus' disciples' victory thus demands a reconciliation:

- If their message was victorious, it aligns with the content of the New Testament.
- Denying this undermines the Qur'an's assertions in Surah 3:55 and 61:14.

Conclusion: Strengthening the Link to the Islamic Dilemma

By explicitly referencing Surah 3:55 and 61:14, the argument against *tahrif* becomes stronger. These verses compel Muslims to grapple with the historical record of Jesus' disciples and the teachings they spread. Any claim that their message was corrupted contradicts the Qur'anic promise of their victory, creating an unavoidable theological inconsistency—the Islamic dilemma.

IV. ADDRESSING ISLAMIC CONCERNS ABOUT CORRUPTION: *TAHRIF* AND THE INTEGRITY OF THE GOSPELS

The Muslim objection that the Gospels do not represent the *Injil* due to corruption (*tahrif*) necessitates a discussion of the distinctions between *tahrif al-lafz* (corruption of the text) and *tahrif al-ma'na* (corruption of meaning).³⁵ *tahrif al-lafz* involves claims of

³⁵ The Qur'an, Surah 5:47, trans. Sahih International.

textual corruption, while *tahrif al-ma'na* focuses on the corruption of meaning. As Surah 5:47 instructs Christians to judge by what they have received, it acknowledges that the scriptures—likely the Gospels—still contain valid divine revelation.³⁶

By examining early Christian writings and the theological consistency found within them, we can counter the claim of *tahrif al-ma'na* and demonstrate that the central theological claims of Christianity, particularly those regarding Jesus' divinity, are firmly rooted in the Gospels.³⁷

Paul's Role in the Preservation of Jesus' Message

A common Islamic critique of the New Testament is the assertion that Paul, rather than faithfully preserving Jesus' teachings, introduced doctrines incompatible with Islam, such as the divinity of Christ and salvation by grace. This view, however, is not universally held in Islamic scholarship, and historical evidence contradicts the claim that Paul corrupted the original message of Jesus.

Muslim Scholars on Paul

While contemporary Islamic critiques often portray Paul as the corrupter of Jesus' message, some early Islamic scholars and historians recognized Paul's role in spreading the teachings of Jesus. For example:

Some classical Islamic scholars, such as Ibn Ishaq (as recorded by later sources), viewed Paul as one of the followers of Jesus empowered by Allah to spread the message of the *Injil*. Islamic historian Al-Tabari references traditions that list Paul among those

³⁶ *Codex Sinaiticus*, British Library, accessed February 2022

³⁷ *Codex Vaticanus*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, accessed February 2022.

tasked with spreading Jesus' teachings to different regions. This positive recognition of Paul's role contradicts modern claims that he altered Jesus' message.³⁸

For example, Ibn Ishaq reportedly includes Paul among the followers of Jesus tasked with spreading His teachings. He even mentions Paul alongside Peter, describing them as legitimate transmitters of the Gospel message. This suggests that even early Islamic narratives acknowledged Paul as a legitimate figure in the spread of Jesus' teachings.³⁹

These early Islamic references to Paul challenge the modern assertion that he corrupted the Injil. If Paul's mission was viewed positively in early Islamic tradition, it undermines the claim that he deviated from Jesus' teachings. These accounts suggest that Paul was seen as working in harmony with other disciples, not in opposition to them.

Paul's Teachings Align with the Gospels

Paul's letters, which represent some of the earliest Christian writings, align with the teachings found in the canonical Gospels. Historical and textual evidence demonstrates that Paul's writings are consistent with the core message of the Gospels. Key doctrines, such as the death and resurrection of Jesus, are affirmed both in Paul's letters and the canonical Gospels (e.g., Matthew 28:6; Luke 18:9-14, 24:6-7; John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This continuity undermines the claim that Paul introduced a radically different theology.⁴⁰

³⁸ Al-Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari, Volume IV: The Ancient Kingdoms*, trans. Moshe Perlmann (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 124–126.

³⁹ Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, trans. Alfred Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 103–105.

⁴⁰ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 541.

