CHAPTER TWO

RIDÂ AND ARAB CHRISTIANS: ATTITUDES TOWARDS SYRIAN CHRISTIANS AND THE EGYPTIAN COPTIC COMMUNITY

In order to present a good picture of Riḍâ’s relations with Arab Christians, I shall first of all describe his relations with some of his Syrian Christian fellow-citizens, who, like him, made Egypt their new residence after migration. In the course of our discussion we shall turn our focus from a short sketch of Riḍâ’s political ambitions with them and their struggle for independence from the colonial presence in the Arab East, towards an outline of the personal biographies of those among them with whom Riḍâ had lively debates. This is suggested as a useful means of illuminating the historical context of the discussions at stake. Many of these Christian writers had championed secularism. Riḍâ’s attitudes towards these individuals generated very interesting discussions on religion, history, Islamic philosophy and literature. At another level, Riḍâ’s polemics with Syrians Christians was extended to include religious controversies with the Arabic Jesuit journal *al-Machreq*. The last part of the chapter is devoted to study his stances towards the Egyptian Copts, and his reflections as a Syrian émigré on their political demands, ending with his sharp reactions to the Christian writer Salâma Mûsâ, who was a close disciple of Syrian Christian publicists in Egypt.


The Syro-Lebanese emigrant community in Brazil knew about *al-Manâr* right from the start of its publication. The Sao-Paulo-based journal *al-Asmaʿī*, co-edited by the Christians Khalîl Milûk and Shukrî al-Khûrî, reviewed *al-Manâr* describing it as ‘one of the best Islamic journals.’ Naʿûm al-Labakî (d. 1924), the founder of the Syrian

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journal *al-Munāẓir* (The Debater) in Sao Paulo, blamed Riḍā for restricting the subjects of his journal to religious issues, and that he stopped his discussions on Syrian national problems and religious strife in their homeland Syria. The contents of the journal, according to him, were not in agreement with the subtitle of his journal: ‘scientific, literary, informative and educating journal.’ In his reply, Riḍā explained that he used to write such items before the banning of his journal in Syria, and they would have been valueless as no Syrian Muslim, Christian or Jew had access to his articles anymore. As the circle of his readers became limited to the people in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, India, Java, and a group of Syrian emigrants in America, it was more appropriate for him to focus on other Islamic religious instructive issues. Riḍā was also convinced that his treatment of such Islamic themes was not only of benefit for his Muslim readers, but for Christians as well. He asserted that a Christian teacher at one of the high schools in Syria, after having read *al-Manār*, had ordered all previous issues. He also persuaded the director of the school to subscribe to the journal and collect its issues for the school’s library. Riḍā finally concluded that it was also reasonable to subtitle his journal as ‘informative and educating,’ since religious sciences are the most ‘venerated’ fields.

Born and bred in Syria, which is known for its religious and ethnic minorities, Riḍā was familiar with its substantial Christian population. His coming to Egypt coincided with the resumption of the emigration wave of Syrians (most of them Christians), who fled from the Hamidian oppression to Egypt towards the end of the nineteenth century. In his later political career, Riḍā gathered around his political project of Arabism an active group of Syrian émigré intellectuals.

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2 ‘Al-Manār wā al-Munāẓir,’ vol. 2/40 (Sha’bān 1317/December 1899), p. 683. In 1908 Labaki returned back to his birthplace Beirut, where he continued its publication. He was the president of the Representative Council of Lebanon. See, Zirikli, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, p. 40.


who opposed the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and promoted the idea of an Arab monarch.\(^5\)

Political interests linked both Muslim and Christian elites in their cultural pride in Arab heritage, as a means to face the cultural expansion of the West.\(^6\) Syrian Christians, in particular, played a large role in the revival of the Arab literary movement. After his migration to Egypt, Riḍā drew closer to his Syrian Christian fellow writers and publishers. This group probably enjoyed the greatest freedom of thought that was experienced by any group of Arab intellectuals in the twentieth century.\(^7\) Most of these Syrians were Christians by origin, but adopted a strictly secularist agenda. Although the majority of those Christians enjoyed modern Western education and adopted Western methods of thinking, some of them, however, shared with Riḍā his resentment of the penetration of Western thought into the Arab world, including missionary activities. They also shared with him the same anxieties that 'the Sublime Porte would fall in the hands of Europe.'\(^8\)

In 1912 and 1913 new Arab political groupings came into being. One of the best known among these new groups was Ḥizb al-Lāmarkaziyya al-Idāriyyā al-ʿUthmānī (Ottoman Administrative Decentralisation Party), which Riḍā founded in Cairo in December 1912. The party was dedicated to the achievement of self-government in the Ottoman Empire.\(^9\) Within the party, Riḍā called for an Arab revival as the necessary herald of the restoration of Islam. He also declared that as a Muslim he was a brother to all Muslims, and as an Arab a brother to all Arabs, and he saw no contradiction between the

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two. His model of ‘an Arab Empire’ would have recognised both Christianity and Judaism and would have given non-Muslims the right to serve in the administration of the government and the judicial system (except the Sharīʿa courts).

After the rise of the theory of Arabism, some Christian Arabs (mostly Syrians and Palestinians) had already implicitly accepted the theory that Islam is an essential part of Arabism because it brought grandeur to the Arabs. Many Arab Christians, such as Shiblī Shumaylī and the prominent lawyer Iskandar ‘Ammūn, had joined Riḍā’s Decentralisation Party. Being on close terms with many of these Christian Syrians of his generation, Riḍā managed in his political struggle to gain the support of those who ‘were unwilling to admit the inferiority of the East to the West.’ For him, Syrian Christians were ‘the most advanced class in education, wealth, generosity, courage and pride.’ By 1914 he had developed to the full his theory of Arabism, which was also accepted by a group of Christian Arabs.

The concept of the ‘Greater Syria’ sharpened Riḍā’s desire for Pan-Arabism. In his struggle against the imposition of the French Mandate in Syria, he played a prominent role with other Muslim, Christian and Druze nationalists. In 1918, a number of Syrian émigrés had established the Syrian-Palestinian Congress. During its first major session in Geneva (summer of 1921), where demands for Syrian unity and independence were presented to the League of Nations, Riḍā was elected as the vice-president. Its president Michel Luṭfallah

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13 Ibid.

14 *Al-Manār*, vol. 15/1, (Muḥarram 1330/January 1912), p. 44.


16 Marie-Renée Mouton, ‘Le Congrès syrio-palestinien de Genève (1921),’ *Relations Internationales* 19, 1979, pp. 313-328. About Riḍā’s political ideas and activism,
(1880-1961), the son of a wealthy Greek Orthodox Christian émigré in Egypt, was the inspiration behind the establishment of the Congress and its major financier. But by 1922, disputes between Syrian factions became intense, a rift between Syrian and Palestinian members started to appear, and the Syrian membership was split into two. Luṭfallah, allied with the Damascene physician Abdel-Rahmān Shāhbandar (assassinated in 1946), chose to advocate a purely secular nationalism. The other group, headed by Shakīb Arslān, propagated the idea of Arabism, as based on the Islamic divine tenets. They clashed with Luṭfallah-Shāhbandar’s faction because of their links with the British and the Hashimite royal family. Riḍā chose to remain linked to the former faction, since this enabled him to concentrate on the ideological articulation of nationalism and particularly on the importance of the Islamic content in its formulation.

