Typologies and Argumentation Tactics in Religious Polemics

An Analysis of *al-Jawāb al Ṣaḥīḥ* and the Cyprus Letter

FARIS ZWIRAHN

Near Eastern Studies Department, Princeton University, United States

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Princeton University

ABSTRACT   Christian-Muslim polemical exchanges and the relationship between the two faiths' religious authorities in the medieval period were often rigid. One exchange between Christian theologians in Cyprus and Muslim theologians in Damascus is evidently polemical and exemplifies the difficult relations that occurred early in the fourteenth century and the nature of challenging religious arguments. That is *The Letter from the People of Cyprus* and Ibn Taymiyya's response to it. This article offers a new analysis through the perspective of particular theoretical typologies of religious polemics. Accordingly, the article shows that these two polemicists adhere to multiple scriptural and rational tactics in support of their biased understanding of religious truth and the definition of impeccable revelations. It also shows that both theologians were involved in forceful and sometimes contradictory argumentative techniques.

KEY WORDS   Ibn Taymiyya; Paul of Antioch; Christian-Muslim relations; religious dialogue

Introduction

When writing about Christian-Muslim polemical exchanges, one cannot but recall Charles J. Adams' words: "Here the difference is so great that one may well ask whether in truth there is any hope of Christian-Muslim dialogue ever progressing beyond the stage of registering the differences with one another" (1984, 306). In more detail, Adams also comments that at one level "Christianity and Islam have much in common" in their adherence to certain principles; however, they also greatly differ in important aspects.

They have "different estimates of the religious situation of mankind, offer different solutions to the problem that all men face, and issue in states and attitudes" (ibid.). Keeping these questions and concerns in mind, this article studies the exchange between two medieval polemicists, one Christian and one Muslim. These polemical exchanges include the famous Muslim theologian Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1328) voluminous book *The Apt Answer to the One Who Changed the Religion of Christ,* written to refute the claims and to respond to the attacks made by *The Letter from the People of Cyprus*, itself a modified version of Paul of Antioch's *A Letter to a Muslim Friend*. The content of the two treatises will likely be familiar to scholars of medieval Christian-Muslim relations. However, this article offers a new theoretical analysis focused on the nature of the argumentation tactics used by the contenders.

In these inter-religious polemical exchanges, polemicists did not adhere to scriptures alone; they also utilized logical argumentation techniques based on traditional Aristotelian logic. On the topic of religious polemics and the use of logical argumentation, Marcelo Dascal, a contemporary philosopher and linguist, theorized three general types of religious polemics, as well as various "moves of argumentative reason" used by polemicists (1998; 2004). Explored in more detail below, these types are: the *discussion*, the *dispute*, and the *controversy*. In light of this theoretical framework, I will analyze the above-mentioned polemical exchanges.

Two broad questions concern me: How is religious 'truth' referenced, justified, and argued for in the Cypriot theologian's treatise and Ibn Taymiyya's response? To be more specific, how do these polemicists tactically support their arguments and perceive the opponent's arguments and what is the nature of their argumentation tactics? I argue that the 'truth' of religion as understood by both polemicists is embedded in their own understanding and beliefs of scriptural and logical 'proofs.' To them,

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it is more a matter of what you believe is true, rather than what your contender is attempting to convince you is true. Also, these two medieval Christian and Muslim religious authorities were forceful in their religious debates and the techniques they used for the purpose of proving that the 'truth' and the only 'flawless' religion are embedded in their own faith.

To better guide the reader through this article, its layout and general structure will be as follows: For the purpose of placing the polemical exchange between the Cypriot theologian and Ibn Taymiyya in its historical context, the article starts with a brief history of Christian-Muslim encounters, relations, and intellectual exchanges. Second, short biographies of the two texts' authors will be presented. Then, I introduce the theoretical framework through which this inter-religious polemical exchange is analyzed with reflective primary material samples from both texts. The article ends with an analytical section of both texts and final remarks, drawing conclusions through the lenses of the theoretical framework.

Early Encounters Between Christians, Muslims, and Jews

To start with, interactions between Muslims and other monotheistic religions go back as early as the first encounters between Muslims and Jews in the early seventh century CE, and between Muslims and Christians in Syria around 630 CE (Valkenberg 2004, 379). Similarly, interactions of polemical nature go back that far as well. One of the earliest extant examples is a critique of Muslims by a Palestinian Jew who had recently converted to Christianity, dated to 634 CE. When "this learned Jew" was asked about the Prophet Muḥammad and Muslims, Sidney Griffiths reports he expressed his discontentment with the new religion and its followers. Although this

man's words do not necessarily reflect the predominant Christian and Jewish communities' views of early Muslims, his anecdotes show examples of hostility on both sides (Griffith 2008, 24–25). Furthermore, on the Muslim side, some of the early as well as the later polemics have their roots in the scripture itself. The Qurʾan presents the earliest case of criticism against Jews and Christians. Later polemics, such as those of Ibn Taymiyya's, have their roots in the Qurʾan and were also influenced by some religious authorities' understanding of scripture. Ibn Taymiyya's polemics did not only target Christians and Jews but also groups within the Islamic faith, such as Shiites, dialectical theologians (*mutakallimūn*),[1] and Muslim philosophers. There are also some more developed Muslim polemics against Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians in the early decades of the ʿAbbasid period. These writings of the ʿAbbasid period were either responses to attacks or arguments intended to provoke in their turn (Thomas 2004, 94–95). Polemical exchanges on all sides of the Abrahamic religions (i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) were initiated by questioning the authenticity of the new religion (Islam) and by allegations of corruption (by Muslims) of the scriptures of older religions (Judaism and Christianity). One of the first recorded challenging polemical exchanges, issued by a Christian asking Muslims to validate their claims about Muḥammad with testimonies from the previous scriptures, was by John of Damascus (676–749) (Cucarella 2015, 217; Noble and Treiger 2014, 19). In their turn, Muslims approached Christians with challenging communications, too. The first recorded one is a letter by Muhammad ibn al-Layth on behalf of the ʿAbbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 809), sent to the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VI (d. 805) in the 790s, asking him to convert to Islam (Roggema 2009, 349–352).

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1   For transliteration of Arabic words, I use the IJMES Transliteration System.

As time passed, polemics became more elaborate theologically and textually. For instance, in these polemical statements, best exemplified in a piece by the Andalusi Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), Muslims refuted the Trinity and questioned the authenticity of Christian scriptures and the divinity of Christ (Lazarus-Yafeh 1996, 62). In a commentary on the alleged corruption of the Bible and the alteration of its text, Ibn Ḥazm carried out one of the earliest, most detailed examinations of Christian Scripture, looking for discrepancies, contradictions, anthropomorphic description of God, and the attribution of unreasonable behavior to the prophets (Kassis 2004, 237–250). From the twelfth century onward, there is a significant rise in Muslim-Christian polemical exchanges. Some scholars argue that this may have been caused by the presence of non-native Christians in the region during the Crusades (Lazarus-Yafeh 1996, 70), when almost the entire coast of the Levant[2] was controlled by Crusader armies. It is worth noting here that there were medieval authors who recognized these tense relations between the Crusaders and Muslims and tried to establish common ground. On the Christian side, for example, Raimundus Lullus (d. 1316), who was contemporary to Ibn Taymiyya, is a famous case in point. Nonetheless, Lullus' views of common ground were influenced by his Christian views and were also rejected on both sides. His teachings were condemned by Christian religious authorities for confusing faith with reason, and his travels in the Muslim world did not end well after his attempts to convert Muslims to Christianity (Fidora 2008).

As we witnessed from the discussion above, inter-religious communications between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologians are as old as these faiths themselves. Nonetheless, the examples discussed

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2   The term Levant refers to the greater region of historical Syria, or, currently, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel/Palestine.

throughout this article are only a few within a larger history of exchanges between the religious authorities of these faiths. Clearly, the history of relations between Muslims and believers of other Abrahamic religions is more complex and it is almost impossible to reflect on in one essay. Notwithstanding whether or not these communications ever escalated to actual violence, they did sometimes result in fierce polemical exchanges in the form of direct face-to-face debates or written treatises. Polemicists usually participated to defend one's religion, to attack the opponent's faith and show its weaknesses, to convert followers of other faiths into their own, or to buttress the faith of their own religious followers against other religions (Sirry 2005).

