



OPENACCESS

Al-Azwa الاضواء

ISSN 1995-7904 ;E 2415-0444

Volume 40, Issue, 63, 2025

www.aladwajournal.com

Christine Schirrmacher on Higher Bible Criticism and Muslim Apologetics in Nineteenth-Century India: A Critical Analysis

Aimen Imran

MS Scholar, Department of the Study of Religions, Faculty of Usuluddin,
International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Abstract

KEYWORDS

Christian-Muslim
Relations, Muslim
Apologetics, Biblical
Criticism, Raḥmat
Allāh al-Kayrānawī,
Izhār al-Ḥaqq



Date of Publication:
30-06-2025



This article reviews a book chapter, “The Influence of Higher Bible Criticism on Muslim Apologetics in the Nineteenth Century”, written by German scholar Christine Schirrmacher. She tells how Muslim scholars used the Christian West’s findings to substantiate their claims in criticizing Christianity. Due to her Western scholarship, this essay gained much significance in European academic circles. That is why every Western scholar quotes Schirrmacher on the topic of Muslim apologetics in nineteenth-century India. Hence, it is important to note how she sees Muslim endeavours against Christian allegations during that period. The main subject of interest is her comprehensive perspective on Raḥmat Allāh al-Kayrānawī and his book *Izhār al-Ḥaqq*. Since her essay is the primary Western source on al-Kayrānawī, it is important to evaluate it and counter her misunderstandings. The research uses qualitative methodology with an analytical and critical approach. For Schirrmacher, nineteenth-century Muslim apologetics is the borrowing of European criticism to refute Christianity, and al-Kayrānawī was the first person to adopt this method. The research concludes that al-Kayrānawī’s approach was not solely influenced by higher Bible criticism and other scholars before him, like Ibn Hazm, have also adopted such techniques.

Introduction:

This article aims to review a book chapter “The Influence of Higher Bible Criticism on Muslim Apologetics in the Nineteenth Century.”¹ This chapter was written by a German scholar, Christine Schirmacher, who specializes in Islamic studies. Currently, she is a visiting professor at the University of Erfurt, Germany.²

The first part of the chapter talks about the theological evolution in Europe, in which Biblical narratives are critically evaluated using modern scientific methods. These include historical and textual approaches to judge the credibility of the manuscripts of the scriptures. Following this method, all the fundamental dogmas of Christianity, like the Trinity, Jesus’ deification, crucifixion, and resurrection, were called into question. This critical viewpoint of looking into religion first evolved in Germany, and then it was adopted by other European universities and modern churches.

The second part deals with the phenomenon of “Muslim Apologetics.” It refers to the works and contributions of Muslim scholars to defend Islam against the allegations imposed by the followers of other religions. It also includes establishing the superiority of Islam and refuting the tenets of other religions.

The third part discusses Muslim apologetics in the modern era of the nineteenth century. It states that before the nineteenth century, the defence of Islam was usually restricted to either praising Islam or devaluing the Christian faith. But it changed with the emergence of higher Bible criticism. Since the nineteenth century, Muslim scholars have started studying modern European theories that cast doubt on and reject various Christian claims. Muslim apologetics have been criticizing Christian doctrines for centuries, but this European method of criticizing Christianity made their claims stronger. An important Muslim figure who first adopted this method was Raḥmat Allāh al-Kayrānawī (1818-1891), who wrote the book *Izhār al-Ḥaqq*, in response to German Missionary Karl Gottlieb Pfander’s (1803-1865) book *Mizān al-Ḥaqq*. In *Izhār al-Ḥaqq*, al-Kayrānawī gathers all the information he can from European sources to refute Christianity scientifically. This book is so influential that centuries after its inception, it is still used as an important apologetic tool in debating with the representatives of Christianity. Thus, the latest scientific research from Europe positively influenced the Muslim apologetic approaches towards Christianity.

The topic is significant because it tells how Muslim scholars used the Christian West’s findings to substantiate their claims in criticizing

Christianity, as it is mentioned in the Qur'ān:³ *قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ* ("Say, 'Bring your proof'").⁴ So it is an intelligent way of using the proofs of Western intellectuals against Christianity. This topic elaborates that because of this change of method and approach, the 1854 Agra debate between al-Kayrānawī and Pfander had a huge influence on future Muslim apologetic works. For example, the renowned Sheikh Aḥmed Deedat stepped into the field of debating and proselytizing after getting motivated by Raḥmat Allāh al-Kayrānawī and his book *Izhār al-Ḥaqq*.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to answer how Schirmacher defined higher Bible criticism and Muslim apologetics; how higher Bible criticism influenced Muslim apologetics in India according to Schirmacher; and what are the strengths and weaknesses of Schirmacher's study.

Research Methodology

For this research, qualitative methodology has been adopted with an analytical and critical approach. Moreover, primary and secondary sources have been collected through analyzing writings, reports, and documents. The material has been rationally arranged and put together.