2.1.1. Farāḥ Anṭūn (al-Jāmiʿa)

Riḍā’s acquaintance with Farāḥ Anṭūn goes back to their youth in their hometown Tripoli. In their early years, he met with Anṭūn for the first time at the house of Jurjī Yannī, a teacher and writer in Tripoli. At that time, Riḍā saw Anṭūn as one of the most intelligent Christian young men in Syria. He was modest, shy, but eventually showed himself to be an irritable person. He often hesitated to give his opinions frankly in case he had not studied the matter in question thoroughly. Both young men agreed that the Syrian stage was too cramped for their dreams of entering the world of journalism. In
1897 they decided to travel to Egypt on an Austrian ship (3 December, 1897) heading towards Alexandria together.20

During the early years of al-Manār, Riḍā entrusted Anṭūn to translate French materials into Arabic.21 In Alexandria Anṭūn founded his journal al-Jāmiʿa (firstly appeared 1899) through which he tried to disseminate his secularist views. Riḍā watched the progress of his friend’s magazine and brought its contents on ethics, philosophy and sociology to the attention of ʿAbduh, who, as a result, expressed his positive impression of Anṭūn and always recommended his magazine to his friends.22

The young Christian journalist Anṭūn was much influenced by the ideas of the French writer Ernest Renan, and gave the most systematic presentation of his French writings in the Arab world. He published serial translations of Renan’s La Vie de Jésus. Following the path of Renan, he very soon published another article in the spring of 1902 on Ibn Rushd in which he also stressed that religious orthodoxy had obstructed the spirit of free inquiry in Islamic civilisation.23 Renan’s skeptical attitude towards religion concurred perfectly with Anṭūn’s anticlerical feelings.24 In that article, Anṭūn extended his theory to maintain that Christianity, unlike Islam, had been shown to tolerate philosophy.

Alarmed by Anṭūn’s arguments, Riḍā promptly raised the problem with ʿAbduh, and fervently requested him to give a response. Anṭūn was very surprised to learn that it was Riḍā, as one of his best friends, who agitated the feelings of the mufti against his journal.25 Riḍā urgently requested ʿAbduh to defend Islam and its scholars against Anṭūn’s ‘blasphemy.’ While staying in Alexandria, ʿAbduh planned to meet with Anṭūn to discuss the contents of his article personally,

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20 Riḍā’s diary, December, 1897. The diary of his early months in Egypt reveals that he was on close terms with Anṭūn. When having visited Anṭūn in the hotel in Cairo, Riḍā used, for example, to observe his prayer in the latter’s room, since there was no mosque close in the neighbourhood.


23 About his anticlericalism, see, Reid, Odyssey, pp. 70-74.

24 F. Anṭūn, Ibn Rushd wā Falsafatuh, Alexandria, January 1903, p. 2 (Quoted below, Ibn Rushd). At that time, ʿAbduh was traveling throughout Egyptian Northern cities to collect donations for the victims of a fire catastrophe in the Delta of Egypt.
but had no opportunity to do so. During a tour in Northern Egypt, ʿAbduh started drafting his articles of defence relying on his memory, while keeping Riḍā updated in a series of letters with the development of his investigations on the matter. He asked Riḍā to inform Anṭūn of his plan to write a refutation to his article on Ibn Rushd, and to ask him whether he was ready to publish it in al-Jāmiʿa. They agreed that Riḍā would edit the final drafts of the rejoinders in his own handwriting and send them to al-Jāmiʿa for publication. Anṭūn was in the beginning hesitant to give space to ʿAbduh’s refutation in his journal.26 But later he published most of his ideas in one separate volume supplemented with ʿAbduh’s response, which he dedicated to ‘the fairly-minded among the Easterners, Christians, Muslims, or followers of any other religion.’27

Their arguments did not remain purely on an intellectual level. They quickly developed into insult and distortion of each other’s position, by changing the conflict into violent and contemptuous hostility.28 Riḍā and Anṭūn charged each other with having escalated the problem in order to gain popularity for their journals and raise the number of subscribers. The issue also spoiled Anṭūn’s friendship with Riḍā and both of them turned to accuse each other of being ignorant. Anṭūn suggested that Riḍā lacked the knowledge (especially, of the French language and of the science of Kalām) required to embark on such debates, and should have left the matter to his more erudite teacher. From his side, Riḍā maintained that his adversary had not simply made a well-intentioned mistake, but had purposely disparaged Islam as well. He also maintained that Anṭūn’s strategy was to separate the teacher from his disciple. Anṭūn declared that while ʿAbduh’s rejoinders took the shape of a respectable intellectual debate, Riḍā was inclined to slander and offense.29

What irritated Riḍā was what he described as Anṭūn’s implicit intention to show up Islam as a religion that is against the spirit of science and wisdom, while Christianity was presented as the religion that promoted science in Europe. He further understood that Anṭūn’s ideas explicitly stressed that the nature of Islam predetermines lack of knowledge and civilisation; and that Muslims would never achieve

26 Riḍā, Tārīkh., pp. 809-810.
28 Hourani, Arabic Theought, p. 254.
29 Reid, Odyssey, p. 87.
progress as long as they clung to their religion and did not convert to Christianity.  

According to Riḍā, some of his readers notified him that articles like those of al-Jāmiʿa were more dangerous for Muslims than missionary publications. However, he maintained that Anṭūn had the right to defend his religion, but should have uttered his views in a moderate way. Riḍā portrayed al-Jāmiʿa as a ‘sectarian’ and ‘religious journal’ in content, although it did not overtly show any Christian tendency and still claimed itself as a platform for literary, scientific and medical subjects.

Anṭūn fervently accused Riḍā of having manipulated religious issues for propagating al-Manār among common Muslims. It was observable that al-Manār’s reputation grew and witnessed a rapid increase of its circulation after Riḍā had published ‘Abduh’s defenses against Anṭūn’s work.

Anṭūn explicitly proclaimed that he never intended to take part in debating with the founder of al-Manār. By his discussion, he only endeavoured to address ‘Abduh as an authoritative and a highly-esteemed Muslim scholar. In Anṭūn’s eyes, Riḍā, whom he had known as a ‘sober’ and ‘restrained’ person, appeared to be of a ‘rash’ and ‘eccentric’ character after having propagated insults against him. His reaction, unlike his teacher, was ‘foolish’ and ‘imprudent.’ He was intolerant towards methods of scientific analysis and the conclusions of Al-Jāmiʿa’s article. In Anṭūn’s own words, ‘the irrefutable evidence of [al-Jāmiʿa] increased his [Riḍā] foolishness, and he was driven frenzyed to the degree that we became anxious about his state of mind.’ He moreover compared Riḍā in his aloofness to grasp the facts mentioned in al-Jāmiʿa in a mocking way with ‘a crocodile […] when you throw to him a pearl, he would immediately rush to smash it with his teeth, but never try to use it as an ornament to his ears. Having failed to smash the pearl, the crocodile would throw it again

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31 Ibid., pp. 474-475. Riḍā gave another example on how Christian magazines zealously supported Anṭūn in what he saw as anti-Muslim campaign, see, al-Manār, vol. 5/13 (Rajab 1320-October 1902), pp. 515-517.  
32 Anṭūn, Ibn Rushd, p. 6.  
34 Anṭūn, Ibn Rushd, pp. 85-87, see also pp. 226-227.  
35 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
and swoop down upon it while being enflamed with anger and grudge.\textsuperscript{36}

