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## Kāshif al-Ghiṭā's Methodology in Criticism of New Testament (Christianity)

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### Abstract

This paper explores the method Allāmeḥ Muhammad Husayn Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, a famous Muslim theorist of the 18-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, employed in his critique of Christianity. Although, his method for looking into the Bible is similar to that of Christian and Jewish scholars, his assumptions and results are different. Based on his viewpoints on the Bible, he believes in impeccable revelations. He examined superstructure, namely accuracy of attribution of books and pamphlets to their authors as well as personality and credibility of Jesus Christ's disciples and apostles. Lack of credibility of the twelve original disciples of Jesus Christ and unreliability of the Gospels are proved. Moreover, he has carefully examined the content as infrastructure of the New Testament. As such, incongruities can be observed between the New Testament and the Old Testament. There are contradictions in the Bible itself. He prefers to apply argumentative tactic for general readers. In addition, his application of comparative step in his critique is considerable. This paper studies Kāshif al-Ghiṭā's approach to review the Bible in order to figure out Muslim scholars' viewpoints on the Christianity.

**Keywords:** Methodology, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, Christianity, The New Testament, The Bible.

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## **Introduction**

Since the colonial era of the 19th and 20th centuries, Christian missionaries started to propagate their faith with evangelical promises in Muslim countries. Adherents to Christianity pretended that it was just this religion which was revealed to put into words the teachings aimed at human prosperity. It was alleged that perfectionism and salvation can only be achieved through being a Jesus follower. At that time, it was said that Christians' religious principles were unique, while many principles and teachings are common between two religions - Christianity & Islam- and even many principles of the latter are complementary to those of the former. Institutes, educational centers and hospitals were established in order to capture young Muslims' attention to Christianity. Of course, Britain was content with this matter. This event led Islamic theoreticians to look into the Christianity comprehensively in an effort to raise awareness about this religion among Muslims. In doing so, Muslim scholars, who possessed proficiency on the holy Qur'an, initially drawn upon investigating the accuracy and authenticity of the Old and New Testaments. Among such scholars, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā is a prominent figure whose approach to the critique of Christianity is of paramount significance. Although thinkers and theorists in the Judaism and Christianity constituted the primary kernels of criticizing the Scripture, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā initiated vigilant examination of the Scripture with an investigation into the Bible concurrent with evangelical promises of missionaries in the Middle East. His endeavors had important consequences hence, came up with a two-volume book: the first published in Cairo in 1912 and the second in Baghdad in 1928.

With regard to the necessity of a wide-ranging clarification of Christianity among Islamic thinkers, the current study, aiming at introducing Kāshif al-Ghiṭā as the one who criticized the Christian scripture as well as identifying his methodology for critique, intends to answer these questions: "What is the approach of Kāshif al-Ghiṭā in his critique of the New Testament?" and "What methods has he applied in his critique?"

## **Criticism of the Scripture**

The word criticism is derived from the Greek word 'Kriuo' signifying judging, distinguishing, and carefully evaluating (Achtmeier, 1985: 129). According to this, the Biblical criticism means vigilant examination of the Bible with the determination to propose newer explanations thereof aimed at preventing some prior biased interpretations from recurrence (Metzger and Coogan, 1993: 318). The Biblical criticism is a method which holds that there is no God, any text including the Scripture can be meaningless or erroneous and such errors ought to be recognized and eliminated. The world, as suggested by this methodology, is based on human discovery, logic, and experience (Rogerson, 1995:46) and, the Scripture, just like other ordinary human-authored texts, is subject to investigation and criticism.

Accuracy of the incidents expressed in the Scripture is assessed by historical criteria, and getting insight into it has its basis on modesty, presence of mind, and faith (Kasha, 1996:109). Accordingly, the biblical criticism is replaced by historical criticism of the Bible, which was an extensive scientific current in the 18th century and in the era of Enlightenment.

Prior to this period, Erasmus (1466-1536), Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Richard Simon (1638-1712), Jean Astruc (1684-1766), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Lock (1632-1704), and Isaac Newton (1642-1727) had made critical discussion out of the Scripture (Metzger and Coogan, 1993: 322). Eighteenth century and periods afterwards, though, were the centerpieces of historical criticism of the Bible with significant impacts on the New Christian theology and thought.