History of the Two Polemical Treatises and Their Writers

It is useful to begin with a brief history of the two cases' documents, and reasons for their selection. As far as we know, Paul of Antioch, the Melkite Bishop of Sidon, initiated the polemical exchange studied here. Biographical information about his life and intellectual activity is still very limited. We know that he may have lived any time between the mid-eleventh century and the early thirteenth century (Ebied and Thomas 2005, 1), and that there are about twenty-four treatises attributed to him (Siddiqi 1986, 35). Scholars speculate that Paul's original letter could have been written any time between 1140–1200 CE and attest that it is "one of the longest and maybe most vehement in the whole history of the Christian-Muslim relations" (Thomas 2001, 201–204). Paul starts his letter by addressing a Muslim friend from Sidon, informing him about what Christians think of

Islam and its Prophet (Paul of Antioch 2005, 55–56)[3] after, supposedly,[4] he had already made a journey through the Byzantine empire, to southern Italy, and to Constantinople (Treiger 2013). He claimed that he met with leaders of these regions and consulted with their experts about their views of Muḥammad (Ebied and Thomas 2005, 1–2). Paul lays out a number of arguments that are allegedly taken from the Qurʾan to support Christianity. He begins with arguing that Muḥammad and his message were sent solely for the Arabs basing that on what was revealed in the Qurʾan,[5] that the Book is in Arabic, and that God sent Arabs a prophet that speaks their language (Paul of Antioch 2005, 57–58). Then he proceeds to show how the Qurʾan endorses Christian beliefs in Christ, the Apostles, the Gospels, Christian monotheism, and religious services. Paul also argues that the Qurʾan even acknowledges the doctrine of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the two natures of Christ, and the death of his human nature alone (Paul of Antioch 2005, 60–65).

Paul did not send his letter to a particular well-known Muslim theologian seeking a response. However, even before it was re-produced a century later in Cyprus, it seems that Paul's letter was known to Muslim theologians. In the course of the thirteenth century, the Egyptian jurist Shihāb al-Dīn

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3   For both Arabic versions of the letter, for this study, I consulted the published editions of Paul of Antioch's Letter to a Muslims Friend and The Letter from the People of Cyprus. They are both published in Ebied and Thomas 2005.

4   Scholars believe that Paul himself is behind the challenging arguments, questions, and the new interpretations of the Islamic scripture in the *Letter*. It is believed that 'the Christian experts' he mentions in the beginning of his letter are just convenient literary mouthpiece who can take the responsibility and blame for these interpretations. See Ebied and Thomas 2005, 4–5; Thomas 2001, 205; Cucarella 2013.

5   For this argument particularly, Paul quoted some of the following verses from the Qurʾan, "*We have sent it down as an Arabic Qurʾan, in order that ye may learn wisdom"*- Qurʾan 12:2; *"In order that thou mayest admonish a people, whose fathers had received no admonition, and who therefore remain heedless (of the Signs of Allah)"*- Qurʾan 36:6; *"And admonish thy nearest kinsmen."*- Qurʾan 26:214.

Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Qarāfī (1228–1285) noticed the letter (Cucarella 2015, 1–3; Thomas 2001, 204). In response, al-Qarāfī composed a refutation in his *Al-ajwiba al-fākhira ʿan al-asʾila al-fājira* (Splendid Answers to Insolent Questions), which was probably written between 1250–1278 (Cucarella 2015, 61). Al-Qarāfī does not name Paul—he refers to him as *Al-Naṣrānī* (the Christian)—or provide direct quotes, but summarizes his arguments and refutes them one by one in the same order in which Paul laid them out (al-Qarāfī 1986, 60). There is no doubt that al-Qarāfī knew very well the text and the details of Paul's letter (Thomas 2001, 203).

The Cypriot Theologian

Sometime in the beginning of the fourteenth century, Paul's letter reached the hands of an anonymous Christian theologian in Cyprus (Ebied and Thomas 2005, 5). There is nothing known about this theologian other than that he was a Melkite Christian living in Cyprus. He was probably a native, or maybe a refugee from the Levant, "though it must be significant that he was thoroughly acquainted with the text of the Qurʾan that he could not only add proof-text to the qurʾanic verses given by Paul but also corrected Paul's revisions of the text" (6). He revised it, removing some elements and altering others, and extensively added quotations from the Qurʾan and the Bible. As a result, the new, expanded version is twice the length or more of Paul's original. Nonetheless, in terms of structure and argumentation, Paul's *Letter* forms the basis of *The Letter from the People of Cyprus*,[6] as nearly everything that was added were more quotes from the Qurʾan.

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6   From now on, it will be referred to as the Cyprus Letter.

After reproducing and expanding Paul's letter, the Cypriote redactor separately sent two identical copies to Muslim scholars in Damascus. He sent one to Ibn Taymiyya, which was received in 1316 (Thomas 2001, 214), and the other one to Shams al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Anṣārī al-Ṣūfī al-Dimashqī (d. 1327), which was received in 1321 (al-Dimashqī 2005, 156–157). Ibn Taymiyya responded within the same year (Ebied and Thomas 2005, 25) with his voluminous book *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ* (The Apt Answer to the One Who Changed the Religion of Christ).[7] Al-Dimashqī responded later with the *Response to the Letter from the People of Cyprus*, which is a less detailed text compared to Ibn Taymiyya's.

An important question one might ask here is to which version of the letter Ibn Taymiyya responded: Paul's version or the Cypriote theologian's version? We know that both copies to which Ibn Taymiyya and al-Dimashqī responded came from Cyprus. First, Ibn Taymiyya mentioned in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* that "a letter has arrived from Cyprus containing logical and scriptural arguments for the religion of the Christians" (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 1: 98). To that he wrote his refutation in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. Al-Dimashqī also indicates in the beginning of his response that "the bishops and patriarchs, priests and monks, the foremost in faith of Christ and leaders of the community of Jesus," had sent from Cyprus two copies of the *Letter*, the first one to Ibn Taymiyya and the second to him (al-Dimashqī 2005, 156–157).

The Cypriot redactor who edited Paul's letter sought the response of two particular eminent Muslim theologians in Damascus. His editions, and his work to expand the letter by bolstering the original arguments with more qur'anic verses, reveal the intention of further challenging the targeted theologians. "Several indications suggest that the anonymous

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7   Thence, it will be referred to as *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ.*

author was indeed attempting to open a dialogue with leading Muslims" (Thomas 2010, 253). If we accept that the Cypriot Arabic-speaking Christian redactor of the letter came from a former Crusader-controlled area in Syria, then we can assume that the first person he wanted to send the letter to is Ibn Taymiyya. Ibn Taymiyya was a well-known Muslim theologian of his time for many reasons, including the popularity he "enjoyed with common people" (Little 1973, 326). He was also the most zealous and argumentative theologian of his time, which granted him the enmity of the Mamluk authorities (ibid.).

Why Ibn Taymiyya's response?

Although both Ibn Taymiyya and al-Dimashqī composed refutations of the Cyprus Letter, I chose Ibn Taymiyya's response rather than al-Dimashqī's for several reasons. First, Ibn Taymiyya is notorious for his polemical accounts of Christians and Jews, and thus further insight into his response to the Cypriot might bear on his other polemical works. Secondly, given its volume and level of detail, Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* does not have an equal among pre-modern Muslim critiques of the Christian religion in general and as a refutation of the Cyprus Letter in particular. Some have described it as one of the masterpieces of Muslim polemics against Christianity (Khalil 2012, 75; Michel 1999, vii-viii). Finally, Ibn Taymiyya received and responded to the letter first, as mentioned above, and many other scholars consider his response to be the most substantial and interesting (Siddiqi 1986, 37).

Ibn Taymiyya is well known by scholars and students of Islamic studies as Ahmad ibn Taymiyya.[8] He was born in December of 1263 in the historical town of Harran[9] and died in Damascus in 1328. As a child, he had to escape with his family from their town to Damascus during the Mongol invasion of the region. Ibn Taymiyya is considered to be one of the most prolific Muslim scholars. His contributions to Islamic thought covered varied discourses of law, theology, philosophy, qur'anic exegesis, Hadith, mysticism, and religious polemics. His early writings focused mostly on theological topics such as the interpretation of revelation and the role of reason, whereas his later works were mainly oriented towards questions of religious practice and detailed evaluations of Jews, Christians, philosophers, and different Muslim sects. To get a sense of the religious milieu in which Ibn Taymiyya worked, it is worth noting that the Syria and Egypt in which he lived were characterized by religious pluralism coupled with social and political antagonism (Roberts 1996, 344).

Which readership both polemical texts' authors targeted is an important question here. Clearly, as discussed above, the Cypriot theologian sought the response of Ibn Taymiyya and al-Dimashqī to his treatise's arguments. However, which audience Ibn Taymiyya targeted in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* remains open for discussion. Many scholars have been drawn to this question, debating whether Ibn Taymiyya intended to primarily address a Muslim audience or refute Christian arguments in the Cyprus Letter to warn the possible Muslim readers of the Letter's contents. Overall, most of the

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8   The genealogy of his full name, titles, and family names are usually introduced in Arabic monographs as: the *Shaykh al-Islām, Taqīal-Dīn* (the religious pious) Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm b. ʿAbd al-Salām b, ʿAbdullah b. Abīl- Qāsim ibn Taymiyya, *al-Harrānī* (from Harran), and *al-Dimashqī* (the Damascene) *al-Hanblī* (the Hanbalite scholar), see Yousif 2013, 20.