In a sixteen-page private letter addressed to ‘Abduh on the pages of his magazine, Anṭūn accused Riḍā of provoking the problem. His assault on \textit{al-Jāmi‘a}, said Anṭūn, was nothing but ‘envy and lack of decency.’ ‘Nothing,’ he went further, ‘would satisfy his [Riḍā’s] ran-
cour, but insulting others.’\textsuperscript{37} Anṭūn drew ‘Abduh’s attention to the fact that the ‘recklessness’ and ‘foolishness’ of his disciple would harm his position as the Grand Mufti of Egypt.\textsuperscript{38} Finally, he made three suggestions to ‘Abduh: 1) to find two trustworthy arbiters among Al-Azhar scholars to judge the whole issue, 2) to disclaim all matters published in \textit{al-Manār}, 3) or to bring the ‘attack’ of Riḍā against him and his journal to an end. In the event that Riḍā continued his cam-
paign, Anṭūn warned ‘Abduh that he would instantly publish a hun-
dred thousand copies of the letter and distribute them among the public.\textsuperscript{39}

The debate with ‘Abduh undoubtedly pushed the interest in Anṭūn’s magazine to its highest point. But it was Riḍā’s critique of \textit{al-Jāmi‘a}, which led to the immediate withdrawal of Muslim subscribers, which contributed to its collapse. Due to its sharp attack, \textit{al-Manār} was said to be ‘the assassin of \textit{al-Jāmi‘a}.’\textsuperscript{40} But Riḍā believed that the reason for the latter’s collapse was its editor’s lack of knowledge of Islamic matters. After its first failure, Riḍā proudly taunted that ‘no Arab paper would ever survive without its Muslim readership, as they re-
presented the majority of the nation.’\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Al-Jāmi‘a} disappeared in 1904, and was revived irregularly after its editor’s move to New York in the period between 1906 and 1909. We notice that Riḍā’s attitude towards Anṭūn started to change, and he eulogised Anṭūn’s efforts to republish his journal in the United States. He described it again as ‘one of the best edited and most useful Arab papers.’\textsuperscript{42} He also welcomed the return of Anṭūn and his magazine

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 5.
    \item \textsuperscript{37} As quoted in, Riḍā, \textit{Tārīkh}, p. 812.
    \item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 813.
    \item \textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 815.
    \item \textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 811. Cf. Reid, \textit{Odyssey}, p. 54.
    \item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid. See also \textit{al-Manār}, vol. 5/14 (Rajab 1320/October 1902), pp. 559-560; Riḍā was later informed by one of his friends that Anṭūn had especially intensified his debate with ‘Abduh only in order that he could gain more subscriptions. \textit{Al-Manār}, vol. 5/14, pp. 559-560.
    \item \textsuperscript{42} \textit{Al-Manār}, vol. 10/2 (Ṣafar 1325/April 1907), p. 158.
\end{itemize}
to Egypt in 1909. But Anṭūn only managed to publish two more issues of his journal, and it disappeared for good in the following years.

After Anṭūn’s death in 1922, it was Riḍā who demanded a ceremony dedicated to his memory. One of Anṭūn’s biographers believes that by this attempt Riḍā tried to make amends for their old conflict. In a letter (see, appendix IV), Rose Anṭūn, Farah’s younger sister, expressed her gratitude to Riḍā for his initiative by saying: ‘[since] I was staying with my brother in all his doings till the last moment of his life, I know perfectly well how he held you in very high esteem. […] Now with all what you did, you have added one new noble deed to all the ones we knew from you before. I shall never forget it that you were the first one my eyes had grasped during the funeral ceremony and the first to summon upon my brother’s commemoration.’

2.1.2. Jurjī Zaidān (al-Hilāl)

The Greek Orthodox Jurjī Zaidān (1861-1914) was an important member of the Syrian community in Egypt. In 1892 he founded his magazine al-Hilāl (The Crescent) in which he published much on ethics, sociology, geography, literature, Arab history, and world politics. He also published many works on many subjects such as the history of Lebanon, education and social order, Machiavelli and Ibn Khaldūn, and the siege of Damiette by the Crusaders. Just like many of his contemporary Syrian Christian intellectuals, Zaidān held the view that each religion is to a certain extent in agreement with the

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44 Reid, Odyssey, p. 42.
45 A. Abū Khīḍr Mansī, Farah Anṭūn, Cairo, 1923, p. 23.
46 Letter, Rose Anṭūn to Riḍā, Cairo, 24 February 1923. The ceremony took place on the first of March 1923 at the American University in Cairo. Riḍā delivered a speech in which he referred to the history of his relation with Anṭūn. For more details about Anṭūn’s commemoration, see, the supplement of his sister’s magazine Majallat al-Sayyidāt wā al-Rijāl, Farah Anṭūn: Ḥayātuh wā Taʿbīnuh wā Mukhtārātuh, Cairo, September 1923.
sciences, though for him science should remain the decisive criterion in evaluating things. He was impressed by Muḥammad ʿAbduh and his recognition of the ‘duty to interpret the Qurʾān in such a fashion as to bring it into agreement with modern science.’ As a Christian intellectual, Zaidān’s writings on Islam were, as described by T. Philipp, mostly ‘precarious.’ When dealing with the relationship between Islam and Christianity he tried to play down any tension between both religions, and tended to show that Christians during most of history lived in harmony with their Muslim compatriots.

A few days after his arrival in Egypt, Riḍā met Zaidān in the company of Anṭūn for the first time in the latter’s office at al-Hilāl (January 1989). Their first conversation focused on the situation of journalism in Egypt. When Riḍā established himself as a Muslim journalist, Zaidān used to send al-Manār his novels on Islamic history and literature in order for Riḍā to review them critically.

In the early years of their relation, Riḍā, at many occasions, praised Zaidān as ‘a historian with objective eyes’ who appreciated others’ criticism of his own views. While involved in his controversy with Farah Anṭūn, Riḍā was earnestly defending Zaidān against the criticism of some Muslims, who accused him of ‘religious fanaticism’ and tried to disqualify his works on Islamic history as a Christian thinker. Riḍā, on the contrary, saw the benefit of such

48 Philipp, Gurgi, pp. 58-59.
49 Ibid., p. 59.
50 Ibid., p. 60.
51 Riḍā’s Diary (1897-1898).
53 See, for example, al-Manār, vol. 6/10 (Jumadā al-Ūlā 1321/August 1903), pp. 391-398. Riḍā also received questions from his readers as a result of their readings in Zaidān’s novels on Islamic history, see, Riḍā’s fatwā on reciting the Qurʾān in the graveyard raised by a student of Al-Azhar, al-Manār, vol. 5/13, p. 508.
novels in educating Muslim youngsters about unknown parts of their own history. He often excused Zaidān for his historical mistakes, since he, as a novelist, was allowed sometimes to collect his information on a non-historical basis. In his historical novel Fatāt Ghassān (The Maiden of Ghassān), Zaidān went further by citing the controversial Muslim narrative on the story of al-Gharāniq. Riḍā mildly criticised Zaidān for having incautiously mentioned such a controversial story. Despite his strong conviction in its forged nature, Riḍā believed that Zaidān included the story in his novel on the basis of the account of the early Muslim historiographer al-Ṭabarī. He maintained that ‘he [Zaidān], as a Christian, should be forgiven if he believed in the story. Some early Muslim scholars mentioned it without giving any critical remarks.’