There are different methodologies in criticism of the Scripture and meticulous approaches to resources of Judaism and Christianity. Although many of such critical approaches are highly analogous to one another, each has its own definition, objectives, and presuppositions. Historical-critical method, historical-grammatical method, and traditional-historical approach are among the methodologies whose differences are revealed upon investigation of their resources:

#### **Historical-Grammatical Method**

Also referred to as “literal method,” this dates back to the Reformation Era and expanded into contemporary centuries. Adherents of this method believe that the Scripture is revealed down as an impeccable word of God. Histories and reports cited in this book are genuine. Also, people named therein have really subsisted and performed what they are attributed to. Since this method intends to achieve true interpretation of the Scripture—namely, genuine intention of God—there should be examinations carried out on all morphological, syntactic, historical, literary, and theological aspects of the holy text. That is why it is referred to as the historical-critical method (Surburg, 1974: 278-288).

In this approach, terms and sentences of the Scripture are believed to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit to its authors; thus, neither is the Book’s content subject to criticism nor its style and form. Moreover, as viewed by historical critics, the Scripture should be the ultimate authentic reference, by which, external criteria is assessed (Surburg, 1974: 280-187) and, the Scripture has the decisive authority (Davidson, 1990:51-52).

#### **Historical-Critical Method**

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, scholars have conducted studies on veracity of claims stated in the Book based on a body of presuppositions and instruments of modern history. This approach looks into the text of the Scripture as a manuscript of ancient literature, since it considers the Book as a byproduct of the history (Krentz, 1975:2). The world, as suggested by this way of thinking, is based on human discovery, logic, and experience (Rogerson, 1995: 46). The historical-grammatical method underlines principles of criticism, analogy, and correlation.

Based on such principles, the Scripture is far from an integrated text, as it is tailored by human minds, and it cannot be appraised against itself. Many sentences of the Scripture lack their usual creditability, since it is a time-bound text. Human components, therefore, should be segregated from the Book’s vital elements (Davidson, 1990:51-52).

#### **Traditional-Historical Method**

This approach identifies evolution of both oral and written ingredients of the Scripture in its present form. This approach presumes that identification of different evolutionary stages of the Scripture can be effective in the

segregation of genuine and historical materials from later incorporations.

Since critical methodologies are highly similar to one another, Scripture researchers have placed the historical-grammatical method under the traditional-historical approach as they intend to reconstruct incidents and history of the Scripture and the traditional-historical approach considers evolution of oral and written ingredients of the Scripture.

General approaches in criticizing the Scripture resulted in establishment of different kinds of Biblical criticism. Although precise segregation of these kinds is impossible, this study seeks to address the criticism of the Scripture by Muslim thinkers in its culmination in 18th and 19th centuries.

### **Muslim Thinkers and Criticism of the Scripture**

Conflicts between Islam, on the one hand, and Judaism and Christianity, on the other, date back to Islam's advent, to which some Qur'anic verses have referred. Intending to direct Jews' and Christians' opinions toward faith and change and ascertain its legitimacy, the Holy Qur'an undertakes to call on some issues and topics adopted from Judaism and Christianity, which probably leads to criticism—like what the case is for the Trinity.

With the introduction of colonization in the 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Muslim thinkers' criticism of the Scripture reaches its peak. In as much as evangelical promises initiated to find a voice in Muslim countries, Muslim scholars began to carry out vigilant surveys on sources of Judaism and Christianity. Shaykh Raḥmaih al-Allah Hindī (1818-1891), Allameh Muhammad Husayn Kāshif al-Ghiṭā (1873-1952), Sayyid

Sharaf al-Dīn (1872-1957), and Allāmeḥ Muhammad Javād Bilāghī (1903-1973) are among prodigious Muslim scholars who had critical eyes on the Scripture. In this study, though, solely the approach taken by Allāmeḥ Muhammad Husayn Kāshif al-Ghiṭā is addressed, other viewpoints toward whether the Old or New Testaments pinpointed by other thinkers needs additional research.