Literature Review

Some relevant works done on the Indian Muslim scholars' perceptions of Christianity are reviewed below. Christian-Muslim Relations in the Second Half of 19th Century India in View of Syed Nāṣir-ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmanṣūr Dehlwī (d. 1903),⁵ introduces the writings of Syed Nāṣir-ul-Dīn, who was a nineteenth-century Indian Muslim polemicist. The author mentioned Nāṣir-ul-Dīn's debate with Rev. David in Allahabad in 1865. He was given the title of Imām-i-fann-i-Munāẓarh-i-Ahl-i-Kitāb (The leader of the art of debating with the People of the Book), and his works are second only to *Izhār-ul-Ḥaqq*. This article explores Abū 'l-Manṣūr's understanding of Semitic religions and his response to modern missionaries. Additionally, it explains his methodologies in retorting opponents, that is, source criticism, literary criticism, historical criticism, form criticism, and textual criticism. It also highlights the importance of his writings in the 20th century. Out of the 15 books mentioned in the article, the author provided details of only 5 including *Navīd-e-Jāved*, *Taṣḥīḥ al-Tāwīl fī Rad-e-Alā tafsīr al-Mukāshfa*, *Namūna-e-Taḥrīf*, *Mīzān-ul-Mīzān fī rad-e-ala Mīzān-ul-Ḥaqq li Pfander*, and *In'ām-e-'Aam fī rad-e-Alā Aina-e-Islām lī Rajab*. His books were written in response to famous missionaries and Hindu and Muslim converts to Christianity like K. G. Pfander, Rev. Imam al-Din Lahiz, Rajab Ali, Rev. Knowles, Ram Chandra, Safdar Ali, etc. The writer

concludes that, given its confrontational nature, the polemical style may no longer be the main approach used in religious studies. The books produced using this method can still be valuable tools for scholars and students because they provide chances for historical research, critical thinking, and a deeper comprehension of the complex interrelationships among many religious traditions.

A Detailed and Factual Review of Izhar Ul Haqq, written by Maulana Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi,⁶ written in Urdu, deals with the descriptive analysis of *Izhār-ul-Haq*. It gives a short introduction to *Mizān al-Haqq* and discusses the topics covered in *Izhār-ul-Haq*. It also talks about the methodology and writing style of al-Kayrānawī as mentioned in *Izhār-ul-Haq*. Among the debates which are discussed are: the books of the Old and New Testaments, evidence of interpolation, evidence of abrogation, refutation of the Trinity, miraculous nature of the Qur’ān, and the Prophethood of Muḥammad (SAWS). The author has also considered the chapterization and division of topics while discussing them.

Rahmatullah al-Kairanawi and His work entitled “Izhar al-Haq”; External Criticism Toward Gospel,⁷ written in Arabic, focuses on al-Kayrānawī’s critique of the Bible in his book *Izhār-ul-Haq*. It covered topics like the definition of the gospel, the decision of the church councils on the number of gospels, historical criticism (i.e., the break in the chain of transmission of the gospels), language criticism (i.e., the revealed language was different from what reached us), and form criticism (i.e., difference of style and expressions found in four gospels). This study concludes that al-Kayrānawī’s criticism was impacted by the approach utilised among hadith experts in hadith criticism. Raḥmat Allāh al-Hindi al-Kayrānawī and his Book Demonstration of the Truth: Islamic Criticism of the Old and New Testaments,⁸ written in Arabic, analyses the methods and stance of al-Kayrānawī’s debate with Christian apologetics, as demonstrated in his book *Izhār al-Haqq*. The study examines the main points made in the book and notes how innovative its presentational style and approach are. The research concludes that al-Kayrānawī’s knowledge and adoption of Biblical criticism aided him in effectively combating his opponents.

A Late Nineteenth Century Muslim Response to the Western Criticism of Islam-An Analysis of Amir ‘Ali’s Life and Works,⁹ is an important work. Amīr ‘Ali was an Indian polemicist who wrote against Christianity and the Western criticism of Islam. The study tells that he challenged William Muir’s allegations about Islam and Prophet Muḥammad (SAWS). The writer quotes W.C. Smith that Amir ‘Ali

emphasized Islam's superiority over Christianity. 'Ali believes that Christianity and Islam are identical in their roots, but Christianity lost its soul as a result of Paul's influence. The writer highlights Amir 'Ali's rational approach towards Islam by extensively quoting from his book *The Spirit of Islam*. The article traces Unitarians' influence on 'Ali and how he identified their values with Islamic history. In criticizing modern Christianity, he stands with the Unitarian viewpoint. The study dwells on why 'Ali's disapproval of Christianity grew over time. The article concludes that 'Ali's writings played a significant role in inspiring Western Muslims to protect their identity in the face of Western-oriented societies.