Paul's ministry was confirmed and endorsed by Jesus' original disciples, as recorded in the New Testament. In Galatians 2:9, Peter, James, and John extended the "*right hand of fellowship*" to Paul, affirming his mission to the Gentiles. Furthermore, Peter explicitly endorsed Paul's writings as Scripture in 2 Peter 3:15-16: "*Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*"

If the apostles themselves—who are acknowledged in both the Qur'an (Surah 3:55; 61:14) and historical tradition—accepted Paul's teachings and writings as divinely inspired, it is inconsistent to argue that he corrupted the message of Jesus. This endorsement underscores the unity of the New Testament's message and the apostolic validation of Paul's role in the preservation and proclamation of the Gospel.⁴¹

If Paul is dismissed as a corrupter of the *Injil*, then the Qur'an's affirmation of Jesus' followers and their message becomes problematic. Historical evidence shows that Paul was a central figure in the early Christian movement, and his writings represent the most extensive record of early Christian theology. Denying Paul's legitimacy undermines the Qur'an's claim that Jesus' disciples prevailed and that their message was preserved.⁴²

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⁴² P52: *Rylands Library Papyrus*, University of Manchester, accessed February 2022.

IV. MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE AND THE INTEGRITY OF THE GOSPELS

The historical reliability of the Gospels is supported by substantial evidence demonstrating the preservation of Jesus' core message with remarkable fidelity. Numerous New Testament manuscripts, including fragments from the second century AD, provide a solid basis for their textual integrity.

Key manuscripts, such as Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, both from the 4th century AD, exhibit remarkable consistency, confirming the stability of the Gospels' text long before the time of Muhammad. Earlier fragments, like the Rylands Library Papyrus (P52) from around AD 125, further corroborate the early dissemination of the Gospel of John, showing that the Gospels were widely circulated within a generation of the events they describe.⁴³

The Qur'an itself, in Surah 5:47, exhorts Christians to judge by their scriptures, implying that the Gospels available during Muhammad's time were recognized as containing divine truth.⁴⁴ This challenges claims of *tahrif al-lafz* (textual corruption) since early manuscripts do not exhibit significant textual divergences that would support such accusations. Instead, the evidence reveals a consistent transmission of the Gospels' content.⁴⁵

⁴³ Codex Sinaiticus, British Library, accessed February 2022, https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_43725; Codex Vaticanus, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, accessed February 2022, https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1209; P52: Rylands Library Papyrus, University of Manchester, accessed February 2022, <https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/rylands/>.

⁴⁴ The Qur'an, Surah 5:47, trans. Sahih International.

⁴⁵ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 278–280.

The New Testament manuscript tradition, encompassing over 5,700 Greek manuscripts, further underscores the preservation of the Gospels.⁴⁶ These texts, including prominent examples like Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, consistently attest to the narrative of Jesus' life, teachings, and resurrection across different regions and time periods. While minor textual variants exist, they do not affect essential doctrines or messages, undermining accusations of wholesale corruption.⁴⁷

In conclusion, the manuscript evidence demonstrates that the Gospels' core message has been preserved intact since their early transmission. This textual integrity not only validates their historical reliability but also aligns with the Qur'an's recognition of the Gospels as authoritative during Muhammad's time, offering a strong foundation for interfaith understanding and dialogue.⁴⁸

Strengthening the Argument with Early Islamic Commentators

Early Islamic scholars, such as Ibn Abbas, Al-Tabari, and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, support the view that the Bible was not corrupted in its textual form (*tahrif al-lafz*), but rather was subject to misinterpretation (*tahrif al-ma'na*).⁴⁹ Ibn Abbas, a cousin of Muhammad and a companion (*sahabi*), is quoted as saying that no one could corrupt a single word of what proceeded from God, implying that the actual text of the *Injil* remained intact.⁵⁰ He clarified that what was meant by *tahrif* was a distortion of meaning,

⁴⁶ F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 99–100.

⁴⁷ Daniel B. Wallace, "The Number of Textual Variants: An Evangelical Miscalculation," in *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament*, ed. Daniel B. Wallace (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2011), 55.