### **Allāmeḥ Muhammad Husayn Kāshif al-Ghiṭā: Scientific and Social Life**

Born in 1873 in Najaf, Iraq, Muhammad Husayn Kāshif al-Ghiṭā was a great Shia scholar. He was pioneer in literature, astronomy, arithmetic, and geometry. He, afterwards, learnt principles of *fiqh* from Muhammad Kāzīm Yazdī (1919), *kalām* from Mirzā Bāqir Istahbānātī (1801-1869), and *hadith* from Hajj Mirzā Husayn Nūrī (1838-1902). Muhammad Husayn was religiously and politically talented. He undertook his religious services and spent his time learning major sociopolitical issues and awakening Muslim states. His book "The Religion and Islam or Islamic Invitation" was a criticism of Western intellectual foundations and their roles in manifestation of new civilization. In this book, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā introduced religious feebleness and infiltration of western spirit in Muslims as their only weakness points, suggesting a Muslim unity as the solution there to. Kāshif al-Ghiṭā's journeys made to Islamic countries were his usual practical method to awaken the Islamic community. His journeys to Iran happened twice in 1945 and 1948, that was, during the Iran National Movement. Although Kāshif al-Ghiṭā was under the influence of awakening movement pioneers such as Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī (1839-1897), Shaykh Muhammad

Abdūh (1849-1905), etc., the depth of his thought, acquaintance with politics and time issues, clarity in speech, courage in action, religious position, and jurisprudence authority endowed him with a particular preeminence at a time when the Islam World was denied of great revolutionary peacemakers.

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā's number of works on jurisprudence, philosophy, kalām, interpretation, and so on exceeds eighty. In 1952, he died in Karand, near Kirmānshāh, at the age of 79. Kāshif al-Ghiṭā was buried in Vādī al-Salām, Najaf's great cemetery . Kāshif al-Ghiṭā subsisted in an age when religious thoughts inspired by then contemporary scholars such as Allāmeḥ Bilāghī (1865-1933), Sayyid Sharaf al-Dīn Āmilī (1873-1957), and Sayyid Mūhsin Amīn (1867-1952) were perfected. Since within a time span of his living in Egypt, he confronted a movement promoting Christianity, insulting the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and jeering The Holy Qur'an, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā determined to dispute over Christian beliefs, a repercussion of which is compiled in his work "Al-Tauzīḥ fī mā Huva-l 'injil va mā Huva-l Masīh"<sup>1</sup>, which is prominent for its methodology in this area (Mūsavī Bujnūrdī, 1950 V2: 105-107; Āghā Buzurg-e Tehrani, 1983: V.2, 612-619; Al-Zereklī, 1992: V.6, 106-107).

### **Criticism of Christianity in Kāshif al-Ghiṭā's School of Thought**

This Muslim thinker criticizes Christianity using two approaches. The accuracy which can be assigned to books and their authors

as well as personality and creditability of Jesus Christ's disciples and Apostles is examined as superstructure of the New Testament and contents and anecdotes are investigated as infrastructure of the Bible.

### **Examination of Superstructure of the New Testament**

Preceding its content analysis, the structural analysis of the Bible deals with the form and does not take into account textual and content analysis. This criticism includes Textual Criticism (Achteimeier, 1985:12), Historical Criticism (EB, 1995: V.14, 998), Philological Criticism (EB, 1995: V.2, 196; V.14, 997), Literary Criticism(), Form Criticism (Achteimeier, 1985: 131), Tradition Criticism (Achteimeier, 1985:132; EB, 1995: V.14, 998; Metzger and Coogan, 1993: 323), Redaction Criticism (Metzger and Coogan, 1993: 323; EB, 1995: V.14, 998; Achteimeier, 1985: 133), Canonical Criticism (Achteimeier, 1985: 133).

### **Examination of Biography of the Bible Writers**

Texts are created in their historical and geographical contexts, and each text should be interpreted within the framework of its own time and circumstance (EB, 1995: V.14, 998). In many Biblical texts, time, authors, date of authorship, and addressees are expressed. One may find evidence within the text itself aimed at a more accurate definition of the date when it has been penned (EB, 1995: V.2, 196). In this part, biographies of the Bible writers are considered as part of the superstructure in order to find their belief to God and their dignity.

<sup>1</sup> It is Worth to Say His Writings Have Been Translated into Persian by Iranian Islamic Scholar, Hādī Khusrushāhī.

### ***-Development of the Base of Christianity***

According to the Biblical accounts, a large number of people have witnessed Jesus Christ's miracles, but not more than 70 persons believed him, from which 12 ones were Jesus' disciples. Saint Peter is one of the disciples who established the centerpiece of this building. On Saint Peter's level of perseverance and faith in his God, Jesus Christ, a reference to the Gospel of Matthew can be made (Matthew: 26, 69-75). Judas Iscariot, according to the New Testament, is one of the twelve original disciples of Jesus Christ. He is clearly introduced therein as a traitor and thief (John: 12, 4-6).

