II. The Bible from an Islamic Perspective

In the preceding chapter, I discussed a selection of Khan's earliest writings on religious matters and carved out his philosophical framework within the context of his biography. While the first period of Khan's writings is characterised by a variety of topics, his subsequent writings center on religious topics. Furthermore, his early religious texts are confined to inner-Islamic debates, while his later writings (after 1857) present a broader perspective, also engaging with other religions. Above all, his *The Mohomedan Commentary of the Holy Bible*, which I will discuss in this chapter, presents a Muslim perspective on the Bible. But what made Khan elect to broaden his perspective and even pen a commentary on the Bible – the only one by a Muslim to date? To fully grasp this shift, one has to take the drastically changed situation after 1857 into consideration. The aftermath of the so-called *Mutiny* compelled the Muslims of South Asia to eventually accept the British as the ruling power and somehow align with this situation.

In his *Asbāb-i baġāvat-i hind* (*The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, 1859), Khan discusses the reasons for the upheaval of 1857. His main concerns were to present a more differentiated picture and to rehabilitate South Asian Muslims. After 1857, Muslims were increasingly discredited as the main initiator of the *Mutiny*. The administration of the East India Company suspected Muslims of being disobedient because of their religion. Their position in society was at stake.[1] This was the turning point for Khan which induced a shift in his writing. The works of his first phase which had dealt with historical topics and, to some extent, religious topics contrast with the broader perspective exhibited in his second, post-*Mutiny* phase. His *Asbāb* clearly represents this rethinking: the nostalgia of several of his early works, like the *Āṯār aṣ-ṣanadīd* (1847-52), which documents the historical architecture of

1 The most famous example is perhaps William Hunter's *The Indian Musalmans* (1871), which bears the very telling subtitle, *Are they Bound in Conscience to Rebel Against the Queen?* Khan wrote a review of Hunter and criticised Hunter's equation of Islam or Wahhabism with rebellion. Furthermore, Khan stresses the fact that Hunter was acquainted solely with the context of Bengal. Cf. William Wilson Hunter: *The Indian Musalmans* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1969); Sayyid Ahmad Khan: *Review on Dr. Hunters Indian Musalmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?* (Benares: Medical Hall Press, 1872).

Delhi or his edition of the famous *Ā'īn-i akbarī* (1855), is replaced by a shift to urgent, contemporary issues. The *Asbāb* is the first work to tread this path.[2]
In the *Asbāb*, Khan argues that:

> This was not a conspiracy by a 'community' [qaum] to overthrow the rule of a 'foreign community' [ghair-qaum]. Nor ought it to be thought that this agitation came about because of a feeling of longing and regret that foreigners had taken control of the Hindustanis' ancient land – that the whole 'community' [qaum] united in revolt.[3]

He worked to refute the assertion that the upheaval of 1857 was a reaction to the decreasing influence of Muslim rule in India. According to Khan, the *Mutiny* must not be understood as a Muslim revolt. Khan negates even the adherence to Islamic conduct on behalf of the instigators of the *Mutiny*. On the contrary,

> the people who raised the banner of jihad were such wretched and ill-conducted and badly-behaved men that besides drinking wine and watching spectacles and seeing dances and shows, they had no other profession. […] In that turmoil nothing at all took place according to religion.[4]

So, the *Mutiny* is perceived as fundamentally conflicting with Islam.

Although Khan condemns the *Mutiny*, he is still not ready to blame Indians alone or even Muslims as the single instigators. He equally blames the government of the East India Company and identifies five causes for the rebellion. In short, they can be summarised as the government's unacquaintance with the habits of the people of India. Khan first of all mentions that Muslims insinuated – albeit erroneously, as much research proves – that the government had missionary intentions. The "biggest cause of this revolt," however, was the assertion that the East India Company aimed "to bring everybody, whether Hindu or Muslim, around to the Christian religion and the customs and traditions of their [the government's] land."[5] He describes a strained situation provoked by increasing missionary activities as one important reason for the *Mutiny* of 1857. Disputes (*munāẓarah*) between Christian missionaries and representatives of Indian religions were the order of the day and contaminated relations across traditions. Bitter disputes were in part

2 Pernau: *Ashraf into Middle Classes*, 207f.

3 Sayyid Ahmad Khan: *The Causes of the Rebellion of India*, translated by Frances Pritchett.
http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urdu/asbab/translation2005.html

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

caused by aggressive missionary activities and their harsh critique of Indian religions.[6] The representatives of the respective religions aimed to convince their opponents and prove the superiority of their own religion. Khan identified this constrained atmosphere of constant confrontation and critique as being perhaps the most crucial reason for the *Mutiny*, as this situation was perceived as a serious threat for the cultural survival of the respective religious communities.

One highly influential dispute between the Christian missionary Karl Gottlieb Pfander[7] (1803-1865) and the Muslim Rahmatullah Kairanawi (1818-1891) will be discussed in more detail in the following passage. This debate also influenced Khan and shaped his religious thought and the terminology used in his transitional phase. Besides the *Asbāb*, Khan's second important publication of this period is his bilingual commentary on the Bible in English and Urdu, entitled *Tabayīn al-kalām fī tafsīr at-Tūrāt va al-Injīl ʿalā millat al-Islām* or *The Mohomedan Commentary of the Holy Bible*. Khan herein develops a terminology which serves as the foundation for all of his subsequent thought. But in order to understand what caused him to pen a commentary on the Bible, it will first be necessary to examine the dispute between Pfander and Kairanawi.

1. "The Mohammedan Controversy"

1.1 Karl Gottblieb Pfander

Karl Gottlieb Pfander was born in 1803 near Stuttgart in Germany. Although he was born as the son of a village baker, the pietist orientation of the family provided him with a solid education. Pietism was an influential tendency of Protestantism, which originated in late 17th century Germany, reaching its zenith during the 18th century. The emphasis on individual piety and his education in Pietism allowed Pfander to enter a Latin school and, later, to proceed to the local Pietist college. Subsequently, he was nominated for the newly established Missionary School in Basel. His four-year training in Basel had a tremendous impact on Pfander and his views on Islam.[8]

6 Avril A. Powell: "Maulānā Raḥmat Allāh Kairānawī and Muslim-Christian Controversy in India in the Mid-19th Century," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1 (1976): 42f.

7 Some sources also spell his name as *Carl* Gottlieb Pfander.

8 Ibid., 44.

The curriculum of the Basel Missionary School was unique in two respects: first, the Basel School provided its students with a profound knowledge of Islam and Arabic. In comparison to other missionary schools, this was unparalleled. Avrill Powell points out in her article "Maulānā Rahḥmat Allāh Kairānawī and Muslim-Christian Controversy in India in the Mid-19th Century" that "English missionaries of this period were sent overseas with little, if any, knowledge of other religions […]."[9] The curriculum of most missionary schools in the 19th century merely emphasised the study of the Bible, while Pfander had the opportunity to gain a good knowledge of the Quran and Arabic:

> Inspector Blumhardt, the head of the seminary, lectured five hours a week on the Qurʾān, and Professor Hengstenberger, of the University of Basel, taught Arabic for three hours each week. […] their inclusion in the curriculum suggests that a Basel missionary would have a more scholarly point of contact with the people whose religion he sought to overturn than had most of his fellow missionaries.[10]

Besides this preparation for the confrontation with other faiths, the Basel curriculum, of course, also contained intensive study of the contents of the Bible. However, Biblical criticism was almost entirely avoided. This new approach to the Bible, which increasingly gained importance in German universities, originated in discoveries in other fields of study. The Bible came to be questioned for its equation with divine revelation. Equally, the rationalism of the 18th century had affected perceptions of the Bible: "Radical changes in historical thinking, accompanied by important discoveries in the fields of geology, archaeology, and anthropology now seemed to threaten the traditional chronology of the Bible."[11] However, the Pietist orientation of the Basel Missionary School prevented any far-reaching contact between their students and the theses of Biblical criticism. Pietism was characterised by its rejection of the otherwise prevalent rationalism in other Protestant churches. Instead of logical evidences, Pietism emphasised the importance of the individual and his piety. Thus, Pfander, too, did not come in further contact with Biblical criticism and had rudimentary knowledge of this approach at best.[12]

9 Ibid., 45.

10 Ibid., 45.

11 Ibid., 45.

12 Christine Schirrmacher: *Mit den Waffen des Gegners: Christlich-muslimische Kontroversen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert; dargestellt am Beispiel der Auseinandersetzung um Karl Gottlieb Pfanders "Mîzân al-ḥaqq" und Raḥmatullah Ibn Halîl al-ʿUtmânî al-Kairânawîs „Izhâr al-ḥaqq" und der Diskussion über das Barnabasevangelium* (Berlin: Schwarz, 1992), 30.