Another noteworthy example was the harsh criticism of many Muslims against Zaidān’s acceptance of the story that the Prophet’s regular meetings with monks (such as Baḥīra) and other lettered people in his young age had an immense impact on his later religious career as a Prophet, especially during the commercial trips with his uncle. Although Riḍā rejected Zaidān’s interpretation, he was certain that he had no intention whatsoever of defaming Islam. Meanwhile he demanded that Muslims should learn only from authoritative and well-versed Muslim scholars instead of depending on such works. Despite all these critical remarks, Riḍā insisted on his appreciation of Zaidān’s enrichment of Arabic literature. He never thought that the latter had any intention of offending or attacking Islam, nor was he ever proved to be ‘a fanatic Christian.’

Riḍā’s response to Zaidān’s works on Islamic history was inconsistent. His attitude towards the man drastically changed because of their political differences. The most significant example was Riḍā’s approach to the latter’s voluminous work on the history of Islamic civilisation. When Zaidān embarked upon writing his work (1902), Riḍā regularly praised his endeavours as a service to Muslims and Arabs by compiling in one piece of work their history which was scattered through the various sources. He acknowledged Zaidān’s

56 Zaidān, ibid, passim, pp. 32-36 & p. 72.
57 Al-Manār, vol. 7/13 (1 Rajab 1322/11 September 1904), pp. 514-518.
58 J. Zaidān, Tārīkh al-Tamaddun al-ʾIslāmī, 5 vols., Cairo, 1901-1906.
initiatives as unprecedented in furnishing the history of Islam, and saw this specific work as ‘a useful example for Arab readers.’ He moreover urged other Arab historians to follow his steps. He again disapproved of Muslim attacks on the book as ‘unfair to recompense those who make efforts to serve [Muslims] by constantly stressing their lapses before giving mention to the benefits of their works.’ Riḍā continued to give his positive assessment for Zaidān’s works in the following years, while he persistently kept requesting other authors to critically review the author’s historical data.

However, by 1908 al-Manār turned to sketch its first detailed criticism of Zaidān’s work on pre-Islamic history by publishing two articles by Ahmad ʿUmar al-ʾIskandarī (1875-1938), a teacher of Arabic Literature, in which he berated Zaidān’s work. In his articles, al-Iskandarī criticised Zaidān’s ability to write on Islamic history. Although his effort deserved appreciation as a historical piece of work, it should have been written in a more accurate way. In January 1912 al-Manār published a sharper criticism launched by the Indian scholar Shiblī al-ʾNuʿmānī (1869-1914), who accused Zaidān of attempting to belittle the Arabs and to abuse them. Like Riḍā, Nuʿmānī had been earlier on good terms with Zaidān. At the beginning of their relation, Nuʿmānī did not believe any accusation against Zaidān of blatantly misrepresenting Arab history. At a certain point, however, Nuʿmānī shifted his attack to the personal integrity of Zaidān by demonstrating that his sole attempt was to deliberately falsify and

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60 *Al-Manār*, vol. 5/14, p. 552.
61 *Al-Manār*, vol. 7/4 (Ṣafar 1322/May 1904), p. 149.
62 *Al-Manār*, vol. 7/13, p. 518.
65 He was a member of the Salafiyā movement in India. He is the founder of Nadwat al-ʾUlamā in Lucknow. He wrote many works on the history of Islam. More about his intellectual life, see for example, Ahmad Anis, ‘Two Approaches to Islamic History: A critique of Shiblī Nuʿmānī’s and Syed Ameer Ali’s interpretations of history,’ unpublished PhD dissertation, Temple University, 1980; Mehr Afroz Murad, *Intellectual Modernism of Shiblī Nu mānī: An exposition of religious and political ideas*, New Delhi, 1996.
66 Various letters, quoted in Ware, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
change the truth about Islamic history. The motive for Nuʿmānī’s response was that Zaidān had engaged in circulating ‘intrigues’ through the publication of such works, while nobody took the initiative to oppose him.\(^\text{67}\) Zaidān, on the other hand, habitually eulogised Nuʿmānī’s work and paid tribute to his scholarly prestige among Indian scholars. But this was no justification for Nuʿmānī to quit his religious ‘zealousness’ by giving concessions in matters of religious beliefs. He also made it clear that he was not ready to ‘accept his [Zaidān] praise in return for allowing him to attack the Arabs.’\(^\text{68}\)

In October of the same year, two other articles by al-ʾIskandarī appeared in Riḍā’s journal in which he again sharply criticised Zaidān’s work on the history of Arabic literature.\(^\text{69}\) Some of Zaidān’s shortcomings, according to al-ʾIskandarī, were his many mistakes in giving references and documentation for his data, his incorrect conclusions, contradicting information, his imitation of orientalists—who sometimes formulate their views without any verification, and his literal application of the theory of evolution in all aspects.\(^\text{70}\)

Riḍā gave the views of both al-ʾIskandarī and al-Nuʿmānī more credibility by reprinting their criticisms in a separate treatise together with another article by the Jesuit Louis Cheikho, the editor of al-Machreq.\(^\text{71}\) In his preface to the treatise, Riḍā also withdrew his support by saying that Zaidān, as a non-Muslim, wrote his history without any proper qualification in Islamic knowledge from real authoritative scholars. Zaidān, Riḍā contended, relied on the works of Western orientalists in his approach of collecting his historical data rather than making an effort to directly rely on Islamic sources. For this reason, his works came out with the gravest of errors. However, Riḍā denied that he had anything to do personally with these criticisms.

\(^\text{67}\) Al-Manār, vol. 15/1 (Muḥarram 1330/January 1912), p. 59.
\(^\text{68}\) Ibid., p. 60.
\(^\text{69}\) J. Zaidān, Tārīkh ʾAdāb al-Lugha al-ʾArabiyya, 4 vols, Cairo, 1911-1914.
\(^\text{70}\) Al-Manār, vol. 15/10 (Shawwāl 1330/October 1912), pp. 743-744.
\(^\text{71}\) Kitāb ʾIntiqād Kitāb Tārīkh al-Tamaddun al-ʾIslāmī, Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Manār, 1330/1912; cf. Philip, Gurgi, pp. 64-65. It is interesting to know that in his early review of this book in 1904, Riḍā insisted that Zaidān never intended to be dishonest in dealing with Islamic sources, unlike the Jesuits whom Riḍā considered to intentionally falsify such sources in their attack on Islam, al-Manār, vol. 7/13, p. 518. Louis Cheikho was, for instance, one of his main antagonists. Cheikho considered Protestants and members of the Syrian Protestant College as a natural object of wrath, Philip, Gurgi, p. 60.
and that al-Nuʿmānī (and other authors) must take the responsibility.72

On his part, Zaidān was frustrated by this unexpected Manārist campaign against his works. A few months after the appearance of these articles in al-Manār, he complained to his son Emile that the views of al-Iskandari and al-Nuʿmānī showed some aspects of religious hatred and fanaticism that he had had to contend with occasionally during his career. They were therefore not worthy of any answer.73 Riḍā and al-Nuʿmānī, whom he had considered as good friends, had now turned out to be his adversaries. When al-Nuʿmānī was still extensively involved in writing against Zaidān’s work in al-Manār and elsewhere, one of al-Hilāl’s Muslim readers in Egypt tried to console the latter for al-Nuʿmānī’s harsh attack on his integrity. In his reply to this reader, Zaidān maintained that he was perplexed by reading these attacks, and had no clear answer why Riḍā and al-Nuʿmānī had turned against him in such a way.74 However, he had explicitly mentioned the direct reason behind their campaign in an earlier letter to his son Emile:

I read al-Manār and saw, what you saw too. Grief prevailed over all other feelings in me. Not because this foolish criticism had any influence upon me. Indeed, the station of al-Hilāl is too lofty as to be hit by any tasteless slander. But I was grieved by the deterioration of the character of our writers to such a level, that even from al-Nuʿmānī, the greatest scholar of India, emanated phrases that even the rabble would be ashamed to use. With all this we were friends for twenty years and our relations were amicable. When I read his criticism I wrote him a letter, reproaching him in very strong terms. A copy of it you will find enclosed […] As for the owner of al-Manār he is excused by his exasperation with al-Hilāl, the success of our books, our fame.75

In June 1910, Zaidān was invited to teach a course in Islamic history at the recently founded Egyptian University, but a few months later he was to learn that the University withdrew his appointment.76 He

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72 Ware, op. cit., pp. 198-199.
73 Letter to Emile, 14 November 1908, as quoted in Ware, ibid., p. 198.
75 Letter to Emile, Cairo, March 28, 1912; as translated and cited in Philip, Gurgi, pp. 216-219.
76 Ibid., pp. 66-67; more about the affair, see, Donald Malcolm Reid, ‘Cairo University and the Orientalists,’ International Journal of Middle East Studies 19/1, 1987, pp. 62-64 (Quoted below, ‘Cairo’).
suspected that Riḍā had a hand in opposing his post at the university. He was convinced that the founder of al-Manār was angered by the appraisal letter of Prince Muḥammad ʿAli (b. 1872) in which he maintained that before the appearance of al-Hilāl nobody mentioned the history of Islam. Another factor for irritation was, according to Zaidān, Riḍā’s failure to imitate him in writing historical novels about Islam. In 1905, Riḍā had approached his Syrian friend Sheikh ʿAbd al-Hamīd al-Zahrāwī (1871-1916) to help him to compose a series of historical novels about Islam because nobody had written about this subject in Arabic earlier. Referring to this imitation, Zaidān ended his letter to his son: ‘regardless of the fact that my novels fill his library and he has read all of them. If this did not change his irritation, how can we blame him that his vexation increased when he started with his project and did not even finish the first novel.’

In truth, Riḍā never openly accused Zaidān of any evil intention to misrepresent the history of Arabs and Islam. He explained his own reasons for publishing this collection of criticisms. Besides his incapability of writing on Islamic history, Riḍā made it clear that he was highly concerned that the Turkish translation of Zaidān’s works might add fuel to the fire of Young Turk chauvinism. The Turkish translation of his work was done by the Christian Zakī Maghāmiz of Aleppo, who was known for his anti-Arab sentiments. In one of his letters, Maghāmiz complained to Zaidān that the illustrations in his book showed Arab civilisation to be too superior. Maghāmiz also took part in the Turkish project of translating the Qurʾān. At another occasion, Riḍā suspected Maghāmiz of intentionally misrepresenting the Qurʾān through his assistance in the translation. Zaidān later became a sympathiser of the Young Turks Revolution and strongly opposed any Arab attempt to form independent organisations, such as the Decentralisation Party of Riḍā and his group. Riḍā was very disappointed in Zaidān’s stance towards the Turks against the Arabs.

77 Philip, Gurgí, p. 219.
78 Ibid.
79 The last volume of the Arabic edition of Zaidān’s work appeared in 1906. When it had been translated into Turkish six years later, Riḍā made his major effort to criticise it. Ibid, p. 65.
81 Ibid., pp. 107-109.
This attitude became clearer especially after Zaidān’s death. Not long after his death, Riḍā (who was also present at his commemoration ceremony) wrote a biography in which he discussed in detail the late Zaidān’s sympathy to the ideas of Ottomanism. For Riḍā, Zaidān was one of the pillars (rukhn) of the modern Arab renaissance (nahḍa). However, after his trip to Istanbul (1908) Zaidān tried to revive the shuʿūbī (anti-Arab sentiments) beliefs among the Christian intelligentsia, and became convinced of the validity of absorbing the Arab provinces back into the Empire. He considered Zaidān’s tendency as an attempt to champion the Turkish culture over the Arabs. Riḍā, who previously praised his works on Arab civilisation, now viewed them as an attack on the Arab identity. For this reason, he allowed Nuʿmānī’s criticism to be published in his journal in order to prevent the Turks from using Zaidān’s works as a source of criticism against the Arabs.82

2.1.3. Yaʿqūb Şarrūf and Fāris Nimr (al-Muqtaṭaf)

As has been mentioned above, al-Muqtaṭaf was one of the Arabic periodicals that brought Riḍā into contact with the Western world during his Syrian years. It was founded by the Syrian Christians Yaʿqūb Şarrūf (1852-1927) and Fāris Nimr (1856-1951) after their arrival in Egypt in 1876. The great contribution of this journal was the revival of the Arabic language by introducing science and technology to an initially narrow, but ever-increasing Arabic reading public in a simple and sound language.83

Al-Muqtaṭaf met with strong opposition from entrenched traditionalist circles in the Muslim world. When its first issues arrived in Baghdad, for instance, conservatives in all communities, Sunni and Shiʿī, Christian and Jewish resisted it because it preached new and ‘dangerous’ doctrines. Only some of the younger generation welcomed it.84 But its appeal to the awakening needs of the Arabic-

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84 Hourani, Arabic Thought, p. 247.
speaking East was broad enough to quickly win the support of Muslim intellectual leaders.  

Riḍā had friendly relations with the editors of the journal, and never had any confrontations with them. He always paid tribute to the skills of the editors and the quality of their journal. His attitude should be explained against the background of al-Muqtaṭaf’s position towards religion in general, and Islam in particular. The journal in many places stressed that there was no conflict between science and religion, and that the revealed Scriptures were not to be read as scientific textbooks.

It was Jurji Zaidān who recommended Riḍā to the founder of al-Muqtaṭaf. He also informed Ṣarrūf about Riḍā’s coming to Egypt. In their earliest meeting, Riḍā discussed with him various subjects, including his main goal of establishing a journal in which he intended to propagate religious reform and the reconciliation between Islam and Christianity. In their discussion, Ṣarrūf explained to Riḍā the difference between Syria and Egypt by attributing the spread of knowledge and reform in the Syrian territory to the consciousness of its people. But in Egypt its spread was due only to the efforts made by its government to establish freedom. As Ṣarrūf was greatly interested in philosophy, Riḍā made it clear that his intended journal was also an attempt to remove the idea in the minds of the majority of Muslims that philosophy contradicts religion.

In his speech during the tenth anniversary of al-Manār, Ṣarrūf expressed his admiration for Riḍā’s journal and its role in ‘serving religious freedom and fighting innovations and superstitions.’ He told the audience about his primary impression of Riḍā when he read the early issues of his journal. He became convinced at that moment that Muslims would one day esteem the reforms of Riḍā and his teacher ʿAbduh in Islam just as Calvin and Luther were highly regarded as reformers of Christianity. Muslims, Ṣarrūf went on, were in dire need of that kind of reformation, which was strongly endorsed in Riḍā’s journal by combining religion and civilisation. He also stressed that Riḍā’s work should please Christians as well as other minority groups.

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86 Ibid., p. 142.
87 Riḍā’s diary, 1897-1898.
in the East, as ‘the Near Orient would never advance without the progress of Muslims.’