### ***-Features of Jesus Christ's Second-Grade Companions***

Companions mean Jesus Christ's disciples, among them Paul the Apostle is the most famous. According to the fifth book of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, Paul the Apostle is the most prominent warrior in propagating Christianity. He took Christianity to Syria, Rome, and Greece. Paul moved forward even to Spain. Disciples of Mark the Evangelist followed Paul the Apostle and accompanied him in some of his travels (Acts, 17-28). He is a Christian-converted Jew who displayed no attachment to any religion. All he had committed were aimed at eliminating heavenly laws and teachings. He was a ruthless Jew who could fluently speak Hebrew, Roman, and Greek—the ability which provoked him to evangelicalism. When he was a Jew, his name was Saul, which he changed to Paul when he grew to be a Christian. He was 20 years old when he first visited Jesus Christ, in whom he refused to believe. He was a strong enemy of Christianity, trying to eradicate Christian pillars. After Stephen was hanged, a group of Christians fled to

Damascus out of fear of Saul, who chased them to execute. In the middle of the route, however, he encountered with a manifestation of Jesus Christ and became blind for three days due to exposure to extreme radiance. When he entered Damascus, he recovered eyesight and converted to Christianity. He made relationships with Christ's disciples, especially Peter. He, then, grew to be a disciple of Christ—apparently, at least (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 2, 89) However, he was, in practice, their master, and, based on some evidence, he introduced some deviant ideas such as Trinity into Christianity. He even turned Jewish laws upside down and changed God's religion (Galatian, 4, 9-11; Colossian, 2, 16 & 21-22).

He intended to make religion a pure spirituality after Judaism was filled with absolute corporality. He found the opportunity to incubate his thoughts in Christianity, making it corrupt and vicious (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol.2, 89-90). He presented a new religion which was unknown to Jesus Christ and his disciples. To secure his own position, he attributed it to Jesus, since Paul injected the spirit of innovation into the hearts of Christians and was a consistent critique of Peter (Galatian, 2:11-...). The Gospel of Matthew reads: "And I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew: 16:18-19).

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' shows that Apostle Saint Peter did not believe in God strongly and Paul changed Christianity foundations. So

they are not trustworthy as the first founders of Christianity let alone the others.

### **Examination of Credibility of Gospels**

For Christians, Four Gospels are more valued and important, among which the Gospel of Matthew comes with a priority as its author was selected by Jesus Christ from among his twelve original disciples. Kāshif al-Ghiṭā enumerates some reasons regarding untrustworthiness of the Gospel of Matthew:

1. Primary Christians are in disagreement to attribution of the Gospel to Matthew, and this disagreement is considerable to other Gospels as well;
2. Christians disagree about the first language of the Gospel of Matthew, with some saying it had been written in Hebrew, others believing in Syriac, while some others saying it had been in Greek;
3. There are further disagreements respecting the time when the Gospel of Matthew had been authored: some estimate it to be eight years after Ascension of Jesus, while others believe in fifteen. Still, there are others who believe that the Gospel of Matthew had been written between sixty to seventy years after Jesus Christ was crucified (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol.2, 94-95).

On the Gospel of Mark, this is important to note that Mark the Evangelist was a Jew, contemporary to Jesus Christ, in whom he believed. Mark received his teachings from Peter and penned his Gospel in late first century. His book is a translation of Peter's speeches. There is disagreement regarding its date or who translated it into Greek. Likewise, there is not much information

about its author, and there are only some accounts on Mark's dispute with Paul (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 2, 95).

The Gospel of John is the last Gospel that was authored at the end of the first century. Its author was deeply favored by Jesus Christ. However, inclusion of some rough materials, contradictions with other Gospels and statement at some points which do not exist in other Gospels have provided enough reasons for a disbelief in it. This deflection has been wide enough to make some Christians consider the book not as a religious book, but a romance. Multiplicity of gods, inter alia, is an issue which is regarded unbelievable by some Christians (John: 10, 35-36). Christians believe in the genuineness and authenticity of the Gospels. Yet how could the incorrectness and inaccuracy be neglected then?

### **Examination of Infrastructure of New Testament**

Introspective approach to the New Testament is a logical method in which, discovery of topics, appraisal of data, identification of argumentation methods, evaluation, examination of the text's strength in expressing its intensions, assessment of authors' worldviews and vantage points, and authors' partialities are taken into vigilant account.