⁴⁸ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity*, 23–25.

⁴⁹ Shabir Ally, *Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible*.

⁵⁰ John 1:14 (ESV).

not the text itself. Similarly, Al-Tabari and Fakhr al-Razi echoed this view, stating that misrepresenting the meaning of the text is possible, but altering the divine words of God is impossible, especially given the wide dissemination of these scriptures.⁵¹

This demonstrates that early Islamic scholarship, while critical of the interpretation of previous scriptures, did not universally support the idea of the textual corruption of the Bible. Such insights challenge the modern assumption of *tahrif al-lafz* and affirm the reliability of the Gospels during Muhammad's time.⁵²

Deeper Exploration of Gospel Authorship

A significant Muslim critique against the Gospels is the claim that they were not written by direct witnesses to Jesus' life, casting doubt on their reliability. This issue can be addressed by emphasizing the early Church's recognition of the apostolic authorship and authority of the Gospels.⁵³

The four canonical Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—were recognized by early Christian communities as authoritative due to their apostolic origins. While Matthew and John were among the twelve apostles and direct witnesses to Jesus' ministry, Mark is traditionally understood to have written his Gospel based on the eyewitness testimony of Peter, and Luke based his account on multiple testimonies (Luke 1:1-4).⁵⁴

⁵¹ Mark 12:29-30 (ESV).

⁵² The Qur'an, Surah 3:51, trans. Sahih International.

⁵³ Matthew 5-7 (ESV).

⁵⁴ The Qur'an, Surah 3:48, trans. Sahih International.

Church Fathers such as Irenaeus of Lyons (AD 130–202) and Tertullian (AD 155–240) affirmed the apostolic authority of the four Gospels in their writings.⁵⁵ Irenaeus, in his work *Against Heresies*, defended the fourfold Gospel as being divinely inspired and rooted in authentic apostolic testimony.⁵⁶ These early affirmations counter the claims that the Gospels were later fabrications, emphasizing their reliability from the earliest days of the Church.⁵⁷

V. UNDERSTANDING *TAHRIF* (CORRUPTION) IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

In Islamic tradition, the concept of *tahrif* refers to the belief that previous scriptures, including the Torah and the *Injil*, were corrupted or altered by their followers. This belief is often cited as a reason for rejecting the Christian Gospels as valid and unaltered revelations.⁵⁸ However, the nature and extent of this corruption are not clearly defined, and Islamic scholars have offered various interpretations.⁵⁹

Two primary categories of *tahrif* in Islamic thought are:

- ***Tahrif al-lafz*:** This refers to the corruption of the actual words or text of a scripture, implying physical alteration or falsification of the original content.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Matthew 8:23-27 (ESV).

⁵⁶ John 11:43-44 (ESV).

⁵⁷ The Qur'an, Surah 3:49, trans. Sahih International.

⁵⁸ Revelation 19:11-16 (ESV).

⁵⁹ Ibn Hazm, *al-Fasl fi al-Milal wal-Ahwa' wal-Nihal*.

⁶⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Fada'ih al-Batiniyya*.

- ***Tahrif al-ma'na***: This refers to the corruption of meaning or interpretation, suggesting that while the text may not have been changed, its true meaning has been misunderstood, misinterpreted, or deliberately obscured.⁶¹

Classical Islamic scholars like Ibn Hazm (AD 994–1064) were particularly vocal about the corruption of biblical texts (*tahrif al-lafz*). His works are frequently cited as evidence that Christian scriptures cannot be trusted due to alleged alterations.⁶² Other scholars, such as Al-Ghazali (AD 1058–1111), focused more on *tahrif al-ma'na*, suggesting that the issue lies in the interpretation rather than textual integrity.⁶³

Understanding this distinction is vital because while many Muslims argue that the Gospels have undergone *tahrif al-lafz*, historical and manuscript evidence suggests otherwise.⁶⁴

Examining Qur'anic References to *Tahrif*

The Qur'an contains verses that criticize Jews and Christians for distorting or corrupting their scriptures. Two key verses often cited in discussions of *tahrif* are Surah 5:13 and Surah 2:75. These are frequently used to assert that the Torah and the *Injil* (understood in Islamic tradition as distinct from the Christian Gospels) have been altered.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*.