Equipped with this comparatively profound knowledge of Islam and the Quran, Pfander was sent to Georgia, where he resided from 1825 until 1835 working among Muslims and Armenians. During this period, Pfander repeatedly travelled to Persia in order to learn Persian and to establish a mission centre. Furthermore, he completed his most famous book on Islam and Christianity, *Mīzān al-Ḥaqq*, which was first published in German, and then also in Armenian and Persian editions.[13]

In 1835, the mission centre in Armenia was closed by order of the Russian Tsar and Pfander was compelled to return to Basel. Over the following years, he struggled to find a mission aligning with his specialisation in Islam. In 1839, he was finally sent to India. After a stay in Calcutta where he prepared an Urdu translation of his *Mīzān*, he was sent to Agra in 1841, where he would reside for the following years and become part of what was perhaps the most influential dispute between Muslims and missionaries in 19th century South Asia.

When Pfander began to circulate his book in Agra in 1841, he provoked serious reactions among the Muslims of the city. Muslims had not been the object of missionary activities in South Asia until the 1830s. Missionaries initially focused on Hinduism, as several of their practices seemed disturbing for Protestant missionaries in particular. Furthermore, the East Indian Company was initially reluctant towards the Christian mission, a stance which changed only with the Charter Act of 1833. This act loosened restrictions in favour of missionary expansion by permitting missionary settlement without the requirement of a residence licence. Only in the wake of this act did the focus of missionaries shift also to Muslims and their cultural centres in northern India. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that Pfander, who had made a name for himself as a specialist of Islam acquainted with several Muslim languages, be sent to Agra, which had formerly been the capital of the Mughal empire and was still an important centre of culture and religious learning.[14]

In order to understand the severe reactions by Muslims upon Pfander's arrival and the dissemination of his books, one has to consider the broader situation: missionary schools with Bible-based curricula were established as orphanages, in which Indian children – in particular after a famine in 1837 – were brought up as Christians; presses were established to print publications denouncing Islam and Hinduism; and bazaar-sermons that attacked the two faiths were the order of the day. All in all, this environment fuelled Muslim fears of a collaboration of the government of the East India Company with missionary agencies.[15]

13 The German manuscript was completed in 1829 and titled *Waage der Wahrheit*. During the following years, Pfander prepared Armenian and Persian versions.

14 Powell: "Muslim-Christian Controversy," 42.

15 Ibid., 47.

In this strained situation, Pfander's missionary approach was perceived as an even more severe threat. His writings, however, lacked the aggression of previous missionaries: he did not apply a merely derogatory refutation of the Muslim faith, but rather conceded Islamic sources a legitimate position in his line of argument. In contrast to previous missionaries who had entirely dismissed the Quran's claim for divine revelation, Pfander utilised his knowledge of Arabic and Islam to build his argument on Islamic sources.[16]

1.2 *Mīzān al-Ḥaqq*

In his *Mīzān*, Pfander conceives of religion as a "universal craving" of man. In the introduction, he hastens to distinguish religion from reason. The former is conceived of as a desire and longing, while the latter's scope is limited to a rather thin, rational conclusion to the acknowledgment of God's existence:

> But how shall we know and find the incomprehensible and invisible God? Can it be by the power and guidance of our reason only? No, indeed! How can human reason grasp that infinite, eternal, most glorious Being? [...] Reason can understand and judge of only those things which it has reached through the agency of the senses; and the world which it has grasped is but that which is visible: it can never reach the invisible world. On this account, man can understand by his reason, only so much of the invisible being of God as He has made known by the world which He has created.[17]

Reason, in Pfander's view, is thus limited to merely visible knowledge cannot grasp the complexity of God, while religion surpasses this observable sphere. Thus, religion cannot be grasped in its entirety by reason. In particular, reason cannot assist in comprehending the will of God. This, according to Pfander, necessarily requires the assistance of the Word of God, which explains "His will and purpose concerning man, and also His commandments and prohibitions to them."[18] But since there are multiple and conflicting claims for the true religion, Pfander concludes that only one can be true:

16 Schirrmacher: *Waffen des Gegners*, 83, 85; Powell: "Muslim-Christian Controversy," 47f.

17 Carl Gottlieb Pfander: *The Mizan Ul Haqq: or Balance of Truth* (London: Church Missionary House, 1866), iii.

18 Ibid., v.

> Now, there are many and conflicting religions [*maẕhab* in the Urdu version] in the world, and every nation considers its own religion true; but it is impossible that all should be of divine origin; indeed, only one can be true and of God.[19]

Religion therefore comes to be perceived as a universal craving implanted in man's nature. However, the various religions in the world are not understood as equal, as only one can inhere divine inspiration.

Since Pfander addresses Muslims, he assumes that only three books, which Muslims consider to be divine, need to be discussed in his *Mīzān* in order to identify the true religion: those are the Old and New Testament as well as the Quran. He writes:

> But it is not necessary for the Mohammedan inquirers after truth to examine the religions of the heathen: the duty incumbent upon them is to search the three books which they already believe, viz. The Old and New Testaments, and the Koran. And the question, the settlement of which is necessary for their peace of heart, is this: "Is the Koran the Word of God, or are the books which the Christians use His Word: or are all three books confirmed and established revelation?"[20]

The last question is subsequently negated by Pfander, as

> […] all those who are acquainted with the three books well know, […] many of the matters contained in the Koran do not agree with the contents of the Old and New Testaments; and so it is impossible that both can be the divine word: only one must be true.[21]

While Pfander suggests a conflict between the Koran and the Old and New Testaments, the latter are both described as consistent. In a later chapter, he discusses this topic in more detail and argues that there is no abrogation of parts of the Old Testament in the New Testament. External rites and ceremonies have been substituted for spiritual practices: the New Testament is not imagined as an annihilation, but rather as an affirmation and completion of the Old Testament.[22] This assertion is part of the larger discussion on the adulteration of the Bible: Pfander argues that the Bible is an entirely consistent and unaltered text. He dedicates the first of the three parts of his *Mīzān* to this discussion, in fact. This can be read in part as a response to the common Muslim critique of the abrogation of the Bible. In quoting

19 Ibid., v.
20 Ibid., ix.
21 Ibid., ix-x.
22 Ibid., 7.

from the Quran, Pfander aims to establish the Bible as a legitimate source of equal value to Muslims:

> According to the evidence which has been adduced in this Chapter, it has been fully ascertained that all these assertions of the Mohammedans are without foundation, and that the Old and New Testaments have, neither in the time of Mohammed nor before his time, – in fact have never at any time been changed or altered. Thus the Mohammedan truth-seeker will clearly comprehend that the Sacred Scriptures are unabrogated and uncorrupted Word of God, and that obedience to the precepts and doctrines contained therein is a duty incumbent upon every people and nation. And it is imperative that sincere and conscientious Musulmans should earnestly labour to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the doctrines and precepts of the Law and the Gospel […].[23]

In the second part of his work, Pfander describes the tenets of Christianity as based on quotes from the Bible. Herein, he also argues why the Bible has to be seen as the Word of God – and not the Quran. He defines several requirements that a book claiming divine inspiration has to meet. These qualities are not discussed further or justified, but rather appear to be generalised properties of the Bible. Besides these requirements, Pfander also equates the conditions of a nation with the legitimacy of its religion and scriptures. Thus, with reference to what he saw as the desolate situation of other peoples, he argues that their books cannot be the Word of God, for a religion and its scripture have to affect the conduct and morals of its adherents:

> The fact that the doctrines of these religions have no influence to renew and purify the heart, is evident from the present condition of their votaries, and this, again, is a distinct testimony to the falsity of those books as professed revelations.[24]

The third part of his work discusses Muhammad's prophethood and the Quran's claim of divine inspiration. Pfander aims to refute Muhammad as God's prophet and, consequently, also the legitimacy of the Quran as the Word of God.[25] Pfander continues his strategy from part one and bases his arguments on Islamic sources already accepted by Muslims. Although previous missionaries had already published tracts which more vehemently and pejoratively denounced Muhammad, the *Mīzān* was perceived as a tremendous threat to Islam. This was because, in contrast to previous publications, the *Mīzān* argued with Islamic sources and could thus have a huge effect. In order to enhance the impact, Pfander furthermore intended

23 Ibid., 22.
24 Ibid., 64.
25 Schirrmacher: *Waffen des Gegners*, 93f.

for the style and appearance of his book to imitate the fashion that was currently *in vogue* for Urdu or Persian publications in South Asia at his time. This was an attempt at "orientalisation" meant "to convince the less learned Muslims that he knew their religion as well, or better, than they did themselves."[26]

1.3 Early Controversies

When Pfander began to circulate his *Mīzān* in Agra, reactions did not take long to appear: he received several letters and pamphlets in response. But one name stood out from the rest: Al-i Hasan, who is described as "an officer of some standing in the Suddar Dewany Adalat, N.W.P. … a man of very superior abilities, [who] holds a high place in Mohammedan society for attainments and learning."[27] When he eventually encountered a debate of some *ʿulamāʾ* discussing Pfander's *Mīzān* and Muslim responses to it, his interest was aroused and he began to engage in the controversy. In a long correspondence with Pfander, he argued mostly on the basis of logic. Al-i Hasan aimed to refute the Christian doctrine of the Trinity by proving its irrationality. Their correspondence continued for several years and Al-i Hasan lastly prepared an 800-page volume in response to Pfander. But when public interest in the debate began to rise and letters of the correspondence and books surrounding it began to see publication in 1845-46, Al-i Hasan suddenly left Agra – most probably for a promotion. This interrupted the debate at once and public interest declined. In the following five years, no local *ʿālim* took interest – or was sufficiently well versed, as Avril A. Powell suggests – in reviving the debate.[28]

1.4 Rahmatullah Kairanawi

Only in the 1850s was the controversy resumed, this after Rahmatullah Kairanawi, founder and teacher of a small *madrasah* in Kairana, had visited Agra in the 1840s. Kairanawi was born in 1818 in Kairana and was educated in a *madrasah* in Delhi from the age of twelve on, and in Lucknow at a later time. He was employed as a *mīr munšī*, but after the deaths of his wife and son, he left the post and established

26 Powell: "Muslim-Christian Controversy," 52; Schirrmacher: *Waffen des Gegners*: 83, 85.

27 William Muir: "Mohammedan Controversy," *Calcutta Review*, IV, 1845, quoted from Powell: "Muslim-Christian Controversy," 49.

28 Powell: "Muslim-Christian Controversy," 49f.

a *madrasah*. His visit to Agra and encounter with Muhammad Wazir Khan then caused him to engage in an effective refutation of Pfander. Not much is known about Wazir Khan, except that he studied at Calcutta Medical College and later came to England for medical studies in the 1830s. During his stay, he undertook "extensive research on the Christian religion" – perhaps as urged by contact with missionaries preaching in his student days in Bengal.[29] Besides English books on Christianity, Wazir Khan also studied German books on Biblical criticism. During his time in England, he could acquire significant knowledge about Christianity. He even went so far as to study Hebrew and Ancient Greek. Having finished his studies, Wazir Khan returned to India and eventually obtained a post in Agra. Even though he observed the controversy surrounding Pfander, and although he had considerable knowledge of Christianity, he lacked deeper insight into Islamic sources, as would have been necessary to refute Pfander's attacks.

After his visit in Agra, Kairanawi felt a responsibility to prepare a counterattack against Pfander, which was supported by his friend Wazir Khan, who provided Kairanawi with his knowledge of Christianity. In the following years, Kairanawi prepared several books in Persian and Urdu. He employed two lines of argument in these works: the first argument repeated the refutation of the doctrine of Trinity on rational grounds, while the second contested Pfander's assertion of the unchanged state of the Bible. As indicated above, Pfander based his argument on the equal legitimacy of the Bible for Muslims and on the Bible's uncorrupted transmission, thus denying its abrogation. Kairanawi utilises Wazir Khan's knowledge of Biblical criticism to prove "that the Christian scriptures had been altered at various times in history and therefore were not divinely inspired."[30]

Strictly speaking, the second argument – the logical refutation of the Trinity – was less innovative than the first. The charge of *taḥrīf* (corruption) had appeared already with regard to this topic since the early period of Islam and was not new in and of itself. However, in Kairanawi's counterattack, this particular argument could unfold a tremendous effect, for Kairanawi did not merely reason with reference to the Quran, but rather referred to the discourse of Biblical criticism, prevalent in Christianity itself, thus making no external charge. He writes:

> But the reason why the second of these categories, *taḥrīf-i lafẓī* [corruption of the actual words, in contrast to *taḥrīf-i maʿnavī*, corruption of meaning], provided a real platform for discussion between the *ʿulamāʾ* and the missionaries in mid-19th century India in a way which the Trinity argument had failed to do, was because the age-old charge that the Scriptures had been corrupted was revived by Raḥmat Allāh

29 Ibid., 46.
30 Ibid., 51.

> at a time when the Protestant churches of Europe were themselves in turmoil over the same issue.[31]

Kairanawi quotes quotes several authors of Biblical criticism in his book, without presenting any one position as superior. His aim is rather to demonstrate the tremendous dimension of disunity even within Christianity itself. In presenting the sheer abundance of mutually irreconcilable opinions on virtually any aspect of the Bible, Kairanawi aimed to refute the claim that the Bible is divinely inspired. In contrast, he depicted the Bible as merely a human creation.[32]

In 1854, Pfander reluctantly agreed to a public debate (*munāẓarah*) with Muslim representatives. He was initially not in favour of a public debate, as he doubted its benefit in convincing opponents of his views. When his reluctance was interpreted by the Muslims as withdrawal, Pfander was eventually obliged to accept the invitation. At the time of the debate, Kairanawi's books had been published only recently. Pfander was not acquainted with the books, and neither did he suspect their line of argument when he agreed on the debate.

Only during the two-day debate did Pfander become aware that Kairanawi had studied and utilised the European debate on Biblical criticism, a discipline which Pfander was virtually unacquainted with. One of his fundamental creeds, which had also been reinforced during his study in the Basel Missionary School, was belief in the uncorrupted state of the Bible and its divine inspiration. This lack of knowledge proved to be a disaster for him during the debate: almost the entire discussion centred on this issue. The order of the debate gave initiative to the Muslims. The topics to be discussed were chosen as follows: abrogation and corruption of the Christian scriptures, the doctrine of Trinity, Muhammad's claim to prophethood, and the inspiration of the Quran. This set-up provided the Muslims with the opportunity to utilise Kairanawi's "new and crucial advantage of being able to employ arguments derived from [the] study of recent Biblical criticism."[33] This plan also made it impossible for the missionaries to reverse their position from the defensive.

When Pfander initially admitted "copyists' errors," the Muslims utilised his admittance to show fundamental errors in the text of the Bible. Pfander was then

31 Ibid., 52.

32 Cf. Schirrmacher: *Waffen des Gegners*, 170: "Er [Kairanawi] vergleicht Bibelübersetzungen, verschiedene Revisionen und Übersetzungen und zitiert vorwiegend Kommentare von Vertretern der historisch-kritischen Textexegese wie z.B. Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher oder Adam Clarke und kommt immer wieder auf die Uneinigkeit zwischen Katholiken, Protestanten und den vielen anderen christlichen Gruppierungen in zahlreichen Lehrfragen zu sprechen." Cf. also Powell: "Muslim-Christian Controversy," 52f.