The above literature includes reviews on Muslim endeavours against Christian allegations during nineteenth-century India. Three of the reviews are on al-Kayrānawī's *Izhār-ul-Haq*. However, their limitation is that they are not in English and don't cover the viewpoint of a Western author. Moreover, they did not discuss the phenomenon of higher Bible criticism. This article aims to overcome these lacunae.

Discussion:

Higher Bible Criticism and Muslim Apologetics

Biblical criticism is a form of literary criticism that asks questions about the Bible, its author, its date, its intended audience, its purpose, its historical and cultural context, its cohesiveness, its preservation, its transmission through time, its literary genre, and how it came to be considered canonical. Biblical criticism can be divided into two primary categories: lower criticism, also called textual criticism, seeks to identify the original text from different readings of ancient manuscripts; higher criticism, also called source criticism, focuses on identifying the author, date, sources, and location of writing for each book of the Bible.¹⁰ The term higher criticism was first introduced by the German theologian of the Enlightenment, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (d. 1827). Due to his vast contributions to this field, he was called 'the father of the higher criticism.'¹¹ Higher criticism has a subjective¹² approach and thus is less scientific, less scholarly, and less academically respectable.¹³

Now, coming to the information that Christine Schirmacher provided regarding higher Bible criticism, it is a new direction of European study of religion that emerged during the nineteenth century. Progressively, it started to become more critical of the validity of the historical and textual questions. She opined that German studies were the precursors to this approach. During this period, different books and Bible commentaries were written based on higher criticism. Higher criticism was informed by

the movements of rationalism, liberalism, and enlightenment. Rationalism accepts only those ideas that are based on reason. Liberalism and enlightenment denote freedom from backward and stereotypical beliefs. Influenced by such ideologies, higher Bible criticism raises questions about the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the reliability of the gospels. Some Christian theologians even went to the extent of denying the divinity of Jesus or his historical existence. Ultimately, higher Bible criticism led to the question of many of the basic dogmas of Christianity.

Muslim apologetics, which is sometimes referred to as Islamic apologetics, is the area of theology that focuses on defending and elucidating Islamic beliefs and practices. It involves presenting arguments and evidence in support of Islamic beliefs and addressing objections or criticisms that may be raised.¹⁴ Schirmacher tells us about the form of Muslim apologetics during the nineteenth century. During that time, Muslims adopted new techniques and methods to defend Islam apart from the conservative approaches. They benefited from the results of the latest European theories and philosophies to affirm their old claims. They quoted German rationalist scholars like Karl Friedrich Bahrdr and Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus to support Qur'ānic verses, like 4: 157–158, which claims that Jesus never died on the cross. Another example of Muslim apologetics is the defending of the Gospel of Barnabas. Muslims see it as the only true Gospel of Jesus because it holds beliefs similar to the Qur'ān. To support the authenticity of this Gospel, Muslims quote European critics like John Toland who affirm the mention of Prophet Muḥammad (SAWS) in it and trace its origin to the earliest centuries CE. Likewise, the skepticism of such scholars regarding the divine inspiration of the four canonical gospels and the rest of the Bible was eagerly adopted by Muslim apologists as proof of the Qur'ānic view of a distorted Bible. The next section will discuss the historical application of Muslim apologetics during the nineteenth century.

Influence of Higher Bible Criticism on Muslim Apologetics in India

For Schirmacher, higher Bible criticism had a great impact on Muslim apologetics in India. Its main reason was the British colonization, due to which many Christian missionary institutions were established throughout India to convert Indian people to the Christian faith. This new phenomenon provoked a sense of danger and responsibility within Muslim scholars. Consequently, they focused on countering the objections raised by Christian missionaries. Schirmacher explained that a Shī'ī Muslim apologetic Raḥmat Allāh al-Kayrānawī was the first person who adopted

higher Bible criticism to highlight the weaknesses found in the Christian source and make it clear that Muslims shouldn't let their beliefs waver by Christian criticism. She said that during the 1854 Agra debate, al-Kayrānawī used the technique to demonstrate the distortion of the Bible with European claims. Then she mentioned the Western sources utilized by al-Kayrānawī. He used Martin Luther's critique of the papacy, European criticism of Pauline Christianity, scepticism of theologians regarding the apocryphal gospels, and the formation of Christian doctrines many years after Jesus in his favour. Moreover, he pointed out many faults and contradictions in Biblical narratives.