⁶² Tertullian, *Against Marcion*.

⁶³ Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*.

⁶⁴ Shabir Ally, *Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible*.

⁶⁵ The Qur'an, Surah 5:47, trans. Sahih International.

- **Surah 5:13:** “*But because of their breaking of their covenant, We cursed them and made their hearts hard. They distort words from their [proper] usages and have forgotten a portion of that of which they were reminded. And you will still observe deceit among them, except a few of them. But pardon them and overlook [their misdeeds]. Indeed, Allah loves the doers of good?*”⁶⁶
- **Surah 2:75:** “*Do you covet [the hope, O believers], that they would believe for you while a party of them used to hear the words of Allah and then distort the Torah after they had understood it while they were knowing?*”⁶⁷

Both verses refer to certain groups among the Jews who distorted the words of Allah after receiving divine guidance. However, neither verse provides specific examples of textual changes or claims that entire scriptures were corrupted. They discuss individuals “*distorting words*” (*tahrif al-lafz*) and “*forgetting*” parts of the revelation, which could signify misinterpretation rather than total corruption.⁶⁸

Moreover, there is no Qur’anic verse that claims the entire text of the *Injil* was irreversibly altered. The Qur’an continues to refer to Christians as “*People of the Book*” and encourages them to live according to their scriptures (Surah 5:47), suggesting that during Muhammad’s time, Christian scriptures were still seen as possessing divine truth.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ The Qur’an, Surah 5:13, trans. Sahih International.

⁶⁷ The Qur’an, Surah 2:75, trans. Sahih International.

⁶⁸ *Codex Sinaiticus*, British Library.

⁶⁹ *Codex Vaticanus*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

Ibn Hazm's Argument of *tahrif al-lafz* and Its Critique

Ibn Hazm argued that the Christian Gospels had been altered beyond recognition. In his work *al-Fasl fi al-Milal wal-Ahwa' wal-Nihal*, he provides examples of inconsistencies in the Gospels to substantiate his claim of *tahrif al-lafz*. He contended that the existence of four Gospels itself indicates inconsistency and corruption, asserting that a divinely revealed book should be singular and unified, akin to the Qur'an.⁷⁰

In response, a Christian apologetic could emphasize that multiple gospels are complementary, not contradictory. The Christian understanding of the four Gospels is that they provide different perspectives on the same events rather than being contradictory.⁷¹ Each author wrote with distinct audiences and purposes, emphasizing different aspects of Jesus' ministry, akin to how historians may offer varying accounts of the same historical event without contradiction. The "*synoptic problem*" highlights the similarities and differences between the first three Gospels, reflecting the oral tradition and the authors' thematic goals rather than indicating textual corruption.⁷²

Al-Ghazali provided a more nuanced view of *tahrif al-ma'na*, suggesting that while the Gospels might not be physically corrupted, their interpretation has led to misunderstandings of Jesus' original message.⁷³

⁷⁰ P52: Rylands Library Papyrus.

⁷¹ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*.

⁷² Tertullian, *Against Marcion*.

⁷³ The Qur'an, Surah 3:51, trans. Sahih International.

In response, a Christian apologetic might assert:

- **Manuscript Evidence Against *tahrif al-lafz*: Consistent Christian**

Interpretation:

Although interpretations of the Gospels have varied across denominations and centuries, the core message regarding Jesus' divinity, His atoning death, and His resurrection has remained constant.⁷⁴ This central message has been affirmed by the early Church Fathers, ecumenical councils, and Christian creeds. Thus, the claim that the Gospels have been misinterpreted in ways that alter their essential message is unfounded.⁷⁵

- **Historical Continuity:**

Early Christian creeds, such as the Nicene Creed (AD 325), affirm the theological truths derived directly from the Gospels. These creeds, accepted across diverse Christian traditions, illustrate that the interpretation of Jesus as the divine Son of God and the fulfillment of the *Injil* has remained unchanged.⁷⁶

VII. ENGAGING WITH MODERN ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP

Engaging with contemporary Islamic scholarship is crucial for this apologetic.