33 Powell: "Muslim-Christian Controversy," 54.

compelled to admit "that a few mistakes had actually been made of a kind more significant than mere copyists' errors."[34] Lastly, when he replied to question posed by Wazir Khan quoting from John's first epistle, Pfander said, "Yes, this passage has been altered, and there are one or two other places like it."[35] Thus, the stage was lost, not to be regained. Similarly, the second day of the debate, which actually gave the initiative to the missionaries, still did not allow them to resume counter-offensive. The discussion returned to the charge of corruption. The outcome of the debate was declared by the Muslims to be a clear victory and received wide publicity throughout India.

Pfander was compelled to leave Agra in the aftermath of the debate and was sent to Peshawar. However, the upheaval of 1857 prevented the maintenance of missionary activities in India. Thus, Pfander was asked to establish a new missionary centre in Constantinople.

Although the exchange came to an abrupt end with Pfander's departure, the debate had significant repercussions in the Indian setting. The strategy which characterised the approach of both Pfander and Kairanawi was applied by later authors as well. The sources of an opponent were acknowledged. The line of argument was then rested on the sources of the opponent, thus aiming to refute the opponent within his own discourse and invalidate his argument.

2. *The Mohomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible*

One important protagonist who resumed the encounter between missionaries and Muslims was Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. The aforementioned debate had a significant influence on him and caused him to prepare *The Mohomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible*. This three-volume book, published during 1862 and 1864, remains an uncompleted commentary on the Bible from the perspective of Islam and the Quran. His commentary is commonly described as an attempt to improve the mutual understanding and relations between Muslims and Christians in the aftermath of 1857. Muslims lacked any thorough knowledge of Christian sources. Thus, the commentary is perceived as Khan's effort to provide Muslims with an approach to the Bible from a Muslim perspective. The commentary emphasises the agreement of the main beliefs of Islam and Christianity.[36] Moreover, he proposes

34 Ibid., 56.
35 Ibid., 56f.
36 Robinson: *Islam and Muslim History*, S. 82.

a very unconventional position regarding the Bible and its legitimacy as divinely inspired scripture.

2.1 *taḥrīf*

As discussed above, Kairanawi argues that the Bible had been corrupted. He perceives the corruption as a verbal one (*taḥrīf-i lafẓī*). He claims that several passages had been altered and do not exist in their original version. This charge cannot be described as Kairanawi's innovation, and instead can be traced to the early period of Islam. His innovative achievement is rather the linking of this long-established Muslim claim with the European discourse of Biblical criticism.[37]

While Kairanawi utilises the charge of literal *taḥrīf*, Khan presents a rather moderate version of corruption in his commentary: he describes eight types of corruption which he distinguishes as verbal corruption (*taḥrīf-i lafẓī*) and corruption of the sense or meaning (*taḥrīf-i maʿnavī*). Within the first category, he describes the adding, striking out, and substitution of words in the text or the changing of words while reading out the text. Khan argues that only the meaning and interpretation of the text had been corrupted. Khan denies the presence of verbal corruption, however, stating only that the sense of the text had been altered, not the text itself. The categories of the corruption of sense or meaning comprise the omission of parts of the text while reading it out, wrong instruction of the people which runs contrary to the text, the application of improper meanings to ambiguous words, and the misinterpretation of allegorical passages.[38]

Khan sees this kind of critique as having been already confirmed by the Quran and other early writings. But he adds two further arguments for the corruption of the Christian canon. The first regards the existence of many varying manuscripts, which he astonishingly de-emphasises in such a way that

> […] all the principles and articles of faith, (the deliverance of which to us commenced with Moses and was continued by the succeeding prophets till the time of our prophet) tend to the same object, and differ in no way from one another, we should abstain from entering upon this useless discussion.[39]

37 *EI*: "Taḥrīf."

38 Sayyid Ahmad Khan: *Tabayīn al-kalām fī tafsīr al-taurāt va al-injīl ʿalā milat al-Islām* (Lāhaur: *Maktabah-i Aḫūvat*, 2006), Vol. I, 78.

39 Ibid., 167.

However, his second critique is directed at the ambiguity caused by the countless translations of the Bible. He asserts that to entirely translate a text from one language to another, in all its subtleties, is "an impossible task."[40] Khan lists various translations and manuscripts in countless languages, and describes variances and translation errors. But despite this 100-page exposition, Khan again weakens his own argument by stating:

> It should, however, be understood that the various interpretations of the same subjects, or other similar errors (if such are to be found among the received versions) are to be ascribed to the inaccuracy of translators, and not to the original, from which those versions have been rendered, and the authenticity of which can, no way, be injured by them […].[41]

Khan emphasises the view that the authenticity of the original Bible is not affected by variances in manuscripts or misinterpretation in translations. The original thus retains its authenticity and legitimacy. This assertion is striking, for it reinforces Kairanawi's argument about the corruption of the Bible. Why does Khan invalidate any kind of verbal corruption and rather emphasise the authenticity of the Bible? What causes Khan to make such far-reaching concessions to the missionaries' claims?

Mushirul Hasan interprets Khan's commentary as part of his greater project of uniting "the Crescent and the Cross" by "strengthening mutual knowledge and respect between the Muslims and Christians."[42] Although Khan deviates from several terms set forth in the Bible, Hasan emphasises Khan's effort to illustrate the similarities between Christianity and Islam: both religions teach the same faith in the unity of God and believe in the same prophets.[43]

This assertion seems to be affirmed by contemporary responses to Khan's commentary. Alan M. Guenther discusses such responses in his article, "Christian Responses to Ahmad Khan's Commentary on the Bible," and concludes that Khan's commentary was appreciated by missionaries and wider Christian communities. Instead of an effort toward reconciliation between British and Muslims, however,

40 Ibid., 168.

41 Ibid., 171.

42 Muhsirul Hasan: *A Moral Reckoning: Muslim Intellectuals in Nineteenth Century Delhi* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 102.

43 Ibid., 102ff. Cf. also Iqbal Sabir: "Sir Syed and Christianity," in *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: Vision and Mission*, ed. Shahabuddin Iraqi (Aligarh, New Delhi: Centre of Advanced Study Department of History Aligarh Muslim University; Manohar, 2008), 265–300.

Khan's text was seen as "evidence that the British colonial project at bringing civilization and learning was finally yielding fruit."[44] Khan's commentary and his acknowledgement of the Bible as a legitimate source were praised as a first step towards the recognition of the superiority of Christianity.[45]

Yet, in presenting the similarities between Christianity and Islam, was Khan's single aim to reconcile the British with Indian Muslims? Apart from Khan's far-reaching concessions to Christian claims, the above-mentioned assertions seem to ignore the fact that Khan's commentary still views the Bible from an Islamic perspective. Khan's intentions behind his acknowledgement of the Bible's legitimacy seem to be overlooked entirely. In the following section, I aim to problematise this reading of Khan's commentary as a mere conciliatory effort.

2.2 The Bible from a Muslim Perspective

In this introductory chapter, entitled "On the necessity of the comming [*sic*] of Prophets to save mankind,"[46] Khan introduces his main terminology and foundational hypotheses. It is significant that this chapter does not provide a parallel translation in English, while the entire commentary is otherwise structured in such a way that every page is divided into two columns with Urdu and its parallel translation in English. Only this first chapter lacks – apart from the title – a translation in English. Was Khan's choice not to translate this chapter therefore intentional, so that it solely addressed Muslim readers? Considering the content of this chapter, this assertion appears not unlikely, given that the introduction raises serious doubts about the solely reconciliatory aim of the commentary and its concessions to Christianity.