### **Contradictions in New Testament**

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā could find incongruities and disagreements in the Gospels:

#### ***-Jesus Christ's Parentage***

In the Gospel of Matthew, the number of ancestors from Jesus' father to Ibrahim is mentioned to be 40 (Matthew: 1, 1-17). However, this is said to be 55 elsewhere (Luke: 3, 23-38). Moreover, there are disagreements regarding the names of Jesus'

father. Noteworthy this is that the parentage of fatherless Jesus goes to husband of his mother, Joseph the son of Jacob or Joseph the son of Hali. Naturally speaking, although, what is the association between one person and husband of his/her mother?

### ***-Jesus Christ's Disposition upon his Death***

One who claims to be God is inexplicably anxious and terrified one night before his death. He said to his wretched companions "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me" (Matthew: 26, 38-39). He continues:

"Put your sword back in its place" Jesus said, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels" (Matthew: 26, 52-53). This is an unjustifiable contradiction. He is, at first, a chock-full submissive to the will of God and His will, but then he insistently demands God to take over his tragic death.

### ***-Jesus Christ's Departure from his Grave***

In this Gospel, Jesus Christ remains for three days in his grave after he is hanged just like Jonah who remained for three days inside a great whale's belly (Luke: 3, 23-38). Jesus, although, is resurrected afterwards. The Gospel of Mark reads: "who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise" (Mark: 10, 34). As cited by all Gospels, Jesus Christ was hanged and, then, buried at Friday evening. For all Saturday or Sunday morning and night, he remained at his grave, where he afterwards departed. At Sunday sunrise, Mary Magdalene comes at Jesus' grave, which she finds to be empty. Accordingly,

Jesus had been in his grave only for one morning and two nights.

This indicated respecting Jesus' departure from his grave and its time: "After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb" (Matthew: 28, 1). According to the Book of John, Jesus was buried on the Sabbath and left his grave on Sunday. He remained there only part of Saturday or part of Sunday (John: 19&20). Therefore, how this matches the story of Jonah and his three-day stay at the whale's belly? (Matthew: 12, 40)

### ***-Abolishment or Maintenance of Shari'a***

There are contradictory materials in the Bible on the fact whether Jesus Christ had attempted to maintain and complete the Judaism or he tried to abolish it totally. Torah regards its laws and regulations to be wholly permanent. This is indicated to be said to Israel by God: "I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, by which the person who obeys them will live" (Ezekeil: 20, 11). Also, somewhere else in Torah reads: "You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good" (Nehemiah: 9, 13).

Jesus Christ offered his invitations to Torah just like the manner a preacher does. Expressing that he has brought no new Shari'a, Jesus demanded people to follow the precepts of Torah, saying: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew: 5, 17). This Jesus and his disciples, however, exerted several changes in Moses' Shari'a and gradually demolished it. Jesus is the first one

who performs this initiative as he says to his disciples: "...If you want to enter life, keep the commandments. Which ones? He inquired. Jesus replied: You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother and 'love your neighbor as yourself "(Matthew: 19, 17-18). This is, although, negated somewhere else (John: 8:1-8).

After referring to contradictions, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā lays a question: "Has Jesus Christ been a wrongdoer himself on account of his order to stone a sinless woman?! Clearly, he has been a wrongdoer for such an order; otherwise, he had to perform it personally. Or, he has been sinless, but failed to perform the rule of God and disregarded Torah, which is also a tremendous sin, too".

After Jesus, his disciples allowed some formerly forbidden things in order to release people from their religious services and duties aimed at their attraction to Christianity. Paul permitted all said items save for adultery. After the case of Helliath, he said: "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving "(1Timothy: 4, 4).

### **Contradictions between Old and New Testaments**

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā has not made an elaborate authorship on this section of contradictions due to the fact that he may be felt that expression of contradictions in the New Testament is more essential. Regarding Jesus' ancestry and parentage, the Bible is filled with serious incongruities. According to the stemma cited in the Bible and Torah for Jesus Christ, he is a three-timer illegitimate son (Matthew: 1, 1-16) The Gospel of Matthew is, as suggested by Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, the most creditable Gospel. It,

however, has positioned the unfathered Perez and adulterous Judah (fourth ancestor of Jesus) among Jesus Christ's family tree (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 2, 38-39). In the Gospel of Luke, also, this stemma is reiterated. It indicates that Jesus' line starts from Joseph the son of Hali: "..... He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Hali... the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, 34 the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac,"(Luke: 3, 23-34) Among almost all nations, meanwhile, adultery is a heinous crime which excludes people from becoming a prophet, let alone God! Even Jesus Christ, in Torah's Ten Commandments, has placed adultery among the most terrible forbidden deeds (Matthew: 17, 18; Mark: 10, 19). Another ancestor of Jesus Christ is Boaz who says: "Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab." According to the Bible, Rahab was a prostitute (Joshua: 2, 1). Solomon the son of David is another ancestor of Jesus Christ. According to the Gospel of Matthew, David married Uriah and Solomon was born (King 2: 11, 3-5).