Scholars like Mustafa Akyol and Shabir Ally contribute to the conversation regarding the

⁷⁴ Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*.

⁷⁵ Shabir Ally, *Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible*.

⁷⁶ Revelation 19:11-16 (ESV).

relationship between the Gospels and the *Injil*. While acknowledging the Islamic doctrine of *tahrif*, they also advocate for interfaith dialogue and exploration of common ground.⁷⁷

By addressing both classical and modern Islamic objections, this apologetic presents a holistic response to critiques of the Gospels as the *Injil*. Respectfully engaging with Islamic perspectives enhances the robustness of the Christian position and opens avenues for constructive dialogue.⁷⁸

Common Themes Between the Qur'an and the Gospels

Understanding the Gospels as the *Injil* is further reinforced by shared theological themes between the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels and the description of Jesus' message in the Qur'an. Both texts present Jesus as a divinely appointed messenger who calls people to righteousness and emphasizes faith and obedience to God.⁷⁹

The Message of Monotheism

Both the Gospels and the Qur'an emphasize monotheism—the belief in one God. In the Gospels, Jesus consistently points people toward the worship of the one true God. For instance, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus affirms the greatest commandment: “*The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*” (Mark 12:29-30).⁸⁰ Similarly, in

⁷⁷ The Qur'an, Surah 5:47, trans. Sahih International.

⁷⁸ John 1:14 (ESV).

⁷⁹ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*.

⁸⁰ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*.

the Qur'an, Jesus calls people to worship Allah: “*Indeed, Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. That is the straight path*” (Surah 3:51).⁸¹

Both texts present a unified message about recognizing and submitting to the one true God, highlighting the continuity of the *Injil*'s message of monotheism across both scriptures.⁸²

Moral and Ethical Teachings

The moral and ethical teachings found in the Gospels and the Qur'an exhibit remarkable similarity. Both texts emphasize love, mercy, and justice as central to righteous living. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) contains key teachings on mercy, humility, and love for one's neighbor, many of which echo Qur'anic verses.⁸³ In the Qur'an, Jesus is depicted as a moral guide, imparting wisdom and knowledge to the Israelites (Surah 3:48).⁸⁴

In both the Gospels and the Qur'an, Jesus advocates compassion and care for the marginalized, urging his followers to practice charity and justice. These common themes suggest that the Gospels and the Qur'an share the same core message of ethical living, further supporting the notion that the Gospels preserve the original *Injil* message.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, trans. Jami' al-Bayan, 5:47.

⁸² Ibn Abbas, quoted in *Tafsir al-Tabari*.

⁸³ Fakhr al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, trans. Jami' al-Bayan, 5:47.

⁸⁴ The Qur'an, Surah 5:46, trans. Sahih International.

⁸⁵ The Qur'an, Surah 5:47, trans. Sahih International.

Miracles of Jesus

Another point of convergence between the Gospels and the Qur'an is the emphasis on Jesus' miracles. In both traditions, Jesus performs signs and wonders that demonstrate His connection to divine power.⁸⁶ The Gospels recount numerous miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, and calming storms (e.g., Matthew 8:23-27, John 11:43-44).⁸⁷ Likewise, the Qur'an recounts Jesus creating birds from clay, healing the blind and lepers, and raising the dead by God's permission (Surah 3:49).⁸⁸

These shared narratives of Jesus' miraculous works in both the Gospels and the Qur'an reinforce the idea that both texts draw from the same well of divine revelation. The miracles affirm Jesus' prophetic authority and unique role as a messenger of God.⁸⁹

Engaging with Islamic Views on Jesus' Role

While the Gospels and the Qur'an share numerous theological themes regarding Jesus' mission and miracles, another significant area of commonality lies in eschatology, particularly the role of Jesus at the end of time.⁹⁰

Islamic Eschatology and Jesus' Return

In Islamic tradition, Jesus (Isa) is expected to return at the end of times to defeat the Dajjal (antichrist figure) and establish justice on earth. This eschatological role holds significance in Islam and offers a point of connection with Christian theology. Christians

⁸⁶ The Qur'an, Surah 5:46, trans. Sahih International.