Al-Kayrānawī recorded his research in his book *Izhār al-Haqq* (the truth revealed). Schirmacher observed that centuries after al-Kayrānawī's demise, his book remained a powerful apologetic tool against Christian missionaries. Al-Kayrānawī expanded on the work of earlier polemicists such as Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn Taymiyyah, and 'Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī. For example, on the topic of the Trinity, some similarities between Ibn Ḥazm's and al-Kayrānawī's work are that both mentioned that different sects of Christianity had different interpretations of the Trinity.¹⁵ They give rational arguments supporting the idea that real unity and Trinity cannot exist together.¹⁶ Both writers reported the absence of clear indications of the Trinity in the scriptures and quoted many passages where Jesus referred to himself as 'Man' or the 'Son of Man'. Both confute deriving the Trinity from those verses in which Jesus addressed God as 'my father'. They explain that the terms 'father' for God or 'son of God' should be understood metaphorically, otherwise they will also make apostles and other humans divine, as indicated by other verses. Both wrote that Jesus' miracle of raising the dead cannot be used as evidence of his being divine because other prophets like Moses, Elijah,¹⁷ Ezekiel,¹⁸ and Elisha¹⁹ revived the dead, but they are not considered divine.²⁰

As for Ibn Taymiyyah's addition to the discussion of the Trinity; some points are as follows: he rejected 'all three being one' by quoting the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth and Biblical narrative in which the term "holy spirit" refers to either the help and direction that God places in the hearts of prophets and upright people, or the holy angels like Jibrīl.²¹ According to Ibn Taymiyyah, a proper understanding of "Baptising people in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" would be an instruction to trust in God, the Prophet He sent, and the angel who conveyed the revelation.²² Ibn Taymiyyah refuted Paul of Antioch (who wrote 'Letter to a Muslim' in ca. 1150 CE) on the topic of 'Indwelling of God in Christ' by elaborating on the prophets' frequent references to God's presence among

His people, on earth, or in believers' hearts. This presence does not, however, imply that God's essence is found in a person or location. He contends that similar claims are made elsewhere in the prophetic teachings as an intellectual image of God's wisdom, might, direction, and love existing inside believers. He corrected the wrong interpretations of Paul of Antioch of the Quranic view of the Trinity.²³ He disapproves of Christians as being monotheists by referring to the Nicene creed which shows that Christians believe in more than one God,²⁴ "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only son of God, born of the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, from the substance of his Father, born not created, equal to the Father in substance.... He is true God from true God, from the substance of his Father." Ibn Taymiyyah had extensively quoted the Christian scholar Al-Hasan bin Ayyûb, who had exposed the invalidity of the Trinity as well as other Christian doctrines.²⁵

The contributions that al-Kayrānawī made to this topic are that he explains that there are many instances in the Bible where divinity is attributed to other than God, e.g., to angels,²⁶ to men,²⁷ and even to Satan.²⁸ It demonstrates that someone is not automatically considered to be God just because they have been called such.²⁹ On a rational account, al-Kayrānawī added that, as at Eucharist, the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is not accepted by Protestants, the same reasoning should be used to reject the idea of the Trinity.³⁰ He wrote that the line "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one"³¹ was a later addition.³² Similarly, in the Arabic version of the Bible printed in 1811, Christ's statement, "*The Lord our God is one Lord*,"³³ has been changed into "*The Lord thy God is one Lord*". The fact that the first person used in the first case denies Jesus's claim to godhood, while the second person used here does not necessarily deny it suggests that this was modified on purpose.³⁴

On the argument of why Jesus did not speak of the Trinity before his ascension, al-Kayrānawī quoted C.G. Pfander, who responded that people would not be able to understand, and that Jesus did not reveal his divinity because he was afraid of the Jews. Al-Kayrānawī counter-argued him by saying that, "people are still unable to understand the Trinity and that the sole objective of Christ coming into this world was to atone for the sins of the people of this world by sacrificing his life, Christ would certainly have known that he was going to be crucified by the Jews. It is unbelievable that out of fear for such people, he should have abstained from speaking a truth that was so basic for eternal salvation when Prophets like Jeremiah,

Isaiah, and John the Baptist willingly faced the worst kind of persecution, some even giving up their lives for the sake of the truth... Had belief in the Trinity been essential for eternal salvation, it would have been expressed and elucidated by all the prophets, and Jesus must have said something to the effect that God consists of three persons, each person being distinct from one another in a real sense. The absence of such indications in the sacred books is enough to prove the falsity of this irrational doctrine.”³⁵ On rejecting the ambiguous deductions of Trinity from the Old Testament, al-Kayrānawī added that Genesis verses which use the plural for God (we, us, our) are wrongly interpreted by Christians as trinitarian. Even Paul used this pronoun for himself.³⁶ Moreover, there are many other places where singular pronouns have been used for God. Al-Kayrānawī had expanded the Christian arguments for the Trinity by explaining that verses³⁷ which show that ‘Christ descended from heaven’ and ‘God dwells in Jesus’ cannot be taken in support of the Trinity as there are other verses³⁸ which show that apostles and other human beings are also not of this world and God dwells in them too.