9   Harran is an old town located between the Euphrates and the Tigris in modern-day Turkey, not far north of the border to Syria.

literature on this work by Ibn Taymiyya leans toward the argument that it was written to warn fellow Muslims of the corrupted Christian arguments.

Louis Cheikho, a Chaldean Catholic theologian,[10] believed that Ibn Taymiyya wrote *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* as a harsh and unfair criticism of the Christian faith, which "he does not know much about" (1924, 913–914). Also, some scholars perceived the work as a theoretical and analytical study of the relationships between Christianity and Islam of the medieval era (Fritsch 1933, 31–33). Others hold the view that it "was indeed a comprehensive refutation" of the Christian apologetic *Letter* (Michel 1999, 100). Thomas Michel bases this view about *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* on its length and detail. Comparing over one thousand printed pages of *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*[11] to the relatively short Cyprus Letter indicates that the work "was conceived as definitive answer as well as an opportunity to explore more fully the nature of Christian unbelief" (ibid.).

Some of the basic arguments listed in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* against Christianity predate Ibn Taymiyya and were known among Muslims at the time. Thus, we can say that the principle motive is likely not to buttress Muslims' faith, but rather to give warning by exposing the corruption and the erroneous faith of Christians (98). Ibn Taymiyya indeed intended to warn Muslims about following what he considered the corrupted Christian faith; this is further demonstrated in his response in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, where we find a polemical response to the Cyprus Letter. In addition to the fact that he quotes the *Letter*'s arguments in order and refutes them one by one,

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10   Louis Cheikho (d. 1927 CE) was a priest and traveler. He was ethnically Assyrian and a member of the Chaldean Catholic Church (Hechaïmé 1979).

11   The copy of Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* that I referred to is one of the most recently edited versions of the book. It is a six-volume version that was edited in 1993 by Dr. ʿAlī ibn Ḥasan ibn Nāsir and published by *Dār al-ʿAṣima* Publishing House, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Ibn Taymiyya also indicates in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* that "these refutations are a response to their [Cyprus] letter" (5: 117). Additionally, although *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* constitutes Ibn Taymiyya's most prolific criticism of Christianity, it is not the only work written by him against the Christian faith. Sometime between 1303 and 1304, Ibn Taymiyya wrote another polemical treatise, *al-Risāla al-Qubruṣiyya* (The Cypriot Letter), addressed to the Crusader baron of Cyprus, inviting him to convert to Islam. In the letter, he argues for the supremacy of Islam over Christianity (Cucarella 2010). One can even speculate whether that letter motivated sending the Cyprus Letter, edited by Paul, to Ibn Taymiyya in 1316. There is also a manuscript titled *Takhjīl Ahl al-Injīl* (Shaming the People of the Bible) that is believed to be written by Ibn Taymiyya. The most dominant opinion among scholars is that this manuscript could have originally been part of *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Michel 1999, 371–373). In sum, *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* was undoubtedly written to raise the Muslim community's awareness about the arguments laid out in the Cyprus Letter. It also constitutes a highly orchestrated specific refutation of the letter and puts forth challenging arguments against Christianity in general.

A Typology of Religious Polemics

First, I will summarize the theoretical framework through which I will analyze the two polemical exchanges. In Dascal's perspective, religious polemics are part of a larger family of polemical exchanges (2004, 3). He identifies three types of religious polemics and the role of rational argumentation in each one of them: *discussion*, *dispute*, and *controversy*. Dascal constructs this typology, which will be explained shortly, based on three criteria: the scope of disagreement, the kind of content involved in these polemics,

and the means used in attempting to solve the disagreement (3–5). At the "tactical level," for each of these types of polemics there is an "ideal type of move" that is used by the polemicist to reach his or her goal in the polemical discussion (6). Dascal also classified religious polemics into three "general classes and that is according to the scope of belief basis shared by the opponents" (9). These are *intra-faith* polemics, where the adversaries are from the same religion, though perhaps different sects; *inter-faith* polemics, when the contenders belong to different established religions, and *extra-faith* polemics, in which the debate is between followers of any religion and either non-believers or believers who challenge the supremacy of religious belief in general (ibid.).

In my examination of the treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and the Cypriote theologian, I observed that the first type, the *discussion*, is not as common as the other two. Based on that finding, I will analyze the polemical exchanges within the other two types in detail below and will only identify the *discussion* type here. In the *discussion* type, the object of debate is "a well-circumscribed topic or problem" (Dascal 1998; 2004). In this type, the contenders tend to eventually acknowledge the problem, the mistake behind it, and the possible solution. The preferred "argumentative move" correlated with this type is *proof,* as, usually, the polemicists' goal in a *discussion* is to "establish the truth." *Proof* is usually based on "inference rules and evidence" accepted by the opponent. *Intra-faith* polemics are closely correlated with the *discussion* type, where participants share "a core of basic dogma," believe in the same prophets, and share the same canonical interpretations. When there is a place for doubt and debate, the participants "abide by the agreed hermeneutic procedures and submit to established procedures and authorities" (ibid.) that guide them to the correct view. Argumentative reason functions here as "a problem-solving device" (ibid.).

In the following sections, this article will examine the nature of each of the two polemical exchanges against Dascal's types of *dispute* and *controversy*. Evidently, the two religious polemical exchange cases of *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* and the Cyprus Letter fit within the category of *inter-faith* polemics. As my analysis will show, Ibn Taymiyya and the Cypriot theologian both employ tactics that fit with Dascal's types of *dispute* and *controversy.* This tactical employment sometimes happens within the frame of a single argument that is based either on revelation or on logical argumentation tactics. At other times, the two theologians' *moves* are based on both revelation and non-revelation tactics to force one argument or multiple arguments.

The Dispute Type in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* and the Cyprus Letter

In the dispute type, the object of debate is "a well-defined" discrepancy; however, the contenders never accept the nature of the problem as grounded in some mistake. Dascal believes that for the contenders, the problem of a debate is "rooted in differences of attitudes, feelings, or preferences" (2004, 5). In this type, the polemicists do not share mutually accepted procedures to depend on to solve the dispute. So, in Dascal's view, "a dispute has no solution; at most it can dissolve or be dissolved." The polemicists' goal in this type is primarily winning the debate. The ideal type of tactical "move" that displays an inherent affinity with dispute polemics is the stratagem. Dascal defines the stratagem as a move that causes a relevant audience to (re)act in a certain way by persuading them that a proposition is true (6–8).

In terms of its relation to his classes of religious polemics, Dascal correlates the *dispute* type with *inter-faith* and *extra-faith* polemics. It seems that in both of them, the contenders "reject each other's ultimate source of authority" in issues related to content and procedure (14). *Inter-faith* polemics seem to be more *dispute*-like than *extra-faith* polemics. This is due to the fact that some religions, like Judaism and Christianity, share "scriptures and dogma, hermeneutic practices, and face similar problems" (13). Inter-faith polemics of *dispute* nature are usually common in polemics between religions of similar backgrounds, like the Abrahamic religions, as "they tend to cater to similar audiences" (ibid.). Another reason that makes *inter-faith* polemics more *dispute*-like is the "manipulative use of dialectics." Dascal believes that this is more "intrinsic to the nature" of *inter-faith* polemics, as the opponents involved "diverge radically to the canon of religious truth and its representative on earth;" there is no impartial judge for whom the issue is to be brought and settled (16). Additionally, Dascal actually realizes that *inter-faith* polemics, although predominantly of the *dispute type*, also display *discussion* and *controversy* features. This fact is important in relation to the polemical exchange case studied here. As we will see, the polemicists on either side built a case that displays features of more than one type.

The Cyprus Letter

The Cyprus Letter, which, as mentioned above, in its essence is a reproduction of Paul's original, offers a vigorous defense of Christianity based on revelation—using quotes from the Qur'an and the Bible—and occasionally based on logical argumentation tactics. The Cyprus Letter, in general, is perceived by scholars as a "fair attempt to argue before Muslims

the validity of Christianity on the basis of an unsullied authoritative Bible and the Qurʾan" (Thomas 2010, 253). The Cypriot writer in particular, but also Paul, managed to take some qurʾanic verses out of their context to bolster their own beliefs at *will* (Ebied and Thomas 2005, 5). In one of his central statements, for example, the Cypriot states, "Then we find in the book also glorification of the lord Christ and his mother and that God made them a sign to the worlds, for its words are, 'And she who was chaste, therefore we breathed into her of our Spirit and made her and her son a token for all peoples'" (Cyprus Letter 2005, 60–62). The Cypriot writer takes this as a signifying factor that Christ was divine, although there is no explicit indication of that here and there are many denials elsewhere in the Qurʾan; thus, to use Thomas' terms, he effectively Christianized the verse (2005, 3). As a tactic, or in Dascal's terms, as a *move*, the Cypriot Christian polemicist quoted heavily from the Islamic Scripture, specifically stressing the verse above in order to face Ibn Taymiyya and other contenders with challenges from their own Scripture. These quotes, although interpreted differently by the Christian theologian than the by the majority of Muslims, constitute and substantiate the truth about the superiority of Christianity in the Christian polemicist theologian's perspective. This kind of *move* squarely fits Dascal's definition of the *stratagem,* where the force of this *move* lies not in compelling the opponent to hold the intended belief or perform the desired action, but rather in "rendering them speechless" and making them unable to react with a satisfactory counter-move (Dascal 2004, 7). Although sometimes the Cypriot theologian forced his own interpretations on the Islamic Scripture, it seems that he aimed at leaving his contender unable to respond. And this applies not only to the above-mentioned specific quote from the Qurʾan, but to the other ones discussed below. It would be somehow foolish for the Cypriot theologian to assume that his Muslim contenders would embrace his arguments about Christ in

the Qurʾan. However, presenting them with 'proofs' from their Scripture, in his perspective and from his understanding of the Scripture, would leave them speechless. Apparently, some scholars observed that medieval theologians "involved in Christian-Muslim polemics were, more often than not, forceful in their arguments and self-justifying rather than self-critical" (Cucarella 2015, 260). Also, the medieval polemicists "encouraged strong arguments in defense of one's own convictions" (Griffith 2014, 219).