All these cases illustrate the Gospels do not confirm each other. Even the materials in the New Testament do not back up the Old Testament which is Shari'a and valid for Christianity.

The approach adopted by Kāshif al-Ghiṭā in his criticism of the Bible indicates that he has been attentive to both external and internal elements of criticism. Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' systematicity in criticizing the Bible demonstrates that he has taken advantage of several methods in his studies and research.

### **Kāshif al-Ghiṭā's Methods in Criticism of the Bible**

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā has made use of research methods and practices in his criticism that have attached significance to his methodologies, in which following items are noteworthy:

### **Argumentative Method**

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā took advantage of rational proof in his arguments with Christian followers. He rejects or denies any thing using certain and indubitable axioms and premises as well as the principles to which most religious people display commitment.

In the second chapter of his *The Bible and Christ*, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā provides response to the article "Proper Argument in Proof of Divinity of Jesus Christ" by Lewis Shaykh Yasūī, who is a prominent scholar at Christian College of Beirut and has spent many years of his life in advertisement of Christianity. His article was published in *al-Mashriq Journal* (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 2, 66).

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā clarifies that specification of divinity or non-divinity of Jesus Christ is a highly important issue which requires powerful argumentations as we are followers of veracity and submissive to a valuable, reliable reason, in case one is found (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 2, 70-71).

In the affirmation of the divinity of Jesus Christ, priest Lewis Shaykh Yasūī indicates, "Jesus Christ has two human and divine natures, just like a person who has two personalities: evil personality which is his /her body and spiritual character which is his/her ego. Human aspect of Jesus Christ, which is his temporal phase, is emanated in human dispositions like walking, getting tired, and dying. On the other hand, his divine aspect is demonstrated in his miracles such as manifestation in Mount Sinai and

making alive dead. Such deeds are originated from a divine person who can, without blasphemy and rodomontade, state that: "I am the light of the universe; I am the right path; I am the essence of the life; God and I are one"(Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 2, 73).

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā refers to the argument necessity of existence and its accessories, indicating' "Necessity of existence is identical to pre-existence and is incompatible with creation and destruction. There is, in addition, no possibility of composition. A creative whose creation is conditioned is characterized by creation and composition. Possibility and necessity are contradictory to one another and cannot come together. Thus, an aggregation of human nature, as a probable creature, and divine nature, which is a necessary issue, is impossible because a necessary issue cannot be attributed by a probable creature. Moreover, a necessary issue cannot be laying as a context of occurrences, because if a necessary issue is attributed by a probable creature, it would grow to be necessary issue: an improbable occurrence" (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 2, 74).

Thereafter, Lewis Shaykh Yasūī considers Jesus Christ's miracles as a sign of his divinity, for which Kāshif al-Ghiṭā's replies, "In case miracles necessitate either a divine essence or its doer being God, why other prophets are excluded from such a divinity!" (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 2, 74).

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā measures the reason as why human societies are skeptics in their beliefs like credence in divinity of Jesus, as they prefer to be apostate than to worship someone like themselves. A rational individual cannot come to believe that a creature like himself/herself is a part of God

or God has incarnated within him/her. (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā', 2011: Vol. 2, 69).

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' refers to concordance of arrangements and results. In affirmation of arrangements Kāshif al-Ghiṭā says: "Before Christ, religions and nations were subject to definite deviations. All such divergences demonstrate that the world is in need of a savior who is able to distinguish the right path from the wrong one. Neither such deviations nor arrival of a savior can be associated with divinity of Jesus. Also, such arrangements cannot be used to come to the conclusion: Jesus was Almighty God " (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 2, 77).