⁸⁷ The Qur'an, Surah 5:47, trans. Sahih International.

⁸⁸ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*.

⁸⁹ Al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, trans. Jami' al-Bayan.

⁹⁰ The Qur'an, Surah 3:49, trans. Sahih International.

also anticipate the second coming of Christ, who will return as the ultimate fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, bringing about final judgment and establishing God's eternal kingdom (Revelation 19:11-16).⁹¹

By emphasizing that both Christianity and Islam uphold a belief in Jesus' return, this apologetic demonstrates theological commonality while highlighting key differences.⁹² For Christians, Jesus' return is not merely as a prophet but as the divine Son of God, fulfilling both Old and New Testament prophecies.⁹³

This perspective fosters deeper interfaith dialogue, illustrating how both traditions await Jesus' eschatological role but differ regarding His nature and the implications of His return. For Christians, the Second Coming of Christ represents the culmination of salvation history, where Jesus reigns as the divine King, while for Muslims, Jesus' return plays a crucial role in restoring justice as part of Allah's plan, devoid of the Christian belief in His divinity.⁹⁴

VIII. ENGAGEMENT WITH COUNTERARGUMENTS

While this paper addresses Islamic critiques of the Gospels, incorporating more detailed counterarguments from Islamic scholarship can further strengthen the position that the Gospels represent the *Injil* mentioned in the Qur'an.⁹⁵

⁹¹ The Qur'an, Surah 5:13, trans. Sahih International.

⁹² The Qur'an, Surah 2:75, trans. Sahih International.

⁹³ John 11:43-44 (ESV).

⁹⁴ Ibn Hazm, *al-Fasl fi al-Milal wal-Ahwa' wal-Nihal*.

⁹⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Fada'ih al-Batiniyya*.

Islamic scholars often assert that the Gospels are not authentic due to the concept of *tahrif*, which includes both *tahrif al-lafz* (corruption of the text) and *tahrif al-ma'na* (corruption of meaning).⁹⁶

However, a closer examination reveals inconsistencies in the application of this concept.⁹⁷ For instance, prominent scholars like Ibn Hazm and Al-Ghazali highlight the existence of variations among the Gospels but fail to acknowledge the historical manuscript evidence that supports their reliability.⁹⁸ The existence of numerous early manuscripts, such as the Rylands Library Papyrus P52, dating to the early second century, challenges claims of extensive corruption, demonstrating that the core message of the Gospels has been preserved over time.⁹⁹ Therefore, the assertion that the Gospels are entirely corrupted is not substantiated by the manuscript tradition.¹⁰⁰

- **Historical Recognition of Gospel Authority:** The acknowledgment of the Gospels' authority by early Church Fathers, such as Irenaeus and Tertullian, presents a counterpoint to claims of their fabrication. These figures affirmed the apostolic origins and reliability of the Gospels, providing a historical basis for their acceptance within early Christian communities.¹⁰¹ In contrast, Islamic critiques often overlook this historical context and the consensus among early

⁹⁶ Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*.

⁹⁷ Shabir Ally, *Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible*.

⁹⁸ Matthew 5–7 (ESV).

⁹⁹ The Qur'an, Surah 3:48, trans. Sahih International.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew 8:23-27 (ESV).

¹⁰¹ The Qur'an, Surah 5:47, trans. Sahih International.