Riḍā’s initial impression of the editors of al-Muqṭaṭaf was that they tended to be ‘atheists’ or ‘antagonists’ in faith. Their later discussions on the divine and other religious issues revealed to him that they (especially Ṣarrūf) were not total disbelievers in the existence of God and His might over the world. He enthusiastically quoted the response of al-Muqṭaṭaf to a letter by the Coptic writer Salāma Mūsā (more about him below) in which he declared his pride in becoming an agnostic and gave his full sympathy to socialism versus any faith in God. Ṣarrūf argued that ‘the rejection of God is the road towards the destruction of human civilisation.’ Riḍā praised this way of thinking, which to a certain degree resembles the Qur’ānic manner of proving the existence of God.

Riḍā’s admiration of al-Muqṭaṭaf and its founders made him propose an event to celebrate the golden jubilee of the journal. In his speech during that event (30 April, 1926), Riḍā admitted the scientific contributions of the founders of al-Muqṭaṭaf to the revival of the Arabic language and its serving the whole umma. However, he was certain that due to the stagnation of scientific and literal movements in the Arab world al-Muqṭaṭaf did not receive the recognition or the circulation it deserved in its time. Riḍā expressed his strong belief that ‘the divine destiny was the moving factor in choosing the founders of al-Muqṭaṭaf to be one of the corners of the Arabic scientific renaissance.’ He maintained that it was predestined by the divine providence that the Americans would come to the East to establish their missionary college in Beirut. In that institution the founders of al-Muqṭaṭaf had the chance to become very qualified in their native language and skilled in other languages. The divine providence, Riḍā went on, was also behind their departure with their journal to Egypt.

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90 Ibid., p. 915.
91 Ibid.
93 Ibid., p. 789.
in order that they could enrich the Arabic language with their vast knowledge of science and foreign languages.\textsuperscript{94}

\subsection*{2.1.4. Shibli Shumayyil: A Fervent Darwinist}

Shibli Shumayyil (1860-1917), of Syrian Greek Catholic origin, was a graduate of the medical school of the Syrian Protestant College. He also studied medicine in Paris before he settled in Egypt, where he practised his profession as a physician and took part in the public and intellectual life of the country. As a young man he clashed with the staff of the College over the theories of Darwin on the evolution. He was a sharp proponent of scientism, and stood out as the foremost populariser of Darwinism. The Arab world became acquainted with the theory of evolution through Shumayyil’s translation of Darwin’s works into Arabic.\textsuperscript{95}

Like Ridâ, Shumayyil escaped the Hamidian tyranny, and sought liberty in Egypt. Despite his agnostic and secularist line of thought, Shumayyil’s general views of politics, religion and sympathy towards Islam must have been the greatest motive for Ridâ to strengthen their relationship. In Shumayyil’s view, religion was a factor of division: not religion itself, but the religious leaders, who sowed discord between men; and this kept society weak. He further extended his view to postulate that all types of extreme solidarity taking the shape of national fanaticism had the same danger as religion, because they lead to the division of society. For him, Christianity sprang from egoism: from the love of domination on the part of religious leaders, and the ordinary man’s desire for individual survival. When Lord Cromer criticised Islam in his \textit{Modern Egypt} as ‘a social system [that] has been a complete failure,’\textsuperscript{96} it was the Christian Shumayyil who rushed to the defence of Islam by stating that ‘it was not Islam, nor the Qur’ân; but the power of the Sheikhs which kept the umma weak.’\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{94} ibid., pp. 790-791.


In his eyes, there was no difference between Christianity and Islam (though he favoured Islam in other occasions) with regard to their inclination to achieve social equality among people,98 but his method of comparison between Islam and Christianity was sometimes seen by Christians as an attack on Christianity.99

Shumayyil’s favourable impression of Riḍā was reflected in his regular praise for him and his journal. For him, Riḍā was a typical Muslim reformer who was ‘keen in his Manār on unshackling […] Islam from all fetters imposed by [conservative] scholars as an attempt to liberate religion from any blemish, and to make it attain its ultimate goal through al-ʾAmr bi al-Maʾrūf wāʾ al-Munkar (to enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong).100

Riḍā considered Shumayyil’s positive views of Islam as a kind of recognition by non-Muslims regarding the authenticity of its divine message.101 Shumayyil once wrote to him (see, appendix V): ‘You look at Muḥammad as a prophet and make him great, while I look at him and make him greater. Although we are in contrast with each other, what we have in common are broad-mindedness and sincerity […]— and that makes our bond of friendship stronger.’102 Despite the fact that Riḍā was appreciative of Shumayyil’s high esteem of the Prophet of Islam, he did not accept his statement that the Prophet’s political career had been stronger than his prophecy.103

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99 Ibid., pp. 72-73.
100 The article was firstly published in the Egyptian daily al-Akhbār, 1907. It has been reprinted in Majmūʿat, pp. 243-244.
101 Al-Manār, vol. 11/1, pp. 10-11
102 Letter from Shumayyil to Riḍā, n.d., the letter contained a poem by Shumayyil on the Prophet. It was also published in al-Manār, vol. 11/1, p. 11.
103 Ibid., p. 11
In a letter to Riḍā, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Qabbānī (1848-1935) \(^{104}\) a Syrian journalist, disapproved of Shumayyil’s propagation of Darwinism as a sign of total rejection of religion. \(^{105}\) Riḍā was not alarmed by Qabbānī’s accusations, and saw them as little more than exaggeration, since the theories of Darwin were not ‘evil’ and did not in principle conflict with Islamic fundamental doctrines. Darwinism was merely a scientific school and should not be studied within the context of religious thought. Despite Shumayyil’s agnosticism, Riḍā defended him as somebody who never intended exclusively to disprove religions. For him, Shumayyil was one of the most erudite and independent people in his thinking. Just as with many educated Christians, the reason behind his scepticism was his training in the exact sciences according to the European traditions without having any parallel religious education that would convince him of the agreement between science and religion. He reminded his questioner that Shumayyil, on several occasions, had admitted that ‘there is no socialist religion, except the religion of the Qur’ān.’ \(^{106}\) Instead of accusing the Christian Shumayyil of unbelief, Riḍā requested Qabbānī and other Muslim writers to sustain him in his struggle against superstitions prevailing among Muslims. They should rather spare their efforts to fight those ‘ignorant scholars’ of Islam, whose ideas were, in his view, more dangerous to their religion than such theories as Darwinism. \(^{107}\) If his mission succeeded, Riḍā dared to guarantee that the educated class of non-Muslims (physicians, chemists, astronomers, socialists, lawyers and politicians) would one day convert to Islam!

As far as Shumayyil was concerned, Riḍā had a strong wish that he would once adopt Islam. He was also convinced that if he just had had the chance to study Islam in the way he had studied Darwinism, he would have become a Muslim. Riḍā once asked Shumayyil: ‘due to your respect of the Qur’ān and the Prophet you are symbolically

\(^{104}\) The founder of the journal *Thamarāt al-Funūn* (Fruits of the Arts, founded in 1876). For more about the journal’s history, see Donald Ciota, ‘*Thamarat al-Funun*: Syria’s First Islamic Newspaper, 1875–1908,’ PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1979.

\(^{105}\) The letter was sent to Riḍā as a result of Qabbānī’s reading of one of Shumayyil’s articles in *al-Hilāl*, (June 1909); ‘al-Duktūr Shibli Effendi Shumayyil,’ *al-Manār*, vol. 12/8 (Shaʿbān 1327/September 1909), pp. 632-637.

\(^{106}\) Ibid.