One of the features of the *dispute* that makes this type deeply seated in *inter-faith* polemics is the manipulative use of dialectics, in which the polemicists radically resort to scripture and its canon as the only judge of the debate (Dascal 2004, 16). This is sometimes done through supporting one's view of a debated issue by a coerced interpretation of either your own or your opponent's scripture and insisting to adhere to it as the only valid reference. The Cypriot polemicist somewhat followed this tactic by quoting mostly from the opponent's scripture, in addition to his own, to support his arguments. To be more precise, it is the manipulative interpretation of scripture in most of the parts that were quoted from the Qurʾan that makes this a *dispute* in nature, tactics (or *moves*), and goals. One of the arguments, in support of which the Cypriot polemicist used the Islamic scripture, regards the sending out of Christ's Apostles with the Gospels. The Cypriot argues that this is explicitly stated in the Qurʾan; then he quotes verse 57:25: "We verily sent our messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the scripture and the balance, that mankind may observe right measure" (Cyprus Letter 2005, 64).[12] Following the same

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12   For translation of Qurʾan's verses in English, the ones that are quoted in the Cyprus Letter, the translation credit goes to the editors of the volume, Ebied and Thomas. For Ibn Taymiyya's volume, the translation of Qurʾan's verses quoted there is from The Noble Quran Website (https://quran.com), while for other non-qurʾanic quotes from Ibn Taymiyya, the translation is mine.

move, the *stratagem*, the writer of the Cyprus Letter goes on to list more support of the same Christian doctrine from the Qurʾan, quoting another verse, 2:213, from a different chapter: "And Allah sent prophets as bearers of good tidings and as warners, and revealed therewith the Scripture with the truth that it might judge between mankind concerning that wherein they differed" (65). At this point, the Cypriot polemicist *manipulatively* offers a new interpretation of these verses of the Qurʾan:

> More or less meaning by his words his 'prophets, bearers of good tidings' the disciples, who spread through the seven regions of the world and proclaimed the one book, the holy Gospel. For if he had meant Abraham, David, Moses and Muḥammad he would have said, 'and with them the scriptures', because each of them brought a scripture different from others (66).

Hence, considering this polemical case is *inter-faith*, and since Christians and Muslims do not share the same scripture, one is led to the obvious fact that there is no commonly shared hermeneutics. Thus, alternative interpretations of the respective scriptures do not work because neither faith has true standing to offer an interpretation contradictory to the interpretations of the followers of the other faith. So, taking into consideration that the actual understanding of these verses is completely different as perceived by Muslims, the Cypriot writer's *move* of offering a new different interpretation is a manipulative move. It is a move that is concerned with his intentions to win the debate, which is the ultimate goal of a disputant. And, to recall Dascal's argument, in this context each side claims the supremacy of its own source of knowledge over the other, so each polemicist strongly believes throughout the polemical exchange that the "opponents' truths" must be wrong whenever they clash with their own

"truths" (2004, 14). Evidently, the Cypriot author is forcing his own 'truth' on the Islamic scripture here.

The manipulative interpretation of scripture and forcing evidence into it, as a *dispute* tactic, is commonly used by the Cypriot theologian. For example, in an attempt to buttress his claims about the Incarnation, the Cypriot quotes the Old Testament:

> About our teaching about God the exalted, three hypostases, one God, this is because God the exalted spoke about it and made it clear to us in the books of the prophets and in the Torah. There is what he says in the first book of the Torah, 'When God willed to create Adam, God said, "Let us make a human in our own image and likeness,'" and what are his image and likeness other than his Word and Spirit (Cyprus Letter, 116).

As we see here, his argument is in support of the Incarnation and the nature of Christ, although what is meant by 'a human' here is humankind, not human characteristics in Christ. Nonetheless, the Cypriot writer still forced this argument in a persuasive tactic. The main point of the Christian author's arguments discussed above is that the essential elements of Christianity and its scripture are confirmed by the Qur'an.

The Cypriot ends his letter by reaffirming that he has showed the superiority of Christianity and that all he said is convincing and requires no further proof. "After such perfection [i.e., the perfection of Christianity] there was nothing left to institute, because everything that preceded it necessitated it, and there was no need for what came after it" (Cyprus Letter, 145). Announcing himself the winner of the debate, the Christian polemicist argues that there is no need for Islam as it is not perfect since "nothing can come after perfection and be superior, but it will be inferior or derivative from it" (ibid.) He emphasizes, "this statement is final, so peace

be upon those who follow guidance" (ibid.). These final statements by the Cyprus Letter's redactor speak to Dascal's description that "a disputant seeks to be acknowledged as the winner, regardless of whether his position is true or not" (2004, 7). Here, the Cypriot theologian applies this exact approach. He does so because he has not made his case, but rather states in an apodictic fashion that Christianity is far more superior than what comes after it, namely, Islam.

Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ

As far as the two theologians studied here are concerned, the medieval theologians' attitude mentioned above sits well not only with the Cypriot author but with Ibn Taymiyya, too. Ibn Taymiyya begins *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* by summarizing the main points and arguments of the Cyprus Letter:

> The claims of the Letter's writer can be divided into main sections. One: their [i.e., the Christians'] claims that Muḥammad was not sent to them, but to the unlettered Arabs. They also claim that the Qur'an contains verses that prove the authenticity of their religion. Two: They claim that Muḥammad praised their religion in the Qur'an…., which they use as a proof that they are right. Three: their claims that the prophecies of earlier prophets in the Torah, Gospels, and Psalms support their religion and traditions, which prove the authenticity of Christianity, and the Trinity…. Section Four: They claim that logical arguments and intellect are in agreement with the Trinity. Five: They claim that they are *Muwaḥḥidūn* (monotheists) and that their religious text, which refers to the Trinity, is similar to the figurative language in the Qur'an. Six: They claim that Jesus

came after Moses to complete his religion, therefore there is no need for more prophets (1, 101–110).

As we see, Ibn Taymiyya clearly lays out the main arguments of the Letter before he proceeds by responding to each of these main points. One of the major points Ibn Taymiyya builds his refutation on is the characteristics of prophecy and the universality of Islam. The Christian author of the Cyprus Letter does not completely reject the prophecy of Muḥammad, but limits his message to the Arabs. In Ibn Taymiyya's response, one of the first issues he is concerned with is showing that Muḥammad was sent as a universal prophet with a universal message. Ibn Taymiyya utilizes many tactics, but the main one is through quoting generously from the Qur'an. He starts with verse 3:85: "And whoever desires other than Islam as religion—never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers" (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 1: 113). Ibn Taymiyya goes on buttressing his argument with more verses from the Qur'an.[13] From the beginning, and throughout his response, Ibn Taymiyya states that scripture, and the Qur'an more precisely, is the tribunal of judgement in the debated issues. In other words, arguments and decisions about debated issues must be approved by the scripture; the scripture is the judge and reference here. For example, in responding to the Cypriot polemicist's argument that Muḥammad was sent only to the unlettered Arabs, Ibn Taymiyya's comments, "The Prophet said that he was sent to them [i.e., Christians] and to the whole humankind and the Jinn. He had never said that he was not sent to them and there is nothing in his book [the Qur'an] stating that. … They ignored many clear verses in the Qur'an that confirm he [Muḥammad] was sent to them …" (1: 124–125).

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13   In this section of his response, he quotes mainly the following verses of the Qur'an: 26:198, 26:199, 2:151, 32:3, 30:47, and more.