An example of some new debate introduced by al-Kayrānawī is; proving the Prophethood of Muḥammad (SAWS) from his personal qualities and Biblical sources, as has been done in ibn Rabban’s work: *Kitāb al-Dīn wa-l-Dawla*, al-Kayrānawī had refuted the attacks of Christians on *jihad*, the absence of an appearance of miracles on the Prophet’s hand, the Prophet’s nine marriages, the Prophet’s seeking forgiveness, slavery, and the presence of eunuchs in Islam.³⁹ He also answered the objections raised by priests against the *Aḥadīth* (traditions of Prophet Muḥammad SAWS)⁴⁰. So, his book *Izhār al-Ḥaqq* functioned as an encyclopedia of all accusations against Christianity. Schirmacher viewed that before the higher Bible criticism's effect, Muslim apologists only challenged certain Biblical doctrines, which were refuted by the Qur’ān, like the Trinity or the divinity of Jesus. But after al-Kayrānawī adopted higher Bible criticism, the scope of the Qur’ānic critique of the Bible’s corruption tremendously increased. That is why she marked the nineteenth century as the turning point for Muslim apologetics. Now, following in the footsteps of ‘*Izhār al-Ḥaqq*, prominent Muslim apologists appropriate the “results” of European theological analyses. For example, South African scholar Ahmad Deedat (d. 2005) adopted the Kayrānawī methods in publicly debating the claims of Christian missionaries worldwide.⁴¹ Bangladeshi scholar Abdullah Jahangir (d. 2016) used Jewish and Christian scholars’ reviews of the Bible to support his arguments in his book *Pobitra Bible*.⁴²

Then Schirmacher gave brief accounts of contemporary Muslim apologetic works that were influenced by higher Bible criticism. In his *Tafsīr al-Manār*, prominent Islamic reformer Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā⁴³ included findings from Western theological research. Riḍā blamed Apostle Paul for distorting the original teachings of Jesus and for introducing heathenism into it. Similarly, Muḥammad Abū Zahrah in his *Muḥāḍarāt fī 'l-Nnaṣrāniyyah*, and Aḥmad Shalabī in his *Muqāranat al-Adyān*, considered Christianity a mixture of Neo-Platonism, Greekism, and Roman heathenism. Schirmacher maintained that Muslim apologists knew about all these corruptions of the Bible and Christianity since the beginning. Now, they feel more confident that European theologians have confirmed it themselves through historical, geological, and archaeological research. She quoted Elwood M. Wherry, an American missionary to India, to support her claim. He said that the Muslims had no choice but to give up on their efforts to refute Christianity. They launched a counteroffensive using Western sources. Since then, the Muslim approach to dispute has been characterised by this trait.⁴⁴ Thus, given Schirmacher, nineteenth-century Muslim apologetics can be defined as the borrowing of European theology and philosophy by Muslim scholars to affirm Islam.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Schirmacher's Study

Like any human endeavour, Schirmacher's study has its strengths and weaknesses. Her plus point is that she used rich and primary sources. She had quoted German, French, and Arabic materials including *Über muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-kitāb*; *Polémique, Apologie et dialogue islamo-chrétiens, positions classiques médiévales et positions contemporaines*; *Les grands courants de la pensée religieuse musulmane dans l'Égypte comtemporaine*; *Izhār al-Ḥaqq*; *Tafsīr al-Manār*; *Muḥāḍarāt fī 'l-Nnaṣrāniyyah*; and *Muqāranat al-Adyān*. She did not hide the fact that tensions between Muslims and Christians in India were caused by Christian missionaries and their proselytizing works. She mentioned that in 1837, British missionaries established an orphanage where several children were baptized as Christians. Moreover, several polemical books against Islam were written. Schirmacher also did not conceal the inner animosity between Catholicism and Protestantism. She says that Catholics helped Muslims by refuting Protestant missionaries. She gave Al-Kayrānawī and his book *Izhār al-Ḥaqq* their due credit and honestly quoted many European sources that were in favour of Muslims. For example, she mentioned John Toland and his comment on the Gospel of Barnabas that goes against Christians. Because of the originality of