### **Comparative Method**

Another method adopted by Kāshif al-Ghiṭā in his Biblical criticism is the utilization of the comparative method. He was absolutely dominant on Christian religious texts, on the one hand, and familiar with general temperaments of the Holy Quran, on the other. In examining different issues, he expresses Qur'anic treatments thereon, as well .

### ***-Rise and Fall Regarding Monotheism and Atheism***

According to Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, the Bible is multifaceted in its expression of Jesus Christ's speech on his purpose of prophecy and God's monotheism (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 1, 19). Somewhere Jesus claims that: "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John: 17, 3).

He, however, after expressing this transcendental fact that is approved by arguments and logics, indicates, according to some other Gospels, some speeches which are opposed thereto: "I and the Father are

one /... that the Father is in me, and I in the Father " (John: 10, 30 & 38).

As suggested by Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, such statements are indicative of incarnation—the development which is unbelievable and irrational according to all sound minds (John: 10, 30&38). Meanwhile, the Holy Qur'an introduces Jesus Christ as a humble, pious, and Unitarian person: "[Jesus] said: I am God's servant, He has given me the Book and made me a Prophet" (Quran, Mary: 30) and "I have never told them anything except what you have ordered me to, worship God as my Lord and your Lord..." (Quran, Maidah: 117). According to the Holy Qur'an, Jesus Christ was an entirely sincere servant and worshipper of God, and indubitably there is no strain of infidelity, trinity, incarnation, and unity in him (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 1, 20).

### ***-Jesus Christ: Cursed or Blessed!***

Ransom theory of atonement is a firm belief in Christianity meaning that Jesus was crucified to pay for all's sins. He sacrificed himself to save us from Torah's curse. The reason why we are cursed by Torah is its expression that: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole" (Galatian: 3, 13).

The most important problem of this theory is its incongruity with divinity of Jesus in which Christians believe. Thus, if Jesus is God, then Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are all a united god, thereby the one who sacrificed himself is the same Almighty God! According to the Holy Quran, however, Jesus Christ is not only far from being cursed, but also a blessed servant of God "He has made me blessed wherever I

may be, and commissioned me to pray and [pay] the welfare tax [Zakat] so long as I live" (Quran, Mary: 31) then: "Peace is to me, the day I was born, and the day I die and the day I am raised alive" (Quran, Mary: 33).

***-Jesus Christ: Afflicted or Prosperous!***

The Holy Qur'an narrates from Jesus Christ: "He has not made me arrogant, hard-hearted (Quran, Mary: 32). In the existing Gospels, however, Jesus does what cruel and tyrant men do. Is there any tyrant man whose perfume-imbued footpaces are gently touched by other people?! One of the twelve original disciples of Jesus Christ sympathetically says: "Why were not this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages .... Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me" (John: 12, 5-8).

***-Showing Kindness to Mother or Being Cursed by her***

In the Bible, Jesus addresses his mother in a pejorative language: "When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied...." (John: 2, 3-4). He, even, does not suffice to this and at times denies and deceives her (Matthew: 12, 46-50). Most surprisingly, Jesus provokes people to separation and division: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn, a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a man's enemies will be the members of his own household (Matthew:

10, 34-36). What the Holy Qur'an narrates from Jesus Christ, however, is that showing kindness to mother is a divine command, to which Jesus Christ was promisingly committed (Qur'an, Mary: 32).

***-Jesus Christ: Crucified or Ascended to Heavens***

In the present Gospels, Jesus Christ is publicly hanged after being arrested as a runaway thief by Jews. He was vociferously demanding his disciples not to leave him alone at gallows, remaining there by morning. With his head drooping down, Jesus then said: "Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. "He saved others" they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him. From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lemasabachthani?" (Which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew: 27). And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEW.

They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left, those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You, who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!" In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him (Mark: 15, 24-32).

The Holy Qur'an illustrates the manner Jesus ascended the sky: "Jews are pointless when they say: "...We killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, God's messenger, though they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but so it was made to appear to them" (Qur'an, Women: 157).

To wrap up, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā writes: "Jesus Christ is introduced as a sly and treacherous man in the Gospels. He is arrested like a terrified thief, is hanged, and is finally buried. In the meanwhile, his mother and relatives think that he has split the grave and ascended up the heaven. Is this the same Jesus who is introduced in the Holy Qur'an as a philanthropist, monotheist, and blessing man—the one who is submissive to God and says nothing of unity or incarnation? Jesus, as described in the Holy Qur'an, demanded nothing illogical; he is Rūh -Allah, i.e., the spirit of God, and the word (Logos) of God. He has been bringing up by the Almighty God's absolute power; he is there treasury of God's secrets and wisdoms. God's too great to surrender his pure servants and permit them to be ridiculed by people" (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 1, 26-27).