The vast majority of Muslims, but particularly Ibn Taymiyya as an apologist, "hold to the premise that whenever the witness of the Qurʾan or Prophetic traditions comes into conflict with that of the Old or New Testament, the former is to be given clear priority over the latter" (Roberts 1996, 364). Ibn Taymiyya's *moves* and responses are more articulate and developed as a polemical case compared to the Cyprus Letter. He utilized multiple tactics against his opponents. He also tends to raise many different issues at the same time and then tackle them all together.

In his efforts to prove the authenticity and universality of Muḥammad's prophecy, Ibn Taymiyya responded, in a *dispute* maneuver, to what he calls "their [the Christians'] argument that 'it is conditional for the authenticity of a prophecy to be confirmed by previous prophets'" (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 5: 144). He devoted an immense chunk of his response quoting previous prophets. Ibn Taymiyya argues that "there is no doubt among Muslim scholars (*al-ʿulamaʾ al-muslimūn*) that the Christ peace be upon him promised (*bashshara*) of the coming of Muḥammad peace be upon him as God said" (147). Then, he quotes the Qurʾan, verse 61:6: "And [mention] when Jesus, the son of Mary, said, 'O children of Israel, indeed I am the messenger of Allah to you confirming what came before me of the Torah and bringing good tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name is Ahmad.' But when he came to them with clear evidences, they said, 'This is obvious magic'" (ibid.). Evidently, Ibn Taymiyya based his *stratagem* evidence on his Islamic scripture to respond to the Christian theologian's argument of "previous prophetic approval" of the Muslim prophet. Then, he quotes more verses from the Qurʾan that confirm the prophecy of Muḥammad. Refuting the same Christian claim in another *dispute stratagem* tactic, Ibn Taymiyya makes a bolder move and quotes what he believes to

be proof from the Psalms. He quotes some of Psalm149:1–9[14] but leaves most of it out. Ibn Taymiyya forcibly interprets some of these verses, saying "these characteristics fit Muḥammad and his followers. They are the ones who praise God in loud voices in their calling for prayers five times on high places" (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 5: 226–227). Following the same maneuver used earlier by the Cypriot polemicist, Ibn Taymiyya here is manipulatively forcing his interpretations on Christian scripture, which is a clear feature of a *dispute* polemic. In other words, it is the "disagreements on the content and procedures" between contenders that play a role in his argument. Some scholars believe that Muslim theologians' reference to and interest in the Christian scriptures is associated with actions of 'Biblicizing' the Islamic prophetic claims, and 'Islamizing' the biblical material (Griffith 2005). In these scholars' view, Muslim theologians do so by forcing the authenticity of Muḥammad's message to depend on the Bible's authority. Following the same *dispute* tactics, Ibn Taymiyya then forced another argument that the prophet Isaiah announced the name of Muḥammad, saying, "I have made your command, O Muḥammad, O Holy One of the Lord, your name is there forever" (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 5: 257).

To show the superiority of Muḥammad's prophecy and Islam to other religions and prophets, Ibn Taymiyya restated a commonly embraced argument by Muslim theologians that God preferred some of his prophets over other prophets. Ibn Taymiyya quotes some of verse 17:55: "And We

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14   1 Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. 2 Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. 3 Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp. 4 For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation. 5 Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. 6 Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; 7 To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; 8 To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; 9 To execute upon them the judgment written: this honor have all his saints. Praise ye the Lord.

have made some of the prophets exceed others [in various ways], and to David We gave the book [of Psalms]" (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 6: 131). Ibn Taymiyya comments that prophets exceeded each other in revelations, miracles, and in their followers, too. In his views, any person of knowledge and justice (*'ilm wa 'adl*) who looks into the Qur'an, the Torah, and the Gospels knows that Muḥammad, his Scripture, and his followers exceeded the others (132–133). Ibn Taymiyya devotes more than two hundred pages in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* to support this argument and to lay out more details about the miracles of Muḥammad.

Among the author's other main targets in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* is the Trinity, what is lawful and what is prohibited in Christianity, and the authenticity of Christian scripture. First, Ibn Taymiyya builds some of his *moves* on the claim of unauthentic Christian scripture by accusing them of *taḥrīf* (corruption) of Jesus' teachings. *Taḥrīf* is one of the most often recurring tropes in Ibn Taymiyya's tactics in his polemical evaluation of Christianity, which he often supports by quoting from the Qur'an, Ḥadīth, as well as from the Torah and the Gospels. Additionally, he uses philosophical and logical argumentation as tactics of judging Christian traditions in relation to what an authentic prophetic revelation is and is not. In a *dispute*-related move, Ibn Taymiyya grants Islamic Scripture the superiority and authenticity as the judge of the debate to show what he believes was the original message of Jesus and how it was corrupted later by Christians. He argues, "The true message of religion is what God revealed to his Messenger [Muḥammad], which is different from Christians who after Christ came up with many innovations *(bida')* he [Jesus] did not allow, neither the Gospels, nor mentioned in other books. They claimed that what their religious leaders permitted, Christ would allow too" (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 2: 340-341). Here, in a *stratagem move*, Ibn Taymiyya not only builds his argument on revelation to show 'the superiority of Islam,' but also claims that the Christian religious

authorities had changed their original scriptures and the teachings of the prophets through *taḥrīf*. He goes on to argue that Christians had corrupted the teachings of Christ by either misinterpreting them or by intentionally adding or eliminating ideas. On this specific Islamic polemical theme of *taḥrīf* against Christianity, Gabriel Reynolds argued that it is a reflection of "the traditional Christian polemical motif of the Jews failure to read Scripture properly" (Reynolds 2010, 189). So according to Reynolds' argument, Muslims inherited this from Christians and used it against them. One scholar has referred to this polemical tactic as "suppersessionist" theology. "Christians find themselves understood by Muslims in terms very reminiscent of those that Christians have historically used to understand other religions, and most specifically, Judaism" (Heim 2008, 28).

In his tactics to refute the Cyprus Letter's claims in support of the Incarnation, Ibn Taymiyya begins with the Christian's belief that God's spirit was incarnated into Christ's human body. He compares the miracles of Jesus to those of Moses to show Christians' misunderstanding of Jesus' nature. He believes that although Moses' miracles were greater than those of Jesus, God did not incarnate in a human body or any other beings in order to be able to talk to him. Refuting his Christian contenders' claims, Ibn Taymiyya affirms that God talked to Moses without incarnating into a tree as Christians claimed (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 4: 5–25). Then he bolsters these refutations by quotes from the Qur'an, starting with verse 28:30.[15] In another, similar *dispute* tactic, he attacks the Cypriote author's claim that the Qur'an confirmed that Jesus was a creator when he made a bird of clay then breathed life into it. Ibn Taymiyya argues that Christians

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15   "But when he came to it, he was called from the right side of the valley in a blessed spot - from the tree, 'O Moses, indeed I am Allah, Lord of the worlds.'"

misunderstood the verse 5:110[16] in the Qur'an and corrupted it in the same way they corrupted other prophets' revelations. He states that God did not mention that Jesus was a creator in the Qur'an. Giving tribunal authority to Islamic scripture once again, Ibn Taymiyya then comments that God said in the same verse (5:110) that it was a miracle that happened with the permission of God. It is a blessing God granted to Christ like any other of God's prophets (40–50). Ibn Taymiyya then supports his arguments with verse 43:59[17] from the Qur'an. He devotes all of volume four in the current print of *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ* to examples like these. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that some have accused him of misrepresenting the concepts of the Trinity and Incarnation in the way he refuted them in his response:

> The conception of the Trinity upon which Ibn Taymiyya bases his objection—
> namely, that: (a) the Father is the Essence from which the Holy Spirit and
> the Word proceed and to which they are related as attributes, and, (b)
> that each of these three 'Persons' is itself an attribute of God (who would
> then have to be the Essence encompassing all three)—is clearly confused.
> (Roberts 1996, 356)

16　"[The Day] when Allah will say, 'O Jesus, Son of Mary, remember My favor upon you and upon your mother when I supported you with the Pure Spirit and you spoke to the people in the cradle and in maturity; and [remember] when I taught you writing and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and when you designed from clay [what was] like the form of a bird with My permission, then you breathed into it, and it became a bird with My permission; and you healed the blind and the leper with My permission; and when you brought forth the dead with My permission; and when I restrained the Children of Israel from [killing] you when you came to them with clear proofs and those who disbelieved among them said, 'This is not but obvious magic.'"

17　"Jesus was not but a servant upon whom We bestowed favor, and We made him an example for the Children of Israel."