Khan commences by briefly proposing his doubts on the ability of reason (*ʿaql*) to act as the means of faith. He argues that reason does not allow any further insight than to conclude the existence and unity of God. Much reminiscent of Pfander, Khan also denies the sufficiency of reason for deep insights. He then proceeds to describe the necessity of prophets:

> Now, can anyone know (*pahchānā*) such an essence by reason? Many very intelligent men have applied their reason to this task, have observed again and again the workshops (*kārkhānē*) of the wonders (*ʿajāʾib*) of nature and exercised their mind

44 Alan M. Guenther: "Christian Responses to Ahmad Khan's Commentary on the Bible," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 6, 6.1-6.2 (2011): 96.

45 Ibid.

46 The parallel Urdu title: "Insān kī nijāt ko nabiyoṉ kā ānā ẓarūr hai."

> in much repeated reflection upon it. Surely we can know this much, namely that there is someone who does these most wonderful and diverse works. But more than that one cannot know, and if one knows one is mistaken. […] It is not in the power of man to know Him as He is, by mere reason.[47]

Khan criticises reason as misleading and instead emphasises the importance of God's revelation through prophets. To gain more knowledge about God, mere reason is, according to Khan, insufficient. The coming of the prophets is considered to be inevitable for the guidance of man. Through revelation (*ilhām*), they alone can teach man who his Master is and what His will is. As it is impossible to gain these fundamental truths with reason, Khan concludes that a prophet must have been sent to every *qaum* (nation), for how could men be responsible for their deeds if they were not made aware of God and His will? With reference to different Quranic verses, he concludes that God has sent a prophet to every people (*qaum*) to admonish them.[48] On this foundation, Khan continues to unfold his terminology.

Every *qaum* received its own law and way of worship (*šarīʿat*) in accordance with its respective time and place. According to Khan, all *shariats* of the various prophets are derived from the universal message, *dīn*. They are conceived of as the current manifestation of *dīn* win alignment with the respective circumstances:

> There is also no doubt that the religion [*dīn*] of each one of the prophets that came to pass was one and the same. They came to teach this one truth, and went teaching this alone – God is One and there exists none except Him. He alone deserves to be worshipped.[49]

Khan assumes that all of the prophets in the world who brought their varying *shariats* – according to the context of time and place of the respective *qaum* – are still related to the super-category of *dīn*. All *shariats* are linked through *dīn*. The latter teaches a universal message which is shared by all of the *shariats* (regardless of ther varying emphases), the most fundamental being the oneness of God. The differences in the *shariats* pertain only to adjustments of this universal message.
Today's present religions, however, are distinguished from the *shariats* and termed *maẕhab*. They are perceived as distorted interpretations of the original *shariat*:

> In short there is no doubt that wherever religions [*maẕhab* in the original] have spread they have all in the first place been given in by prophets. The teaching of all

47 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, S. 237 / Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. I, 14.
48 Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. I, 15f.
49 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 239f. / Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. I, 16.

> of them was one and the same […]. But when these people corrupted this [basic] content (*maṭlab*) there arose the necessity for another prophet to come. For this reason thousands of prophets came, brought their books with them and propagated the unity of God and His precepts among the people.[50]

The repeated distortion of the messages brought by the prophets required the restoration of the original message by a new prophet. But, according to Khan, Islam was eventually sent to break this circle of distortion and restoration. Islam is described as the final *shariat* with universal aspirations:

> When these precepts (*aḥkām*) had spread far and wide and become known in all [possible] ways and nothing had remained hidden and was able to fall into error again, then, after this prophet [through whom this situation had been brought about] no further prophet was needed. This final prophet is the Seal of the prophets. This work [of prophethood] was completed in Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, peace be upon him![51]

The necessity to send messages according to varying circumstances lapsed because Islam was sent as a universal religion conforming to any environment. Furthermore, Khan denies the possibility of its corruption. Thus, no further prophets need be sent.

Khan's concept of religion, as developed in this introduction, is split into two levels. On the lower level, *maẕhab* can be described as religion in the plural. Despite their diversity, religions are thus linked through their relation with the universal *dīn*. This is a super-category which links the various *shariats* as its manifestations and can, thus, be termed as religion in general. With the *shariats*, Khan implements an intermediate level which maintains a link between *maẕhab* and *dīn*, implying, however, that the former is a mere corruption of an original manifestation of the latter. The latter thus lacks the aspect of plurality found in *maẕhab* and functions as an immaterial concept. The *shariats* are the connective link between both. All of them resemble the central message of God's unity as the only one to be worshipped. Only the manifestation and realisation of these fundamental messages varied in such a way that it was appropriate to meet the demands of the respective *qaum*:

50 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 239f. / Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. I, 17.
51 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 240 / Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. I, 17.

> When man's spirit is afflicted by a spiritual illness the *sharīʿat*, the method of service (*ʿibādat*) by which this spiritual illness disappears is given to the prophet of that age.[52]

If one considers Khan's use of *dīn* and *shariat* as well as his view about the revelation which God gave to every single *qaum*, his terminology appears to be very traditional. It will not be possible to thoroughly examine the entire history of such broad concepts as *dīn* and *shariat* within the scope of this discussion, but in order to provide a point of reference, I will concisely contrast Khan's terminology with Shah Waliullah's (1703-62).

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Waliullah and the continuation of his thought through his sons, in particular in the *Tariqah-i Muhammadiyah*, were important influences on Khan. Thus, Waliullah's terminology and conceptualisation of religion and Islam shall justly serve as an exemplary point of reference for the present argument. At first glance, both appear to be in general conformity. Both distinguish between a universal *dīn* and the various *shariats* in which it is manifested.[53] But, by introducing the category of *maẕhab* in this context, Khan gives this term an entirely new meaning. *Maẕhab* was traditionally applied only with reference to the four schools of law in Sunni Islam. In Mughal India, however, *maẕhab* had acquired the meaning of a synonym for *dīn*, both roughly translating as religion.[54] Khan's usage twists this terminology, however, and introduces a clear distinction between *maẕhab* and *dīn*. He uses *maẕhab* in the sense of comparative religion or religion in its plural form. *Maẕhab* denotes the now acknowledged religious belief systems like Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc. On the other hand, *dīn* refers to the particular religion's abstract points of reference.

If one scrutinises Waliullah's terminology – or, equally, the non-uniform terminology in the Quran – it becomes very obvious that the plurality of religion was never unfamiliar to Islam. However, here plurality is denoted with *dīn* and its plural *adyān*.[55] Khan deviates from this terminology and instead construes *dīn* as a singular concept, while its plural is disallowed.[56] When the plurality of religious

52 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 239f. / Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. I, 16.

53 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 90.

54 *EI*, "madhhab. Cf. also the *Dabistān-i maẕāhib* (ca. 1655), thematising various religious traditions of South Asia. Its title documents the use of *maẕhab* in the sense of religion.

55 Shah Waliullah: Ḥuǧǧat Allāh al-bāliġa (Bairūt: Dār al-Ǧīl, 2005), 210; Smith: The Meaning and End of Religion, 81, 86f., 101f. Hans-Michael Haussig: Der Religionsbegriff in den Religionen: Studien zum Selbst- und Religionsverständis in Hinduismus, Buddhismus, Judentum und Islam (Bodenheim, Berlin: Philo, 1999).

56 There are, however, very rare instances of the plural *adyān*. Yet, in general, Khan remains by and large consistent in his terminology. Cf. for instance Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. III, 13.

belief systems can be seen in Waliullah or the Quran on the level of *dīn*, Khan shifts the plurality to a lower level which retains inextricable dependence on the super-category of *dīn*. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Khan was well-versed in Sufi thought and must have been well acquainted with the concept of *nūr-i Muhammadī*, which implies the assertion of a pre-existence of Muhammad as light, i.e. in an uncreated form.[57] All prophets are perceived as merely particular manifestations of this light – with Muhammad, however, being the final messenger who exceeded his predecessors' particular *shariats* with his universal message. Thus, one might perceive Khan's conception of *dīn* as an adoption of *nūr-i Muhammadī*, however it might be detached of its Sufi connotations.[58] Khan abandons the hierarchical aspect, as taught in its Sufi interpretation, implying the transfer of this light further on saints and *pīr*s. Rather, Muhammad is presented as the unmediated conveyor of God's message, much reminiscent of Khan's thesis in his *Kalimat al-Ḥaqq*.[59]

This distinction of the immaterial super-category *dīn* and its related manifestations, the *shariats*, allows Khan to presume a singularity of truth. The plurality and clashes of the various religions are thusly disregarded as mere corruptions of formerly true messages. Every *maẕhab* is linked to *dīn* as its corrupted derivative. Islam, however, is described as the last and universal message sent to restore the original message of *dīn*. Previous *shariats* – as well as their corruptions in the form of the present religions – are declared unnecessary, if not altogether wrong. Islam

57 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 31f. In reference to the famous verse *āyat an-nūr* in the Quran, which is deemed the impetus for the development of the concept of *nūr-i Muḥammadī*, Khan does not quote any representative of this concept, but suggests that he knows about the interpretations of this verse, cf. Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. III, 284f.