Schirmacher's research, her work has been cited by many contemporary scholars.⁴⁵

Now, coming to the weaknesses or misunderstandings of Schirmacher's study, one can note that she repeatedly mentioned that Raḥmat Allāh al-Kayrānawī and later Muslim apologetics concluded that Christianity was a false religion and the Bible was completely corrupted and unreliable. However, this is not true because many Muslim scholars themselves referred to some verses of the Bible as the original, undistorted message. For example, the Biblical verses⁴⁶ that show the teachings of Jesus are quite similar to the Qur'ānic concept of Prophet Jesus (A.S). Moreover, Muslims accept Christianity as a revealed religion, but that is now distorted. Schirmacher said that Muslim apologists quote Western theologians and philosophers to prove that Jesus Christ survived the crucifixion. This is again a misunderstanding because the Muslim viewpoint is that Jesus did not undergo crucifixion at all, so surviving is a later thing. She understood 4: 157–158 of the Qur'ān incorrectly, meaning that "Jesus never died on the cross, even if he was perhaps crucified, which is doubtful." While the correct meaning is as follows: *"They did neither kill him, nor crucify him, but they were deluded by resemblance. Those who disputed in this matter are certainly in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it, but they follow whims. It is absolutely certain that they did not kill him, but Allah lifted him towards Himself."*⁴⁷ Schirmacher claims that before the influence of higher Bible criticism, Muslim apologists only challenged certain Biblical doctrines like the Trinity or the divinity of Jesus. This view can be criticized by describing the methodology of Ibn Ḥazm (11th century) in his study of Christianity. Jewish Rabbi Joshua Berman, who is known for his views on Biblical source criticism, wrote that the criticism of the Hebrew Scriptures by Ibn Hazm is more thorough than any writing done in Europe before the eighteenth century. Many of the discrepancies that Ibn Hazm pointed out in the Bible have served as the foundation for contemporary diachronic readings of the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁸ He integrated the use of logical reasoning and revelation. He first used logic to demonstrate the veracity of revelation (the Qur'ān). Then he used logical analysis to compare Qur'ānic verses with claims made in the corrupted scriptures to pinpoint their distortions.⁴⁹

Schirmacher thinks al-Kayrānawī's approach to counter Christian missionaries is based wholly on higher Bible criticism. Depending on this assumption, she presumes that had European scientists and theologians had claimed Christianity to be a collection of myths and legends, Muslim apologists would have accepted it. But this is not the case. Al-Kayrānawī's

approach was influenced by the techniques used by Ḥadīth scholars in Ḥadīth criticism.⁵⁰ For example, al-Kayrānawī's arguments that the books of the Old and the New Testaments are not original⁵¹ as they do not have an authentic chain of transmission aligned with the science of narrating traditions (*'ilm al-riwāyah/ naql mutawātir*). In Ḥadīth sciences, *al-riwāyah* is the expertise to accurately record reports by verifying the empirical link between reported events and their reporters. Furthermore, verifying continuity across generations of transmitters who have passed down the narratives also ensures authenticity.⁵² Al-Kayrānawī wrote: "Many times we have demanded renowned Christian scholars to produce the names of the whole chain of narrators right from the author of the book to prove their claim, but they were unable to do so. At a public debate held in India, one of the famous missionaries confessed to the truth that the absence of authoritative support for those books was due to the distress and calamities of the Christians in the first three hundred and thirteen years of their history. We examined and probed into their books and took great pains to find any such authorities, but our findings did not lead beyond conjecture and presumption. Our impartial search in the sources of their books showed that most of their assertions are based on nothing but presumptions."⁵³ Muslims cannot regard Christianity as a whole a mythological or false religion. Even some Christian denominations have declared Jesus' virgin birth a legend. For example, German Lutheran theologian Rudolf Karl Bultmann viewed the virgin birth of Jesus as a myth.⁵⁴ But Muslims still believe in it. Schirmacher criticized Muslim apologists, saying that they accept European criticism directed at Christian doctrines but think that Islamic beliefs are quite sensible. This is a false accusation on her part because Islam believes in metaphysical issues and upholds those aspects of Christianity as well, regardless of the rationalistic criticism of them, e.g., virgin birth, ascension to heaven, Parousia.

Another thing that seems strange in Schirmacher's article is that she constantly referred to al-Kayrānawī as a Shī'ī Muslim and said that his book has a cautious Shī'īte colouring. However, he is known for being a Sunni scholar.⁵⁵ In his book, where al-Kayrānawī referred to the Shī'īte scholars like Shaykh Saduq Muhammad ibn Babuyah, Sayyid Murtaza Abu'l-Qasim 'Ali ibn Husain Musawi, Qazi Nurullah Shostri, Muhammad Ibn Hasan Amili, and Muhammad Ya'qub Kalini is to refute the arguments of Christian scholars who occasionally attempt to sow suspicions in the minds of the public by using the Shī'īte writers' incorrect and concocted remarks. Al-Kayrānawī dialectically refuted the Christians who use Shī'īte statements by giving examples of Christian

sects like Ebionites, Marcionites, and Manichaeans. He questioned how the Protestants could defend their opposition to Muslims based on claims made by the Shī‘īte people, who are considered a sect by the Muslim ummah as a whole, if the assertions of these three sects are unacceptable to them.⁵⁶ For academically refuting the Christian objections, al-Kayrānawī quoted the above-mentioned authentic Shī‘īte scholars to show that even they believe in the authenticity and the intactness of the Qur’ān. The Shī‘īte themselves vehemently reject the few Shī‘īte writers who believe that the Holy Qur’ān is distorted and do not regard them to be reliable because their claims are based on unauthentic reports. Furthermore, on elucidating Qur’ān 9:100, al-Kayrānawī wrote that in this verse honour has been conferred upon all of the early embracers of Islam (including the foremost companions Abu Bakar (R.A.), ‘Umar (R.A.), ‘Uthman (R.A.) and ‘Ali (R.A.) impartially, without favouring the companion ‘Ali (R.A.) over others. Just as any criticism or disdain for the caliph ‘Ali (R.A.) is ludicrous and untrue, as it is for the previous three caliphs (R.A.).⁵⁷ All this discussion makes it pretty clear that al-Kayrānawī himself was not a Shī‘ī Muslim.