Like the Cypriot, Ibn Taymiyya's response shows us that the same approach of religious superiority thrived in Islam. Although Muslims recognize other prophetic revelations, they also believe that some of these religions' teachings were abrogated by the qur'anic revelation. This gave Muslims the platform to transfer this tradition of abrogation to some realier Abrahamic religions' rules, too. As expected, this Muslim "supersessionist" approach was rejected by both Jewish and Christian religious authorities (Tritton 1962, 60–65). Overall, Ibn Taymiyya was convinced that believers, especially among Christians, had no excuse but to see the truth after the message of Islam was revealed by Muḥammad. As we see here, in Ibn Taymiyya's tactics, based on *dispute* arguments, he is "diverging radically to the religious truth" by affirming that Islam is "the only representative of truth on earth," in Dascal's terms (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 3: 200). Clearly, in essence, Ibn Taymiyya's words resemble those of the Cypriot theologian cited above about the perfection of Christianity. Ibn Taymiyya continues arguing that this is the truth that Christian religious authorities deny, which otherwise should lead them to follow Islam instead. The truth in religion is that God sent messengers to humanity over different periods of time. Each one came to affirm, complete, or correct the teachings of the previous prophets and messengers. While the essence of God's *risāla* (message of religion) in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is invariable, Islam came to complete these teachings and correct the corrupted ones (ibid.).

The Controversy Type in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* and the Cyprus Letter

The final, and most important, type of religious polemics that Dascal identifies is the *controversy*. Dascal argues that it is part of an alternative

to Kant's classical typology of polemics and places the type between "the strict rule-based notion of rationality that characterizes *discussion,* and the concept of *dispute* as governed by extra-rational factors" (2004, 10). The importance of the *controversy* comes from its role in filling the gap in Kant's traditional polemical typologies. Kant considered the existence of only two types of polemical exchanges in their relation to pure reason. These are the discussion type, which is exemplified by physics and mathematics, and the dispute type, exemplified by metaphysics (Kant 2007, 593–605). Dascal believes that *controversy* could be correlated with *inter-faith*, *intra-faith*, and *extra-faith* polemics. He defines the *controversy* as "a polemical exchange that occupies an intermediate position between *discussion* and *dispute*" (Dascal 2004, 4). It begins with one specific problem, but it spreads to other problems and "reveals profound divergences." The core issue of the debate is not perceived as "a matter of mistake" to be corrected, nor are there mutually "accepted procedures for deciding" the issue. This will cause the issue of controversy to continue in its existence.

In a *controversy,* the polemicist's goal is to persuade the opponent to accept one's position (5–7). The ideal type of "move" that is preferred here is the *argument*. In Dascal's terms, an *argument* is a kind of move that aims to "*persuade* the addressee to *believe* that a proposition is true" (7). For the *controversy* type, Dascal is convinced that logical argumentation has "an important but broadly conceived role." *Controversies* "typically do not end by decisions or solutions" (16). As for the relation between *controversy* and *inter-faith* polemics, Dascal sees the use of argumentative reason in *inter-faith* polemical exchanges as "a remarkable example of a controversy-like aspect" (Dascal 2004, 16).

According to Dascal's typology, although *inter-faith* polemics are predominantly of the *dispute* type, they also show features of the *discussion* and the *controversy*. The main reason for this, he explains, is that in spite

of religions' competing claims to truth, they essentially use the same argumentative procedures (15). That, in other words, allows polemicists to seek support of their arguments not only through scripture but also through philosophical logical arguments and other means. Dascal sees an example of that in *controversy* debates when polemicists consult reason and rational argumentation tactics in *inter-faith* polemics.

Controversy in the Cypriot theologian's treatise

We witness the utilization of logical argumentation, which is a characteristic of *controversy*, in the Cyprus Letter's author's tactical *moves* when seeking to support the Christian doctrines of Trinity and the Incarnation. The Cypriot used certain logical argumentation analogies to explain the Trinity. He used some of these analogies when he argued that Trinity does not mean worshiping three gods (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) as Muslims believe, but one God. He compares this to certain analogies saying that a fire's flame, heat, and radiance is three fires, or saying that the sun's disk, brightness, and beams are three suns (Cyprus Letter, 122).

As we saw from his arguments above, the Christian polemicist's *moves* are connected to scripture, specifically the Qur'an and Muslims' criticism of the Trinity. However, in other parts of the *Letter*, especially when he argues in defense of the Incarnation and the Trinity, his *moves* are more diverse, and he bases them on the Old Testament, the Qur'an, as well as on reason. Some of these tactics show *controversy* features, too. For instance, in defense of the Incarnation and the language used by Christians to refer to Christ and the Trinity, the Cypriot author follows a polemical tactic by first attacking the Muslims' use of anthropomorphic language about God in their scripture and how they use the attribute names of God. He comments:

> What made them [Muslims] say that He [God] has two eyes by which He
> can see; two hands, which He spreads wide; a leg; a face that He turns
> in every direction; a side; and that He comes in the darkness of clouds[?]
> They [Muslims] did so that people hearing this might imagine that God the
> exalted has a body, limbs and organs, and that He moves from place to
> place in the darkness of clouds[?] (Cyprus Letter, 130).

The Cypriot writer goes on arguing that this anthropomorphic language gives the impression that Muslims assign bodily features to the Creator and that "indeed, people among them have believed this and taken it as their doctrine" (Cyprus Letter, 130–131). Then, in defense of the same arguments, he follows another tactic by employing Aristotelian principles about the philosophical meaningfulness of calling God substance (Ebied and Thomas 2005, 8–10). Here, he lays out an old philosophical argument that all existing things are either substances or accidents, and since substances are the more noble of these two categories, God must be a substance, though uncreated. Furthermore, he is not a solid substance that might bear accidents but is more like subtle substances, such as the soul, intellect, or light (Cyprus Letter, 136–138).

In classifying the polemical argumentative tactical *move*, we can consider both tactics, used above, of the *argument* type and nature, which is preferred in a *controversy* debate. In Dascal's perspective, this kind of move aims to persuade the contender to believe that a certain proposition is true. Clearly, the Incarnation is a topic of huge disagreement between the followers of the two faiths. And "still no matter how Christians seek to explain it, the conviction that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them' (2 Cor. 5:19) will remain a point of division between Christians and Muslims" (Cucarella 2015, 215).

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Controversy in Ibn Taymiyya's treatise

In response to the Trinity-related claims in the Cyprus Letter, an argument Ibn Taymiyya elaborated on in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* is the Christian claim that Jesus is divine. Ibn Taymiyya believes that the followers of the Christian faith misinterpreted the miracles Jesus performed and arrived at the wrong conclusion. He states, "miracles should not be taken as a sign of divinity (*al-ilāhiyya*). All prophets performed miracles and they were not considered to be gods" (2: 4). Elaborating on this, Ibn Taymiyya employed logical argumentation tactics to support his *controversy*-type *moves*. An example that illustrates the utilization of logical argumentations in his accusations is when responding to the Christian belief that "Christ was both God and a messenger of God." Ibn Taymiyya argues, "if he was God, he cannot be a messenger of God at the same time" (i.e., if God was talking directly to people, He would not need a messenger). For Ibn Taymiyya, this is more of a rational issue: you cannot be your own messenger, for "if he was a messenger of God, he cannot be God at the same time" (46). Based on Ibn Taymiyya's arguments and tactics, we can say that although he intended to fault theologians who depended on logical argumentation methods in religious debates, he made use of the same tactics in his polemics against these theologians. By not adhering to revelation alone as a polemical strategy, but also to argumentative reason, Ibn Taymiyya, as well as the Cypriot theologian, follow tactics that speak to Dascal's assertion concerning his third type, that of the *controversy*. Adding it as an alternative between the two typical types of religious polemics that make use of either scripture or pure reason, polemics that utilize the *controversy*'s tactics are more forceful in their arguments. Nonetheless, for Ibn Taymiyya, prophetic revelation remains at the center of measuring the authenticity of any kind

of religious knowledge. He frequently quotes the Qurʾan, according to which Jesus was not the son of God but rather his messenger.

We know from Dascal's typology that in a *controversy* polemical debate, a polemicist lists as many arguments as possible even if it does not necessarily lead to deciding on the truth of the matter under debate, but rather on tilting the balance in the polemicist's favor. In other words, the polemicist "seeks to provide reasons for believing in the superiority of a position, even though such reasons do not conclusively prove it" (2004, 7). Utilizing the *argument move* of a *controversy*, Ibn Taymiyya attacks one of the Cypriot polemicist's principles by arguing that Christians cannot seek support of their belief from the Qurʾan. He also believes that the 'proof' they cite from the Old Testament in support of their arguments about the Trinity and Incarnation is actually proof against them. He makes his logical explanation here by arguing that you cannot seek proof from what Muḥammad revealed and at the same time reject him and his message (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 1: 130–135). Thus, Ibn Taymiyya is working through logical argumentation here, a distinctive feature of the *controversy* type of polemics. When religious texts fail as a procedural tribunal to decide on the truth, Dascal believes, it is "only the appeal to rational persuasion could somehow narrow the gap between the parties" (2004, 16). Although it is doubtful that Ibn Taymiyya's intentions here are to narrow the gap to reach out for an agreement with his contender, it is rather to make a point that his contender's argument is baseless.