\(^{107}\) Ibid.
a Muslim!’ In his answer, Shumayyil answered: ‘No, I am a Mohammedan!’

When the Iraqi-Kurdi poet Jamil Šidqī al-Zahāwī (1863-1936) published his article on women’s rights in Islam in the Egyptian daily al-Mu’ayyad (August 1910), he was dismissed from his job as a teacher of Shari’a at the College of Law in Baghdad. Many Muslim writers in Iraq, Egypt, Syria and elsewhere accused him of ‘infidelity’ and ‘atheism.’ In that article, Zahāwī criticised the position of women in Islam, the veil, the system of inheritance and Islamic regulations of divorce as unjust. In his writings, Zahāwī in general denied the existence of God as the Maker of the world, defied the authority of the Qur’an and was annoyed with the daily prayers and Ramadan.

Zahāwī was influenced by Shumayyil’s Arabic translation of Darwin’s works. As a result of the anti-Zahāwī campaign, Shumayyil requested Riḍā to write his views as a Muslim scholar on the ideas of the Iraqi poet. In December 1910, Riḍā responded to Shumayyil’s request. He was very cautious not to label Zahāwī as an infidel, although he could be seen as an ‘apostate’ on the basis of his anti-Islamic statements. Riḍā, on the other hand, was more inclined to remind those who supported Zahāwī (such as Shumayyil) that his expression of such views was ‘scorn’ and ‘ridicule’ of Islam as the official religion of the Supreme Porte. His words should not be defended under the rights of freedom of expression. Putting in mind that he was reacting at Shumayyil’s request (whom he earlier

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111 Ibid., p. 180.
had praised for his independence of thought), Riḍā argued that Zahāwī should have pursued his mission of reforming the situation of Muslims in another way: by addressing those superstitions widely spread among Muslims, instead of attacking the religious fundamentals of Islam. Zahāwī was found by Riḍā as to have ridiculed the Islamic Law; and therefore was not entitled to teach it to Muslim students. In order to avoid chaos in society, he strictly forbade Muslim individuals to physically attack him, nor to raid on his property; but they were allowed to manifest their objections in all peaceful means.\footnote{i bid., pp. 844-845.}

Fifty days after Shumayyil’s death (January 1, 1917), a memorial ceremony was held at the Syrian Club in Cairo. In an article in his journal, Riḍā eulogised the late Shumayyil as one of the ‘unique and sincere seekers of civil and social reform.’\footnote{Al-Manār, vol. 19/10 (Jumādā al-ʾĀkhira 1335/April 1917), p. 625.} Shumayyil’s influence, according to him, was extended to his genuine efforts for the socialist cause besides his profession as a physician. In his comment on Shumayyil’s affinity with Darwinism, Riḍā was astonished that the Catholics (especially the Jesuits) did not publicly attempt to criticise Shumayyil and his adherence to such theories. According to him, some priests were said to resist Shumayyil’s ‘infidelity’ and propagation of Darwinism by discouraging Christian patients to visit his clinic for treatment. But the majority of Christians acknowledged his social reform despite his atheism. In Riḍā’s understanding, Muslims did not see his manifestation of unbelief as a reason for ignoring him. They treated him, however, as a non-Muslim physician and sociologist.\footnote{i bid., pp. 625-626.} Shumayyil’s appreciation of the Prophet’s personality and his social role in Arabia enabled Riḍā to consider his adherence to atheism as less destructive. He believed that the only reason he did not embrace Islam was that he studied Islam while being an agnostic, who did not believe in the existence of God. For Riḍā, Shumayyil’s attribution of the Prophet’s success only to his human traits had prohibited him from studying his achievements as a Prophet dispatched by God to humanity. But in spite of Sumayyil’s materialism, Riḍā praised him for his ‘compassion, generosity, sincerity, bravery and sense of honour.’\footnote{i bid., p. 629; after his eulogy of Shumayyil in Al-Manār, an anonymous graduate of Al-Azhar launched a campaign against Riḍā accusing him of infidelity for his
2.1.5. ʾIbrāhīm al-Yāzijī

Sheikh ʾIbrāhīm al-Yāzijī (1847-1906) was one of the most well-known Christian Arab literary figures in the late nineteenth century. His father Naṣīf al-Yāzijī was also a man of letters and a great Arab philologist. Sheikh ʾIbrāhīm had contributed to the Jesuit Arabic translation of the Bible. Before that, he had embarked upon learning Hebrew and Syriac. By 1889, he became a freemason in Syria, and migrated to Egypt in 1897 with other Syrian publicists, where he established or contributed to many Arab magazines. He belonged to the group of Christian intellectuals who participated immensely in the revival of the Arabic language in modern times, and was one of the earliest proponents of Arab nationalism as well. For him, the Arabs were ‘the most remarkable people among all nations.’

During his early years in Syria, Riḍā had no personal contact with al-Yāzijī, but he formed an unfavourable judgement of him on the basis of stories attributed to him that he had attacked the Qurʾān and its language. At that time, Riḍā made no effort to get acquainted with him. Later in Egypt his image temporarily changed when he met with al-Yāzijī at the Egyptian Book Association. According to al-Manār, al-Yāzijī showed Riḍā ‘friendliness, gentleness and good manners.’ After that meeting, Riḍā started to praise him regularly as one of the most knowledgeable Syrian Christian literary figures. What attracted Riḍā to al-Yāzijī besides his earnest contributions to the revival of the Arabic literary was his enthusiasm in opposing the archaic and foreign elements in the Arabic journals of his time.

In a personal article written two years later entitled: ‘We and al-Yāzijī,’ Riḍā, however, noted that many Syrian Christians were disappointed with al-Yāzijī’s pride and arrogance; and that his feeling of superiority had prevented him from sharing his knowledge with


117 He established with other people newspapers and magazines before his migration to Egypt, such as al-Najāḥ (1872), and al-Ṭabīb (co-editors Khalil Sāʿādeh and Bishārah Zalzal, 1884-1885). In Egypt he established two: al-Bayān (1897-1989), and al-Ḍiyāʾ (1898). For more about his life and works, see, ʿIsā Mikhāʾil Sabā, al-Sheikh ʾIbrāhīm al-Yāzijī (1847-1906), Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1955.


others. Riḍā pointed here to Yāzījī’s criticism of Yaʿqūb Ṣarrūf, the founder of al-Muqtaṭaf, for his use of colloquial or foreign words, and for occasional slight grammatical mistakes in his writings. Riḍā’s view of al-Yāzīji was that he himself often made mistakes in his writings.

In 1903, one of the missionary magazines attacked the Qur’ān on the basis of one piece of work attributed to al-Yāzīji in which he was said to assault the Qur’ānic language. In his comment on Riḍā’s stance, al-Yāzīji blamed al-Manār for causing ‘chaos’ and ‘disturbance of thoughts’ among the public by stirring up such accusations with no verification. On the other hand, Riḍā accused him of arrogance, stating that if he had been really innocent, he should have taken the effort to clear his name by at least writing a letter to the editorial of al-Manār. Riḍā repeated that al-Yāzīji hardly had any sincere friends whether in Syria or in Egypt. He also concluded that al-Manār’s critical response to him should not be seen as an attack on al-Yāzīji’s person, but against the background of its general stance against missionary writings. There was thus in his view no contradiction in his eagerness to establish concord and friendship with fair Christians. Al-Yāzīji died three years later, and al-Manār was silent in giving any further responses to him during these years.