58 In one of his later texts, Khan even uses the term *nūr-i islām* more or less synonymously with *dīn* and states that "Islam is an imperishable light [*nūr*] which was always alight and will always remain. Islam is God's light [*Islām ḫūd ḫudā kā nūr hai*] […]. This *nūr-i Islām* was in the breast of Adam and this *nūr-i Islām* enlightened the hearts of Noah, Shuaib, Jacob, Abraham, Moses, John the Baptist, Jesus and all the prophets" (Khan: *Maqālāt*, Vol. XII: 146). Interestingly, Khan does not mention Muhammad in this list, thus leaving open the questions of whether he perhaps obtains a different position. On the other hand, Khan relates his concept of light directly to God, thus apparently skipping Muhammad's role as conveyor of this light. Khan seems to refer to the doctrine of *nūr-i Muḥammadī*, but detaches it of any venerating aspect, apparently even of Muhammad, and links the entire authority solely to God. Still, significant parallels to the *nūr-i Muḥammadī* cannot be ignored.

59 "Muhammad is also described as light from light, and from his light all the prophets are created, constituting the different aspects of this light. In its fullness such light radiated from the historical Muhammad and is partaken of by his posterity and by the saints; for Muhammad has the aspect of sanctity in addition to that of prophecy" (Schimmel: *Rhine to Indus*, 117). Cf. also Chapter 1.

as the final message unites all of them under its umbrella. Regional variety is replaced with Islam's universality. Universality, in Khan's view, as it obtains the position of the exemplary manifestation of *dīn*. Islam is, therefore, more or less equated with *dīn* and receives a double position: Islam is described on the lower level as a *maẕhab* comparable with other religions. It is not, however, perceived of as a corruption—as is the case for the other religions—but rather as a universal manifestation of *dīn*. Islam is represented on the concrete level of *maẕhab* as well as on the abstract level as an equivalent of *dīn*.

Considering that this first chapter introduces Khan's commentary on the Bible, the assertion of a merely conciliatory purpose of this work appears to be very dubious. The introduction closes with an assertion of the finality and singularity of truth in Islam. Taking this presupposition into account, it becomes obvious that Khan does not aim to merely present the Bible in order to familiarise Muslims with the teachings of Christianity – for he refutes a Christian perspective on the Bible. Instead, he reads the Bible from the perspective of the Quran and Islam. Khan's strong presuppositions thus prevent an unbiased examination of the Bible. His perspective conceals the Christian faith behind the assumption of the Bible's corruption. Khan's commentary applies a rather apologetic view of the Bible, so that the purpose of a mere familiarisation with Christian sources is clearly exceeded.

The assertion that Khan's commentary is merely explicatory thus becomes rather questionable. His commentary cannot be read only in the context of the upheaval of 1857 and the effort for reconciliation. One must also take into account the context of missionary activities, and the debate of Pfander and Kairanawi in particular. Khan was personally acquainted with Pfander and referred to several books by Kairanawi.[60] We can therefore assume that he was familiar with the arguments presented in their dispute. We also know that, since 1855, Khan had defended Islam again missionary critique – thus doing so even before the rebellion of 1857. Yet, only after 1857 did he disseminate his commentary on a broader scale.[61] Thus, it is reasonable to assume that a conciliatory intention – if at all present – was rather a later addition to Khan's original purpose.

The missing translation of the introductory chapter might therefore be read as an intentional omission made in order to keep up the appearances of a conciliatory effort towards the British government, while apologetic intentions are explained only in Urdu. Khan appears to assume that each language is respectively linked with distinct speech communities and separate audiences: Urdu with Muslims, and

60 Schirrmacher: *Waffen des Gegners*, 191; Avril A. Powell: *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993), 231.

61 Troll: *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 69f.

English with Christian missionaries. Potential overlaps through bilingualism are apparently denied or ignored. In leaving the introduction untranslated, Khan hence seems to address only his Muslim audience at this point in the text. But what prompted him to divide his audience? The bilingual character of the remainder of Khan's text emphasises his conciliatory efforts in appreciating the relevance of the Bible for Muslims and thus aims to familiarise them with the Bible from the perspective of the Quran. The goal of mutual acquaintance is stressed, while critique of Christian belief appears only as a marginal feature, as Khan's theoretical framework is missing. His critique of doctrines such as the Trinity only make complete sense, however, within his project of restoring the original message of the Bible.

On the other hand, Khan's introduction seems to first address his Muslim readership, to whom he perhaps felt it necessary to explain his project of commenting upon the Bible from a rather different perspective than conciliatory aspirations – for his Muslim audience might question his intentions in that case, suspecting his conversion to Christianity. One has to bear in mind the fierce reactions to his *Aḥkām-i ṭaʿām-i Ahl-i kitab*, published only a few years later in 1868, wherein Khan argues for the licitness of dining in the company of Britons. Thereafter, rumours about his conversion circulated. Hence, his introduction may also be read as a legitimation for his commentary as a whole, dismantling potential insinuations in advance. Thus, in order to not obfuscate any conciliatory aspirations, Khan delimits this introduction to his Muslim audience by refraining from providing its translation.

2.3 "What faith have Mohomedans in the Scripture?"

In a subsequent chapter, Khan discusses the question of the status of the Bible in Islam. Elsewhere, he refutes the idea of *nasḫ* and *mansūḫ*, the abrogation of a divine message and its replacement by another. Khan instead argues for a renewal of the same message:

> Thus it is that no commands of God are, in truth, ever cancelled or corrupted. To call them cancelled is merely a way of expressing that they are no longer required; because the commands which are now cancelled, may still be readopted: suppose the wants of the present time assume the form of those of the past, when those commands were originally promulgated.[62]

62 Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. I, 278

Khan refutes the assertion of abrogation and rather emphasises the universality of the general implications of God's message. However, these general principles require an adjustment to the respective context. With changing circumstances, particular laws may become obsolete in their particular instantiation. Still, the general implication of the law need not be abrogated, but rather readjusted to a new context. Accordingly, Khan opposes the abrogation of the Bible. The latter is rather acknowledged as a relevant and legitimate book for Muslims as well. He writes:

> Those who imagine it to be part of the Mohomedan creed that one law has totally repealed another, are utterly mistaken, and we do not believe that the *Zuboor* (Book of Psalms) abrogated the *Toureit* (Pentateuch); that the Toureit in turn gave way to the *Injeel* (New Testament); and that the New Testament was suppressed by the Holy Koran. We hold no such doctrine, and if any ignorant Mohomedan should assert to the contrary, he simply knows nothing whatever about the doctrines and articles of his faith.[63]

In particular, the last sentence seems to refer to the dispute between Pfander and Kairanawi: the former was criticised for presenting a completely misrepresented understanding of abrogation which assumed "that Muslims believed that the Qurʾan had nullified the whole *Injil* (gospel), just as the Gospel had nullified the Psalms, and the Psalms the Torah."[64]

Khan adopts Kairanawi's opinion and refutes Pfander's assertion. He thus acknowledges the Bible, properly contextualised, as a legitimate source for Muslims. In presenting a long list of Qranic quotes affirming the divine inspiration of the Bible, Khan adopts Pfander's position. Pfander likewise aimed to convince Muslims of the legitimacy of the Bible by arguing from the perspective of the Quran:

> Now, we Mohomedans believe from our heart that the Toureit, Zuboor, the writings of all the prophets, and the Injeel, are all true and sacred records, proceeding primarily from God; and we believe further, that the Koran is the last message which came down from heaven, and that, without doubt, it was delivered to our prophet, Mohomud. It is in fact the Koran that teaches us to believe faithfully, that the Scriptures above named have originated from God […].[65]

In line with Pfander, Khan first aims to refute the assertion of abrogation based on a Quranic argument. As has been discussed earlier, Khan furthermore negates Kairanawi's strong argument of a verbal corruption of the Bible. Thus, at first

63 Ibid., 280.
64 Powell: *Muslims and Missionaries*, 246.
65 Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. I, 44f.

glance, Khan seems to make far-reaching concessions to missionaries and accept several crucial arguments, while abandoning forceful counterarguments. This view discounts the powerful theoretical approach Khan develops in his introduction, however, for the inextricable linking of any religion to the universal *dīn* permits Khan to also integrate Christianity under this umbrella. All religions (*maẕāhib*) are therefore integrated under the shelter of the single true *dīn*, and the Bible is established as a legitimate, divinely inspired text. But with reference to the universal implications any *shariat* shares, Khan can also argue that the Bible has been misinterpreted, resulting in the misconceptions of Christianity. The Bible is thus acknowledged as uncorrupted in respect to its text, but not in respect to its interpretation.[66]

2.4 Parallel Inclusivist Approaches

This inclusivist move, which allows Khan to degrade the status of Christianity, shares striking similarities to the reformist approaches of "Neo-Hinduism." Inclusivism was a crucial strategy in countering the Christian mission. The emphasis on Hinduism as the single religion upholding a tolerant stance towards other traditions "provided an effective means whereby the long-established Hindu inferiority complex could be overthrown and a considered response be made to centuries of Christian polemic."[67] In his *India and Europe*, Wilhelm Halbfass mentions Ramakrishna (1836-86) and his pupil Vivekananda (1863-1902), who came to fame as the first Hindu to speak at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 in Chicago. He thus obtained the prominent position of representatitve of Hinduism, and as the most eminent proponent of inclusivism. Ramakrishna presented his concept of *sanātana dharma* (eternal "religion") as an umbrella category of its various particular expressions: "[…] the various religions were all paths to the same goal. The

66 Khan further reinforces the assumption of Christianity's deviation from *dīn* by questioning the authenticity of the Christian canon of divine texts. In the first place, he negates the divine character of a part of the canon which does not consist of revelations to prophets, but rather to "private individuals." In comparison to prophets, ordinary people cannot receive revelations "without any suspicion of error in either of the fact of the revelation itself, or of its interpretation." Although "the apostles of Christ [are acknowledged] to have been inspired men, and their writings, so true, holy and worthy of respect that they may be used as religious guides, we cannot still be disposed to include or embody them in the Injeel, for according to our religion the Injeel is held to be that sole revelation of God which was made to Jesus Christ himself […]" (Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol I, 42).

67 Richard King: *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London, New York: Routledge, 1999), 136.

metaphor of the different expressions for the one water which all drink […] illustrates the Unity of God in the diversity of forms of worship."[68] This universal tolerance and openness is thus turned against the Christian critique of Hinduism as superstitious and backward.[69] Ramakrishna inverts any critique and includes it within the realm of *sanātana dharma*. As Halbfass writes:

> Instead, Neo-Hindus tend to claim that their tradition accepts, includes, and transcends all religions, by providing them with a limited and preliminary legitimacy. in this sense, the "Hindu Dharma" does not compete with the special *dharma* of the Christian missionaries. In the Hindu self-understanding, it does not even share a common border, and no area of potential conflict, with Christianity. Instead, it claims to represent the *dharma* per se, a higher unity of all specific religions: Unlike the religions, and regardless of all differences in interpretation, *dharma* itself is one (*dharma eka*).[70]

The critique of Hinduism thus becomes obsolete, as it inevitably bounces off the inclusivist claim of *dharma* as an umbrella for the various particular religions. Vivekananda argues:

> Ours is the universal religion. It is inclusive enough, it is broad enough to include all the ideals. All the ideals of religion that already exist in the world can be immediately included, and we can patiently wait for all the ideals that are to come in the future to be taken in the same fashion, embraced in the infinite arms of the religion of the Vedānta.[71]

According to Vivekenanda, then, any critique is included per se within the realm of *sanātana dharma*. Thus, Halbfass concludes that "dharma [...] serve[s] as [the translation] for, but also as devices of self-assertion against, the Western[72] concepts of religion and philosophy."[73] Parallel to *dharma*, Khan's *dīn* serves as a means to counter the arguments of the Christian mission and degrade its claim of truth to a mere subordinate branch of one's own tradition.

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68 Wilhelm Halbfass: *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 227.

69 King: *Orientalism and Religion*, 136.

70 Halbfass: *India and Europe*, 341f.

71 Vivekananda as quoted by Halbfass: *India and Europe*, 238.

72 Halbfass's terminology for a Western concept has to be viewed critically, for it is dubious to what extent it is reasonable to assume religion as a Western concept – in particular in the mid-19th century, a time when processes of negotiation regarding the conception of religion were already in full swing. At this time, the "originally" Western concept of religion was already standing in contact with South Asian religious traditions and presumably being transformed due to this encounter.

73 Halbfass: *India and Europe*, 219.

In fact, Khan goes even further and questions the reliability of the contemporary understanding of Christianity. Although Khan acknowledges the status of the Bible in Islam, he simultaneously presupposes its misinterpretation as an uncontested fact. Apart from his concessions, Khan thus does not pen the commentary as a merely conciliatory work, but first and foremost as an apologetic one: in the actual commentary following the first, merely introductory volume, Khan sets out to restore the original message of the Bible. The Quran, as the last and single uncorrupted message, provides him with the proper perspective.[74]

2.5 Restoring the Original Message of the Bible

Having established the theoretical foundation and terminology to be applied in his commentary, Khan continues in the second and third volume of his commentary with an actual examination of the Biblical text. In order to reveal any misinterpretations based on imprecise translation, which had been discussed as one important reason for the corruption of meaning (*taḥrīf-i maʿnī*), Khan refers to the Hebrew original.

Starting with the book of Genesis, Khan questions central tenets of Christian belief and aims to restore the original Hebrew interpretation. In this context, a few topics recur frequently: one of them is the doctrine of Trinity, discussed in his commentary on the first verses of Genesis. Here, Khan doubts that "spirit" refers to a third person, as seen in the interpretation of Trinity:

> Christian divines, in opposition both to us Mohomedans as well as to the Jews, apply a different sense to the aforesaid expression. They affirm that the word *spirit* here represents the third person of the Trinity, viz the Holy Ghost. But we Mohomedans and the Jews likewise do not concur with them in this opinion: because, in the first place, it is to be observed that according to our views the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be deduced from all the Scriptures. Again, independently of this opinion, the word *spirit* as here used can, by no means, be made to represent one of the persons in the Trinity; for, it is here used as a *noun governed* by the *governing* or *possessive noun God* […].[75]

Returning to this topic in another example, Khan declares a calculatedly wrong translation to be responsible for the corrupted reading of a verse in conformity with the doctrine of the Trinity:

74 Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. I, 17.
75 Khan: *Tabayīn*, Vol. II, 484.