Ibn Taymiyya believes that all of the Christian theologian's references to the Qurʾan and older scriptures in the Cyprus Letter disprove his arguments. In Ibn Taymiyya's view, the Qurʾan came to both confirm and reject some of the Jewish and Christian teachings. It is one of the pillars of faith in Islam to believe in the previous messengers of God, like Moses and Jesus, and their true teachings, he notes. However, Christians should not interpret this

as if these beliefs were in support of their corrupted teachings. He adds, "They [Christians] often use logical tactics to verify their arguments about the prophets' teachings. However, this maneuver itself is a proof that they corrupted the prophets' teachings" (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 1: 104). In other words, Ibn Taymiyya believes that the Christian religious authorities' use of logical analysis to establish the truth is not convincing and that this could be used against them. He is convinced that Christian theologians use logical argumentation in order to cover up the textual corruption in their tradition, and thus lack an authentic revelation to support their arguments. Instead, they employ imperfect strategies of intellectual reasoning. "Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the straightforward meaning of a genuine prophetic saying will never conflict either with reason or with the messages brought by previous prophets" (Roberts 1996, 347). However, while Ibn Taymiyya does employ *moves* based on logical argumentation, along with revelatory texts to expose the flaws in the Christian tradition, he still castigates their use of the same strategies. One might believe that this could be classified as an internal contradiction in his tactics, but he does not assign much power to logical argumentation as an independent strategy in any case. Ibn Taymiyya believes that logical argumentation might be a good strategy, but only if your premises are right, i.e. based on the truth of revelation.[18]

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18   Historically, Muslim philosophers, theologians, and scholars had great disagreements on reason and revelation as sources of religious knowledge and debate tools. The main disagreement, which occurred several centuries before Ibn Taymiyya, was between the Mu'tazilites, proponents of logical reasoning, and the Ash'arites. For the Ash'arites, "moral values could only be ultimately based on Scripture, as that was the only source that could be deemed absolutely reliable" (see Khalil 2006, 105). The Mu'tazilites, meanwhile, employed rational and philosophical arguments in their debates about theology. Notably, the Hanbalites, which Ibn Taymiyya is part of, adopted similar views as the Ash'arites, giving less value to reason. However, despite being theologically closer to the Ash'arite camp, Ibn Taymiyya, as a Hanbalite scholar, engaged some of the same techniques of rationalist analysis as the Mu'tazilites (see Ahmed 1972, 99).

Therefore, for him, Christians resort to this strategy when criticizing the Islamic tradition, while their premises are wrong, which, as a result, counts against them. Ibn Taymiyya does believe that revelation is the ultimate reference for logical strategies of argumentation. He is also convinced that the two should not disagree with each other (Abrahamov 1992, 272). Ibn Taymiyya also takes revelation as the basis of reason, not the opposite. In other words, he looks at revelation as more powerful and legitimate means than logical argumentation.

Taqlīd (imitation) is also a common polemical theme that Ibn Taymiyya used in his criticism of Christians in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. He used the term *taqlīd* with its negative connotations as "blind following, or imitation" by the faiths' followers of their religious authorities who corrupted the Scriptures. Using moves indicative of *controversy*, he used logical argumentation as a tool for judging which revelatory texts were correct and how Christians misinterpreted them. Reaching these conclusions, Ibn Taymiyya criticized Christians' loyalty to their spiritual masters and the religion of their ancestors despite his own critique that Christian religious authorities were misleading them. His main concern here is related to whom to follow and imitate in religion, God's authentic revelations or imitating corrupt religious authorities. He states:

> He who follows the religion of his ancestors as a routine of his life and ignores following the truth, is the dreadful imitator (*muqallid*). So is the situation of the Jews and Christians. …. He who obeys the people in disobeying God and His messengers is either following doubt or following his passion and many follow both. Thus, this is the situation of all of those who disobeyed the messengers of God among the infidels and the People of the Book (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 3: 198).

Clearly, in Ibn Taymiyya's perspective, the misled Christians, who followed the traditions and rituals of their ancestors, are poor "imitators". Thus, would Christians use their intellect, they would find that their scriptures are corrupted by their priests, and that Islam is the true path to God. To him, rational thinking should have provided Christians with the tools to uncover corruption of their texts. So, with *controversy*-debate *arguments*, Ibn Taymiyya argues that if the Christian religious authorities looked with a sound mind into their scripture they would find the truth. He accuses their clergy of knowing the truth, the right message of their religion, and the right path to God, but refusing to follow it while deluding their own followers. He states, "every person of intellect should admit this, even among the Jews and Christians. They know that the religion of Muslims is the true religion, and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, and that whoever follows him goes to Paradise" (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* 3: 203).

Christian-Muslim Polemics in Analysis

Overall, the nature of the approaches and the *moves* adopted in the Cyprus Letter are made patently clear here, "where verses from the Qurʾan are mustered together with Biblical quotations and rational arguments to make the point that Muslim scripture is not only not intended for Christians but actually approves their position" (Ebied and Thomas 2005, 3). Additionally, the Cypriot theologian adopts careful *moves* in piling up his arguments. He not only quotes extensively from scriptures, while sometimes bending the references and interpretations, and using reason, but he eliminates some main ideas of Paul's original letter. He does so in a tactical-speculative way, foreseeing that certain parts of the Cyprus Letter might invite powerful counter-arguments with indignation (8-9). He also accumulates as many

arguments as possible against the opponents' possible objections in a tactic to bend "the balance of reason in his favor"—a move indicative of *controversy* polemics, according to Dascal. In its final result, the *Letter* the Cypriot prepares to send to Damascus roots the claims for Christianity on firm scriptural foundations, biblical and qur'anic, "and employs scripture with respect to its original form" (Michel 1999, 96).

In his exertion of proving the imperfection of Islam and the non-universality of its prophet and message, the divinity of Christ, the Incarnation, and the Trinity, the Cypriot polemicist based his tactics on scriptural and logical philosophical proofs. Furthermore, he castigated Muslims for their criticism of the language used in Christian scriptures, arguing that they themselves have anthropomorphic language in the Qur'an. His approaches reveal features primarily of the *controversy* and *dispute* types. As we know from Dascal's arguments, it is common for a polemical exchange to be of more than one type. As a matter of fact, polemical exchanges are rarely "pure" examples of one of the three studied types (2004, 8).

In inter-faith polemics, according to Dascal, debates mostly take the form of a *dispute,* as polemicists reject the authority of each other's scriptures in matters related to "content and procedure" (14). Consequently, we observe the disagreements with regard to "content" through the Cypriot author's persistence in forcing proofs and different interpretations of Islamic Scripture. As for "procedure" of debate, which I prefer to call the *device* of debate, the Christian polemicist evidently adheres to the Christian canon and Christian understandings of Islamic canon, as well as to classical philosophical procedures, all of which Ibn Taymiyya refutes. These conclusions confirm Dascal's observation that in *disputes*, the opposition between theses in conflict is mostly perceived as "ideological" and has no solution in the end (7–9). While Ibn Taymiyya's approach of employing both

revelation and logical argumentation goes along with his intention to prove that Islam takes evidence from scripture, it still encourages the use of sound, logical argumentation on the premise that reason, if used properly alongside revelation, will guide one to the truth (Abdullah 2006, 105).

When evaluating Christian scripture, traditions, and practices, Ibn Taymiyya also targeted what he believed to qualify as *tahrīf* and *taqlīd.* medieval Muslim polemicists in general targeted Christianity using two common central arguments: *Naskh* (abrogation), the idea that Islam had abrogated many of Christianity's teachings, and *taḥrīf*, already explained above*.* As mentioned earlier, some of these arguments were used in ways similar to early Christian polemics against Jews. For instance, Muslim authors accepted the Christian argument that Christianity abrogated Judaism through God's preordained decree, but argued that Islam, containing God's final dispensation for mankind, later abrogated both Judaism and Christianity (Lazarus-Yafeh 1996, 63–64). In short, the point here is that Muslim polemics against Christians (and Jews) are built on premises similar to Christian polemics against Jews.

Al-Jawāb al- al-Ṣaḥīḥ sums up Ibn Taymiyya's attitude towards Christianity, which, in the context of the time it was written, scholars perceive to "eloquently detail[...] the Islamic rejection of Christian beliefs and its understanding of the right relationship between the two faiths" (Thomas 2013, 247). In general, there are main thematic functions of medieval Muslim polemical literature against Christians. Some of these are polemics in defense of Islam's superiority and its better civilization, polemics that argue for the existence of foreseeing the coming of Muḥammad and Islam in biblical sources, and polemics as a response to Christian social antagonism (Cucarella 2015, 56–58). Some of these themes were used by Ibn Taymiyya as well. In other words, he mostly repeated

what previous Muslim theologians had already said, although his critique is more elaborate and more bitter in its discourse.