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, at the end, asserts that there were two contemporaneous persons who claimed the gift of Christian prophecy. The two adopted similar invitation methods. According to available signs and symptoms, however, only one of the two was of good morals, the one who is mentioned and affirmed by the Holy Qur'an. The other one, on the other side, falsely claimed to be Jesus and degenerated Christianity. He was a cunning person, the one some of whose characteristics were cited by Gospels (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 1, 27-28). Somewhere else, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā talks about multiplicity of Jesus as referring to the available Gospels "Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many" (Mark: 13, 6). Cited from Jesus Christ, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā says: "Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many" (Matthew: 24, 4-5) (Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, 2011: Vol. 1, 19-20).

### **Conclusion**

Biblical criticism of Muslim thinkers is less than 50 to 60 years old. There are common approaches taken by Christian and Jew theologians including historical-critical, historical-grammatical, and traditional-historical approaches among works by Muslim thinkers. In this area, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā is a prominent figure who criticized the Bible using a similar methodology, while with different presuppositions and outcomes. He, initially, places his emphasis on the belief that the Bible is a divine book, each of whose words are revealed faultlessly. He assesses creditability of the Bible's statements in order to get insights into what really had happened, as this is prevalent in historical-critical approaches. Kāshif al-

Ghiṭā does not verify principles of the history in the Biblical criticism; that is, he does not regard the Bible as an old literary text for whose interpretation an understanding of history is a criterion.

The Bible, as suggested by Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, is a message of God. Moreover, he does not give priority to uncertainty, inconsistency, and inaccuracy. Rather, he, unlike historical-critical reviewers, considers nothing as certain and definite unless the contrary is proved. According to Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, certainty is the criterion of criticism so far as the contrary is proved. Primarily, he knows the Bible as the final reference in his reviews and interpretations.

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā interprets the Bible against itself, from inside which he makes attempts to extract God's real intentions. These indicate that he has adopted historical-grammatical method in his criticism of the New Testament. His method, although, comes with some differences with this new method as well.

Kāshif al-Ghiṭā inaugurates a new passageway in distinguishing divine from human speeches after he is confronted with differences and contradictions. At times, however, his methods and those of historical-grammatical reviewers are angled. Parallel with the Bible itself as the ultimate criticism reference, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā makes use of the Holy Qur'an as a measuring tool (comparative methodology). He pays, also, tremendous attention to argument and rationality as potent criticism references as regarded by all religions (argumentative methodology). Having in mind the basis that the Bible is a divine book, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā has reviewed it, during which process, he arrived at contradictions which assured him of the fact that not all parts of the book are revealed by the Almighty God, and there are cases in which a commixture of divine and human words is lodged.

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## روش‌شناسی علامه کاشف الغطاء در نقد مسیحیت

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### چکیده

مقاله حاضر روشمندی علامه محمدحسین کاشف الغطاء اندیشمند مسلمان قرن ۱۸-۱۹ را در نقد مسیحیت بررسی می‌کند. اگرچه کاشف الغطاء همچون اندیشمندان مسیحی و یهودی به بازبینی محتوای انجیل می‌پردازد، پیش‌فرض‌ها و نتایج برآمده از نقد او متفاوت است. کاشف الغطاء انجیل را همچون قرآن کتاب آسمانی و وحیانی می‌داند. او چنانکه به روساخت عهد جدید یعنی کتاب‌شناسی، نسخه‌شناسی، سندشناسی، حجیت و تاریخ انجیل پرداخته، ژرف‌ساخت آن را که بررسی محتوایی عهد جدید است، مورد مذاقه قرار داده است. در نقد او عدم اعتبار انجیل اثبات می‌شود و صحت مقام حواریون مورد تردید قرار می‌گیرد. از نگاه او نه تنها میان عهد قدیم و جدید تناقض‌های پدیده می‌شود که حتی در محتوای خود عهد جدید نیز تفاوت‌ها و تناقض‌هایی به چشم می‌خورد. روش برهانی و تطبیقی مبانی نقد او را مستحکم کرده است. این پژوهش با هدف معرفی چهره‌های نقد کتاب مقدس در میان اندیشمندان مسلمان نگاشته شده است.

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