Conclusion

Christine Schirmacher’s research is based on a rational European study of the Bible and its impact on Muslims in substantiating Islam’s superiority and Christianity’s inferiority. In scholarly terms, it is known as “higher Bible criticism and its influence on Muslim apologetics.” For her, the nineteenth century was the milestone during which Muslim apologists adopted the method of confronting Christianity using Western sources. This broadened the scope of refuting Christian doctrines. For its historical application, she focused on Indian Muslim scholar Raḥmat Allāh al-Kayrānawī and his book *Izhār al-Ḥaqq*. Apart from a few points, Schirmacher maintained intellectual integrity and objectivity in her book section. However, she has some misunderstandings regarding the modern Muslim viewpoint of Christianity, by assuming, for example, that contemporary Muslim apologists consider Christianity and the Bible as a whole false and corrupted.

Schirmacher concludes that nineteenth-century Muslim apologetics is the borrowing of European philosophy to refute Christianity, and al-Kayrānawī was the first person who adopted this method. However, this is not the case. Al-Kayrānawī’s approach was not solely influenced by higher Bible criticism. He used the methodology of Ḥadīth criticism. Also, he was not the first one to use Biblical criticism in favour of Islam; other scholars before him, like Ibn Hazm, have also adopted such techniques.

References

- ¹ Christine Schirmacher, “The Influence of Higher Bible Criticism on Muslim Apologetics in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 270-79.
- ² “Prof. Dr. Christine Schirmacher,” University of Erfurt, April 19, 2023, <https://www.uni-erfurt.de/en/philosophische-fakultaet/seminare-professuren/religionswissenschaft/professuren/islamic-studies/team/prof-dr-christine-schirmacher>.
- ³ Qur’ān, 2:111
- ⁴ Translated by Mufti Taqi Usmani
- ⁵ Farman Ali, “Christian-Muslim Relations in the Second Half of 19th Century India in View of Syed Nāṣir-Ul-Dīn Muḥammad Abūlmanṣūr Dehlvi (D. 1903),” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 2 (December 6, 2023): 152–63, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.132.10>.
- ⁶ Abdul haq and Dr. Gulzada, “A Detailed and Factual Review of Izhar Ul Haqq Written by Maulana Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi,” *Al- Misbah Research Journal* 3, no. 1 (March 2023): 108–21.
- ⁷ Aisyatur Rabiah Abdullah and Maziah Mustapha, “Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi and His Work Entitled ‘Izhar Al-Ḥaq’; External Criticism toward Gospel,” *AL-ITQAN: JOURNAL of ISLAMIC SCIENCES and COMPARATIVE STUDIES* 5, no. 2 (2021): 199–218, <https://journals.iium.edu.my/al-itqan/index.php/al-itqan/article/view/205>.
- ⁸ Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu, “Raḥmat Allāh Al-Hindi Al-Kayrānwaī and His Book Demonstration of the Truth: Islamic Criticism of the Old and New Testaments,” *Al-Hikmah* 9, no. 2 (2017): 186–204.
- ⁹ Abdullah Ahsan, “A Late Nineteenth Century Muslim Response to the Western Criticism of Islam-an Analysis of Amir ‘Ali’s Life and Works,” *American Journal of Islam and Society* 2, no. 2 (December 1, 1985): 179–206, <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v2i2.2914>.
- ¹⁰ New World Encyclopedia contributors, “Biblical Criticism,” in *New World Encyclopedia*, October 1, 2023, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Biblical_Criticism&oldid=1124349.
- ¹¹ Miner Broadhead Stearns, “Protestant Theology since 1700,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 104, no. 414 (1947): 197.
- ¹² Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, Ky; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 108.
- ¹³ Ernest Cadman Colwell, “Biblical Criticism: Lower and Higher,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67, no. 1 (March 1948): 2, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3261423>.