As mentioned earlier, Dascal offers the third type, the *controversy*, to stand in between *discussion*, which is strictly based on rationality, and *dispute*, which takes scripture as its ultimate tribunal reference (2004, 10). Some of the typical characteristics of *controversy* are present in the representative material quoted from the Cyprus Letter and *al-Jawāb al- al-Ṣaḥīḥ.* The polemicists' tactics of switching between scriptural and logical 'proof' are intrinsic, in Dascal's perspective, to the *controversy* polemical exchange. Dascal also tells us that in a *controversy*, the disagreements between both sides of the polemic include the "attitude and preferences," as well as the existing methods of problem-solving (2004, 6). When arguing for proofs in support of their tactical *moves*, both theologians showed their inclinations to certain *preferences* (scriptural and philosophical) that they used. Clearly, from the final statement in the Cyprus Letter, the "guidance" the Cypriot urges his Muslim contenders to follow is Christianity, which, in his perspective, would solve all debated matters.

In light of Dascal's theoretical view, the arguments of both Ibn Taymiyya and the Christian theologian are problematic. Despite their ostensible ambition, neither seems to actually expect a constructive dialogue with the targeted party. In line with Dascal's theoretical arguments, both Ibn Taymiyya and the Christian author reject the authority of their opponent's scripture, and each claims the supremacy of his own religious scripture over the other. In other words, even though each party of the polemical exchange utilized scriptural and logical *moves* to fault the other, these tactics were not successful to convince the opponent polemicist. This is mainly so because, as Dascal suggests, reason often takes on a marginal instrumental role in *dispute* and *controversy* polemics, as both sides fail to recognize each other's religious text while asserting the primacy of

revelatory truth. As a summary example, Ibn Taymiyya argues that utilizing reason should indicate that the Christian texts are corrupt, but it seems that with reference to Islamic revelation, reason can in fact claim authority.

When looked at through the lens of Dascal's typology, it becomes clear that the "content and procedure" of Ibn Taymiyya's and the Cypriot theologian's arguments contribute to their bitter disagreement. Both sides perceive the debated issues and their relevant scriptures differently. They also have different ways of solving the problems that arise from these issues. "Under these circumstances, the very possibility of establishing a decision procedure that would solve the problems raised" in this polemical exchange "is ruled out" (Dascal 2004, 14). The situation is so because in a *dispute*, a "dissolution" will remain an external "closure" to both the repressed topic of divergence of the dispute and to the participants. In this case, this means "the underlying divergences tend to recur" either in conflicts over other topics or in debates over other versions of the same topic (5). In practical terms, we can say that the same disagreements and questions of this medieval Christian-Muslim exchange are still debated and not settled today.

Similarly, approaching these issues in a manner reminiscent of the *controversy*-type is no less problematic. Dascal believes that *controversies* are "neither solved nor dissolved; they are, at best, resolved" (ibid.). The resolution of a controversy usually occurs through the 'acknowledgment' by the contenders that enough arguments have been piled up in favor of one position, or the controversies are resolved through the "emergence of modified positions" that are acceptable to the contenders. Both options are ruled out here since victory seems to be acknowledged by neither (ibid.). As we saw in this polemical exchange, each side of the debate accumulated enough proofs, in their perspective, to declare that they are the winner of the debate. However, neither side acknowledged their contender's claim

to victory. It seems that, theoretically, only "an emergence of modified positions" (Dascal 2004, 6) would lead to dialogues between Christian and Muslim religious authorities that are more likely to result in a resolution. This new position must go "beyond only registering the differences" between the two religions (ibid.). Rather, it must build on the parallels between the two religions. Overall, and to put it in Walter Kaufmann's terms, "No religion is an island and each has defined itself in relation to others" (Kaufman 1976, 15).

Among the scholars who looked into this polemical exchange between Ibn Taymiyya and the Cypriot Christian theologian, some believe that, "strangely, both the Christian and Muslim theologians involved in this correspondence share a similar attitude, which is that the faith of the other is an incomplete version of their own" (Thomas 2013, 262). As we have shown, the Cypriot does not completely reject the Qur'an; however, he interprets its message to be limited to the Arabs and argues that its limited truth regarding Christianity can only be understood in the light of the Christian scripture itself. Likewise, Ibn Taymiyya is convinced that the original, uncorrupted Christian traditions of Jesus align with the message of Islam. Diego Cucarella, who studied the exchange between Paul of Antioch and al-Qarāfī, argues that this exchange continues to influence today's dynamics between Christians and Muslims. "Neither of the two traditions speaks with one voice when talking to each other. Their discourse is plural and often contradictory" (2015, 270). This echoes Hugh Nicholson's distinction of two moments in the formation of religious identity. One is a political moment of exclusion, the '*we* are not like *them*;' the other is an ideological moment, imbedded in the first, which allows '*us*' to declare '*them*' as different and unworthy (Nicholson 2011, 3–17). Furthermore, Nicholson emphasizes a "two-dimensional understanding of religion," divided into "the horizontal worldly relations between religious

communities" and "the vertical transcendental relations between human beings and God." In doing so, he argues for taking religions out of their historical categorizations as "Islamic faith," "Christian faith," and so forth, to more universal categorizations like "faith in Islam" and "faith in Christianity" (ibid.).

Conclusion

To conclude, the following question remains to be answered: How is the *truth* of religion and its authentic message justified and argued for by the Cypriot theologian's treatise and Ibn Taymiyya? The *truth* as understood by both polemicists is as embedded in their own understandings and beliefs of scriptural and logical 'proof.' Both polemicists engaged in this exchange are convinced that this should be shown to both supporters (of the same faith) and opponents. To put it in Dascal's terms, "because of the claim to truth of religion must be shown to believers to be more justified than its competitors' claims to truth, proponents of a religion are bound to engage in polemics, in which success is vital" (2004, 18). Indeed, these polemical religious debates are more about the idea of "success is vital" and *truth* as you see it than an agreement on differences.

In general, in their pursuit to show the truth of religion, medieval Muslim religious authorities, especially Ibn Taymiyya in his treatise here, followed certain polemical themes against Christians. One of these is that Islam is superior to Christianity and its civilization. Another line of polemics argues for the existence of foreseeing the coming of Muḥammad and Islam in biblical sources, which, in its turn, shows 'the truth' to Christian religious authorities and invites Christian followers to follow Islam. The third is related to what Ibn Taymiyya perceives as a fact, namely that Christian

religious authorities corrupted their own scriptures. On the other hand, taking Paul of Antioch and the Cypriot as an example of medieval Christian religious authorities who presented challenging questions for their Muslim counterparts, one can also trace polemical threads against Muslims, at least from these two theologians' perspectives. One common polemical theme is de-emphasizing the universal message of Islam and Muḥammad's prophecy. Another is utilizing the Islamic Scripture to prove the authenticity of Christianity and the nature of Jesus and his miracles. And a third is concerned with showing 'the perfection' of Christian scriptures and religious message in comparison to the Qur'an.

The other questions to which this article sought answers are how Ibn Taymiyya and the Cypriot theologian tactically support their arguments and perceive the opponent's arguments, and what the nature of their argumentation tactics is. As we saw above, both theologians resorted to their own scripture as a tactic to prove that the other's scripture is invalid. Additionally, both Ibn Taymiyya and the Cypriot referred to the opponent's scripture's content to show proofs of corruption in scriptures or to support their own belief of what is the 'original message of religion.' Although both hold the belief that their scripture is the perfect version of the opponent's scripture, they also sought support from logical reasoning to buttress their perfect reference of truth, which, again, is their own scripture.

As the analysis of the representative samples of primary material in this article shows, both Ibn Taymiyya and the Cypriot theologian make use of argumentative techniques that fit into two of Dascal's religious polemics types. These are the *dispute* and *controversy.* We also notice that some of their tactics include forming attacks and *moves*, at times in support of a single argument, based either on revelation, like the universality of the Islamic message for Ibn Taymiyya, or on logical argumentation tactics, like the Cypriot's defense of the Trinity. At other times, their *moves* are

based on revelation and non-revelation 'proof' to force one argument or different arguments. An example of this is found in both theologians' techniques of arguing for perfection of their own scripture or corruption in their opponent's scriptures. We also witness that when arguing for proofs in support of their tactical *moves*, both theologians showed their inclination to certain scriptural and/or philosophical preferences, which they used, or forced, to support their *moves*. This tells us that Ibn Taymiyya and the Christian Cypriot theologian, and probably other medieval Muslim and Christian theologians as well, were forceful in their religious arguments and sought support of multiple argumentative tactics even if they were contradictory.

Overall, when analyzed through the lens of the religious polemics typology used here, it seems that issues of *content* and *procedure* of the debated matters by both Ibn Taymiyya and the Cypriot theologian contribute to their bitter disagreements. It is a *content* issue in relation to the ways scriptures are understood or interpreted and the nature of the questions asked and arguments put forth. It is also a *procedure* issue in relation to the argumentative techniques they use and the different ways they have of solving the problems that arise from the debated matters.

Acknowledgment

sincere thanks also go to the management and editorial staff members at Entangled Religions for their guidance and patience.

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