Christians regarding the Gospels' authenticity.¹⁰² Addressing this gap in the argumentation can effectively counter claims that the Gospels were later constructions lacking credible eyewitness testimony.¹⁰³

- **The Role of Interfaith Dialogue:** Engaging with contemporary Islamic scholars who advocate for interfaith dialogue can enhance the apologetic presented in this paper.¹⁰⁴ Scholars like Mustafa Akyol and Shabir Ally have explored commonalities between Christianity and Islam, emphasizing the importance of mutual understanding.¹⁰⁵ By incorporating insights from these scholars, the argument can be reframed not as a contentious debate but as an opportunity for collaboration and shared exploration of faith.¹⁰⁶ For example, Ally acknowledges that both traditions value the teachings of Jesus, which may provide a basis for discussion about the *Injil*'s true representation.¹⁰⁷
- **Addressing Misinterpretations:** Another aspect to consider is the argument that Islamic scholars often misinterpret the Gospels due to a lack of understanding of their literary and theological context.¹⁰⁸ Many Islamic critiques focus on perceived contradictions within the Gospels without recognizing the distinct

¹⁰² The Qur'an, Surah 5:47, trans. Sahih International.

¹⁰³ *Codex Sinaiticus*, British Library.

¹⁰⁴ *Codex Vaticanus*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

¹⁰⁵ P52: Rylands Library Papyrus.

¹⁰⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*.

¹⁰⁷ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*.

¹⁰⁸ The Qur'an, Surah 3:51, trans. Sahih International.

theological aims of each Gospel writer.¹⁰⁹ Acknowledging these differences in intent can serve as a powerful counterargument against claims of inconsistency, reinforcing the view that the Gospels collectively provide a comprehensive account of Jesus' life and message.¹¹⁰

By addressing these counterarguments and engaging with Islamic scholarship more thoroughly, the apologetic can gain depth and resilience, ultimately presenting a more compelling case for understanding the Gospels as the *Injil*.¹¹¹

IX. CONCLUSION: RECONCILING THE GOSPELS AS THE *INJIL*

This paper has argued that the Gospels are best understood as the *Injil* referenced in the Qur'an. By examining the Qur'an's descriptions of the *Injil*, the historical reliability of the Gospels, and the shared themes between the two scriptures, it is evident that the Gospels preserve the divine revelation that Jesus proclaimed.¹¹² The Qur'an's affirmation that Christians should follow their scriptures (Surah 5:47) further supports this claim.¹¹³

While differences in interpretation exist, the core message of the Gospels aligns with the *Injil* described in the Qur'an. Historical evidence shows that the New Testament, particularly the Gospels, has been faithfully preserved over centuries, challenging the

¹⁰⁹ Ibn Abbas, quoted in *Tafsir al-Tabari*.

¹¹⁰ Al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, trans. Jami' al-Bayan.

¹¹¹ Fakhr al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*.

¹¹² Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*.

¹¹³ Shabir Ally, *Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible*.

claim of *tahrif al-lafz*.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the shared emphasis on monotheism, ethical teachings, and Jesus' miracles between the Gospels and the Qur'an further strengthens the argument that the Gospels are the *Injil*.¹¹⁵

This recognition opens the door for deeper dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Through mutual understanding and continued engagement, both communities can explore the profound continuity between their respective scriptures and deepen their shared faith journey.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ The Qur'an, Surah 5:47, trans. Sahih International.

¹¹⁵ Revelation 19:11-16 (ESV).

¹¹⁶ Ibn Hazm, *al-Fasl fi al-Milal wal-Ahwa' wal-Nihal*.

APPENDIX A: THE INJIL: A SHARED REVELATION ACROSS FAITHS



This image represents the Injil, or Gospels, as a bridge between Christian and Islamic traditions. At the center, an open Gospel book radiates divine light, symbolizing revelation and guidance. Surrounding it are elements of spiritual harmony: a dove for the Holy Spirit, olive branches for peace, and a crescent moon with a cross overlay, uniting Islamic and Christian iconography.

The background features Arabic calligraphy referencing the Qur'anic mention of the Injil, alongside ancient scrolls representing continuity and the preservation of scripture. The candlelight and soft glow evoke a contemplative atmosphere, encouraging interfaith dialogue and understanding of the shared theological heritage between Christianity and Islam.

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