- 14 “Why Muslim Apologetics?,” The Muslim Apologist, December 10, 2021,
 15 <https://menj.international/muslim-apologetics/>.
- 16 ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm, *Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā’i wa al-Niḥal*, vol.
 17 1 (Qahirah: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1899), 47; Raḥmat Allāh al-Kayrānawī,
 18 *Izhār Al-Ḥaqq*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Qādir Khalīl Makāwī, 1st
 19 ed., vol. 3 (Riyad: al-Idārah al-‘Āma li-al-Ṭab’ wa’l-Tarjuma, 1989), 715.
 20 Ibn Ḥazm, *Faṣl fī al-Milal*, 1/51; Al-Kayrānawī, *Izhār Al-Ḥaqq*, 3/713-
 21 714.
 22 I Kings 17:2-21; II Kings 4
 23 Ezekiel 37
 24 II Kings 13
 25 Ibn Ḥazm, *Faṣl fī al-Milal*, 1/56; Al-Kayrānawī, *Izhār Al-Ḥaqq*, 3/766.
 26 Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Jawāb Al-
 27 Ṣaḥīḥ Li-Man Baddala Dīn Al-Masīḥ*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Saudia: Dār al-
 28 ‘Āṣimah, 1999), 181-184.
 29 Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Jawāb Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3/257.
 30 Ibid., 3/263.
 31 Ibid., 3/299.
 32 Ibid., 4/158-324.
 33 Genesis 17:1-4, 28:10-17, 35:1,6, 9-15, 32:24-30; Deuteronomy 1:30-33,
 34 31:3-8
 35 Psalm 82:6
 36 II Corinthians 4:3-4
 37 Al-Kayrānawī, *Izhār Al-Ḥaqq*, 3/700.
 38 Ibid., 3/705.
 39 John 5:7 (KJV)
 40 Al-Kayrānawī, *Izhār Al-Ḥaqq*, 3/713.
 41 Mark 12:29
 42 Al-Kayrānawī, *Izhār Al-Ḥaqq*, 3/739.
 Al-Kayrānawī, *Izhār Al-Ḥaqq*, 3/721-724.
 I Corinthians 3:4, 8:1
 John 8:23, 14:9, 10;
 John 15:19, 14:20, 17:14; I Corinthians 6:19; II Corinthians 6:16;
 Ephesians 4:6
 Al-Kayrānawī, *Izhār Al-Ḥaqq*, 4/1214-1364.
 Ibid., 3/922-954.
 Muhammed Haron, “Ahmad Deedat: The Making of a Transnational
 Religious Figure,” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 27, no. 2 (2013): 79.
 Md Helal Uddin and Md Maruf Hasan, “The Methodology of Abdullah
 Jahangir in Challenging Christianity in Bangladesh,” *Journal of
 Comparative Study of Religions* 2, no. 1 (November 2021): 62,
<https://doi.org/10.21111/jcsr.v2i2.7285>.

- 43 Shahin Emad Eldin, "Rashīd Riḍā, Muḥammad," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (Oxford University Press, 2009), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195305135.001.0001/acref-9780195305135-e-0668>.
- 44 Elwood M. Wherry, *The Mohammedan Controversy* (London, 1905), 2.
- 45 Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reformism and Christianity: A Critical Reading of the Works of Muhammad Rashid Rida and His Associates (1898-1935)* (Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 23; Scott Rank, "Disputing Religion, Empire, and Modernity: Christian-Muslim Polemics in the Ottoman Print Sphere, 1861-1915" (PhD Dissertation, 2015), 22; Ammeke Kateman, *Muḥammad 'Abduh and His Interlocutors: Conceptualizing Religion in a Globalizing World* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 128.
- 46 Matthew 4:10; Mark 12:29; John 17:3
- 47 Qur'ān, 4: 157–158 (Translated by Mufti Taqī Usmani)
- 48 Joshua Berman, "The Biblical Criticism of Ibn Hazm the Andalusian: A Medieval Control for Modern Diachronic Method," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 2 (2019): 377, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1382.2019.511588>.
- 49 Mahmudul Hasan, Syed Mahbubul Alam Al-Hasani, and Mochammad Maola, "Ibn Hazm Framework of Comparative Religion Based on His Book Al-Fasl Fi Al-Milal Wa Al-Ahwa Wa Al-Nihal," *Quantum Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 5, no. 1 (February 26, 2024): 61, <https://doi.org/10.55197/qjssh.v5i1.353>.
- 50 Aisyatur Rabiah Abdullah and Maziah Mustapha, "Raḥmat Allāh al-Kayrānawī and His Work Entitled 'Izhar Al-Ḥaq'; External Criticism toward Gospel," *AL-ITQAN: JOURNAL of ISLAMIC SCIENCES and COMPARATIVE STUDIES* 5, no. 2 (2021): 199, <https://journals.iium.edu.my/al-itqan/index.php/al-itqan/article/view/205>.
- 51 Al-Kayrānawī, *Izhār Al-Ḥaqq*, 1/109-112.
- 52 Dr. Muhammad Akram, "Foundations of the Descriptive Study of Religions in Muslim History: A Conceptual Analysis," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 10, no. 2 (November 25, 2020): 82, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.102.05>.
- 53 Al-Kayrānawī, *Izhār Al-Ḥaqq*, 1/111.
- 54 Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1958), 17.
- 55 Maziah Mustapha and Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, "A Critical Appraisal of Zakir Naik's Islamic Evangelism," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 15, no. 1 (June 13, 2019): 72, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.15.2019.007>.
- 56 Al-Kayrānawī, *Izhār Al-Ḥaqq*, 3/925-928.
- 57 Ibid., 3/930.