> Consequently, because the English Translators have rendered the expression in a manner calculated evidently to show that God took some other being besides Himself into consultation on the subject of the creation of man, Christian divines have been led to deduce therefrom the supposition of a plurality of persons in the Godhead, or in other words, the doctrine of the Trinity.[76]

Besides the topic of the Trinity, Khan additionally reveals corruptions concerning fundamental tenets of Christian belief: among them the doctrine of original sin. Khan questions this doctrine in referring to "the perfect justice of God,"[77] and doubts that God has, as he writes:

> […] visited all the succeeding generations of Adam with the fatal consequences of this transgression of their first parents; – since according to our own finite and imperfect notions of what is just and what is unjust, we do not hold the son responsible for the guilt of the father.[78]

Instead, Khan presents the Muslim perspective, which negates the sin committed by Adam. He does not interpret the ordinance of God as "strictly incumbent and obligatory," but rather as "a caution prompted by a regard for man's well being, and not as a peremptory command which must necessarily be implicitly obeyed."[79] Khan affirms this position in referring to the result of Adam and Eve's transgression: "God merely pointed out to them the harm they had brought upon themselves, without expressing Divine indignation or visiting them on the spot with any mark of displeasure – We would not therefore hold Adam and Eve guilty of a transgression of law in this instance of their disobedience to God."[80]

In respect to the Sabbath, Khan concludes a general conformity among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. All acknowledge the Sabbath as a holy and sacred day. Nevertheless, the way of observance varies among the three religions. More relevant, however, is Khan's discussion of the fixation of the Sabbath. Khan argues that the Sabbath is to be taken on the seventh day, according to the Bible, but that no particular day had been fixed: the Jews had confused the day "in the course of time as they were accustomed to enlarge and diminish, for certain purposes, the proper number of their weeks in the month, and that of months in the year, and sometimes to exchange one month for another."[81] The Christians, however, changed the Sabbath to Sunday, as "it is the day on which Christ rose from the

76 Ibid., 511.
77 Ibid., 586.
78 Ibid., 586.
79 Ibid., 586.
80 Ibid., 586.
81 Ibid., 535f.

dead; and no other day can therefore be more happy and hopeful."[82] Khan thus aims to show human interference and the corruption of God's commandments in a relocation of the original Sabbath. According to his argument, the original day of Sabbath cannot differ in the three religions, as they are all related to the same origin. However, only the Muslim perspective is acknowledged as legitimate:

> We learn from our religious Records, that our Prophet informed us that the day appointed by God to be the Sabbath, was *Friday*; that the Jews and Christians had differed among themselves in receiving it; that to us Mohomedans God had been pleased to point to *Friday* for the Sabbath; and that the Mohomedans were therefore to solemnize the Sabbath on Friday.[83]

In particular, the example of the refutation of the Christian doctrine of Trinity clearly demonstrates Khan's approach: he seems to make far-reaching concessions to Christian claims, as with the claim of the uncorrupted transmission of the Bible, which is recognised as a legitimate source in Islam. Yet, in the same breath, these apparent concessions are undermined and reversed in Khan's inclusivist approach. He acknowledges the Bible as an uncorrupted and legitimate source for Islam, and thus argues from within the Bible itself. His perspective on the Bible is, however, Quranic.

This is the reason why Khan insists upon the uncorrupted status of the words of the Bible in his introduction. The Christian canon itself is utilised to prove that Christianity is a mere misinterpretation of the originally true message. By refuting Christian doctrines, and in particular the Trinity, Khan utilises an impactful theoretical framework which presumes an essentially immutable message of *dīn* expressed in varying *shariat*s. This inclusivist move permits him to refer to a fundamental commonality in the implications of the various *shariat*s. The Quran, as the last and uncorrupted message to restore and eventually maintain the implications of *dīn*, serves as a basis upon which to derive God's oneness in its most fundamental principle. On this basis, Khan utilises the Quran to restore the original message of the Bible, which had been distorted by the "Christian doctors." Thus, Islam is identified and equated with *dīn* and serves as the fundamental reference point for the measuring of other religions.

82 Ibid., 536.
83 Ibid., 536f.

Conclusion

The dispute between Pfander and Kairanawi was a turning point in the encounter of Muslims and Christian missionaries in South Asia. While Hindus had hitherto been the main focus of the Christian missions, Muslims increasingly came under missionary scrutiny from the 1830s onwards. Disputes between Muslims and missionaries, public preachers, and the publication of pamphlets were the order of the day, but the dispute between Pfander and Kairanawi stands out with respect to their approaches and engagement with their opposition's sources. Pfander had acquired a significant and hitherto unequalled knowledge of the Quran and Muslim languages. The latter permitted him to present his theses in Urdu, the prevalent language of South Asian Muslims. Urdu, in contrast to Persian, was not restricted to graduates of higher education. Furthermore, his acquaintance with Arabic allowed him to rest his argument on the Quran: on this basis, Pfander argued for the legitimacy of the Bible as a source in Islam. Referring to obvious contradictions between both texts, Pfander negated the possibility of both being divinely inspired. Having established several principles upon which to measure the validity of a divine scripture – principles derived, however, from a generalisation of the Bible – he concluded that only the Bible could be acknowledged as a divine revelation.

Pfander, however, had a weak point, which was utilised by his opponent Kairanawi: he insisted vehemently on the uncorrupted transmission of the Bible, as supported by his Pietist upbringing as well as the Pietist orientation of his missionary school in Basel. He lacked any thorough knowledge of the contemporary discourse of Biblical criticism, and thus could not counter Kairanawi's argument, which was based on exactly this discourse. Kairanawi referred to the charge of corruption presented in the early period of Islam against Judaism and Christianity. However, the strong impact of this old charge lies in its link with the intra-Christian controversy: Kairanawi argued that not even Christians themselves agreed upon the authenticity of the Bible.

Khan, who was acquainted with this dispute and its arguments, develops a differing approach in his commentary on the Bible. He neglects Kairanawi's charge of the verbal corruption of the Bible and emphasises its uncorrupted state. Reminiscent of Pfander, he argues through quranic quotes for the legitimacy of the Bible for Muslims. These concessions to Christian claims have been interpreted by contemporary Britons as the first fruits of their civilisatory politic. In a similar vein, recent studies also read his commentary as a mere conciliatory work in the aftermath of 1857. I have argued in the preceding pages that this assertion – if appro-

priate at all – requires a contextualized view: although the commentary was published only from 1862 onwards, Khan had already started to prepare it in the early 1850s. This fact alone raises serious doubts about a restriction of the commentary to a merely conciliatory purpose that was aimed at presenting commonalities between Islam and Christianity. Thus, this goal appears to be no more than an additional aim added *a posteriori*.

But these concessions must be read in respect to Khan's vast introductory apparatus, this consisting of the entire first volume of his work. Herein, Khan develops an inclusivist approach which presumes a universal message (*dīn*) that was manifested in particular *shariats* according to their respective circumstances. But Khan does not stop here, he adds a further level denoting the present religions (*maẕhab*) which are perceived as corrupted derivatives of the original *shariat*s. This inclusion adds a crucial footnote to his inclusivist approach, as the present religions are, despite their link to a shared, universal message, *a priori* presumed as corruptions. The only exception is Islam, which is presumed to be the last message, sent to eventually restore the preceding religions.

With this in mind, Khan's concessions to Christian claims appear as something of a tactical move, as they allow him to reverse Pfander's argument regarding the authenticity and legitimate state of the Bible into a thesis of corruption. Khan emulates Pfander's emic approach and argues from within the Bible. His view is nontheless overlaid by a Quranic perspective. Islam and the Quran thus serve as a means to discover the corruption in the Bible and are applied to restore the original message of the Bible, which is in conformance with the general implications of *dīn* and, thus, equally in conformity with Islam as its final, uncorrupted manifestation.

This commentary on the Bible is the first step in the broadening of Khan's perspective on religion. While we have seen a restriction to merely inner-Islamic debates in his first phase, we observe here an engagement with the holy text of Christianity. On this basis, Khan develops a new philosophical framework in his introduction to the commentary that allows him to deal with a plurality of belief systems – an aspect entirely ignored in his first phase. This framework forms the basis for all later developments in his thought. While we have seen in Khan's commentary only a introductory engagement with the positioning of Islam towards other religions, Chapter 5 will discuss Khan's explicit approach toward the plurality of religions and the position of Islam in the context of this plurality.

Khan's commentary, furthermore, is his first attempt to defend Islam against foreign critique. While the commentary was triggered by a confrontation with Christian mission, Chapters 4 and 5 will present an engagement with the newly emerging discipline of Orientalism and their approach to the history of Islam. I

will contrast Khan's newly developed philosophical framework with his early writings and further question the assertion of a total break.