2.1.6. Khalīl Saʿādeh

Very little is mentioned in al-Manār about Riḍā’s relation with the Syrian Orthodox Khalīl Saʿādeh (1857-1934), whose significance actually lay in their co-operation in editing the Arabic translation of the controversial Gospel of Barnabas (see chapter 5). In view of the importance of the Gospel, it might be useful to discuss their relation in the light of some biographical information about Saʿādeh in order to place him in the intellectual and political setting of our discussion.

Saʿādeh was known as a ‘politically engaged man of letters.’ He was born in Shuwayr, Mount Lebanon, and studied medicine at the Syrian Protestant College. In 1882 he was chosen as the spokesman of the

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121 Ibid., p. 319.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
student movement at the College. After his graduation in 1883 he
became a staff member of the editorial board of the short-lived sci-
cientific and medical review *al-Ṭabīb* in Beirut (mentioned above). In
the following years, he worked as a medical advisor for the Ottoman
government in Palestine. In 1901 he left Syria for Egypt, where he
eventually stayed till 1913. Like many of his Syrian fellows, he became
involved in journalism, and wrote articles for *al-Ahrām*. He also
became a correspondent of English papers, such as *The Times* and
*The Standard*.125 This period of his life witnessed an intense intellectual
productivity and political involvement. He was able to read in French,
Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin. Besides his work as a journalist,
Saʿādeh gained special qualifying skills in English and was able to
write literary works in that language. He in fact wrote two novels:
*The Syrian Prince* (London, 1893) and *Cesar and Cleopatra* (London,
1895). He compiled also an Arabic-English Lexicon during his stay
in Cairo in 1911.126

Later he moved to Argentina, where he lived during World War I,
until 1919. In 1919, he accepted an invitation from the Syrian com-
community of Sao Paolo and moved to Brazil. There he founded the
newspaper *al-Jarīda*, which developed into a cultural magazine and
subsequently changed its name to *al-Majalla*. From 1930 until his
death in 1934 he was the editor of the prestigious literary magazine
*al-Rābiṭa*. During this period in South America, he did not write any
direct contributions to Rîdā’s journal. But from the Diaspora he had
been sharing with him the struggle for the complete independence
of Greater Syria. He also founded the Syrian League and the National
Democratic Party to support the Syrian quest for complete inde-
pendence.127

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125 C. Schumann, ‘Nationalism, Diaspora and ‘civilisational mission’: the case of
Syrian nationalism in Latin America between World War I and World War II,’
‘Khalil Saadeh: L’homme en l’œuvre: 1857-1934,’ unpublished PhD dissertation, Sor-
bonne, 1986 (Quoted below, ‘L’homme’). Thanks to Dr. Hamie for sending me a copy
of the thesis. It has been recently translated into Arabic, id. *al-ʿAllāma al-Duktūr
(Quoted below, *al-ʿAllāma*). My gratitude is due to my colleague Abdullah Şofān of
the American University in Beirut for sending me a copy of the book from Beirut.

126 See the speech delivered by his granddaughter Sofia Saʿādeh during the event
of his honor held by the branch of the Society of Feminist Development in his village
Shuwayr in 2002, p. 3; available at http://www.shweir.com/ain_el_assis.htm, accessed,
20 November 2006.

Sa‘ādeh regarded journalism as the measure for the advancement of nations, and the mirror of their morals and cultural refinement.\(^{128}\) According to Schumann, Sa‘ādeh believed that the state of journalism was tied to the state of the nation itself. The nation would decline if the press declined and stagnated. If the nation woke up and joined the ‘other living nations,’ it would be most visible in the awakening of its press. Sa‘ādeh wrote: ‘[Today] the hidden forces of the nation become evident in the advanced press. Its working spirits as well as its thinking brains become apparent, and its splendid literature emerges. There is no advanced press, however, unless it is based on excellence, unless its motto is knowledge and unless its strength is respect for the individual. Its content is nourishment for the brain the same way food is necessary for the stomach.’\(^{129}\)

Sa‘ādeh was a secularist, who was strongly convinced of the necessity of the separation between religion and state. In Sa‘ādeh’s view, Christianity (his religion by origin) had changed to be ritualistic. Contrary to early Christianity, whose followers had offered their lives for the cause of their faith, it had become one of the modern tricks in the hands of Christian states. He severely attacked religious fanaticism, but believed that religion is an integral part of the Oriental’s life, and he had his strong faith that life is meant to dignify religion.\(^{130}\) Like Riḍā, Sa‘ādeh was aware of the diversity of voices and religious orientations in the Syrian homeland as well as in the Diaspora communities in South America. It was definitely not his goal to eliminate these differences. Yet he wanted to ensure that his compatriots were united at least in the defense of the national cause in order to make the Syrian voice heard within the international arena, thereby giving hope to the Syrians who had lived in despair.\(^{131}\)

In 1906 Riḍā briefly mentioned one of Sa‘ādeh’s scientific works on pulmonary tuberculosis.\(^{132}\) Sa‘ādeh’s fame as a good writer in English was primarily the reason for Riḍā to entrust him with the Arabic translation of the Barnabas Gospel. In his short biography of Sa‘ādeh, Adel Beshara considered the publication of this Gospel as the most controversial event of his life. He wrote: ‘the publication of

\(^{128}\) Ibid.

\(^{129}\) As quoted in ibid.

\(^{130}\) See the booklet in his honour, p. 29.

\(^{131}\) Schumann, op. cit., pp. 606-607.

Barnabas [Beshara reads it ‘Barnabus’] in Arabic was met with some scepticism largely due to religious sensitivity. The late Rashid Riḍā inflamed the public by prefacing the work with a preamble that took its entire meaning out of context. The preamble was incorporated into the book without Saʿādeh’s prior knowledge. In his statement, Beshara relies on information cited by Badr Al-Hage, one of Saʿādeh’s biographers, in his collection of some of the unknown works by Saʿādeh. In his account, al-Hage quoted Anṭūn Saʿādeh, Khalil’s son and the later founder of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. Tracing the exact source mentioned by al-Hage, I could not find the pages referred to by Anṭūn.

After the English publisher had sent him the English translation of the Gospel, Riḍā soon settled an agreement with Saʿādeh on publishing an exact Arabic translation by his Manār. It is conceivable that Saʿādeh must have known Riḍā’s reasons for publishing the Gospel. In his initial advertisement of al-Manār’s plan of cooperating with Saʿādeh, Riḍā explicitly maintained that the Gospel’s agreement with many Islamic principles stimulated him to think of translating it into Arabic. Besides, he was keen on making it known among Arab readers, just as the translators had done for English-speaking people. He also had a great desire that other translators would follow this step by increasing its publicity in all Western languages. One year after the appearance of the Gospel’s translation, Saʿādeh contributed to al-Manār by publishing one of his scientific articles on Substance theory. Saʿādeh’s granddaughter Sofia, presently professor at the American University in Beirut, rejects the argument that this period of her grandfather’s life was controversial. In her own words: ‘he was known among his contemporaries as a staunch secular person, and his translation of the Gospel was out of curiosity more than anything else. He tried also to refute the fact that it was genuine, but never

136 Al-Manār, vol. 10/5 (Jumādā al-Ūlā 1325/July 1907), pp. 385-387; Riḍā expressed his gratitude to the editors for sending him a copy of this work. This copy still exists in Riḍā’s family archive with his own signature: Milk al-Sayyid Muḥammad Rashid Riḍā (Owned by Al-Sayyid Muḥammad Rashid Riḍā).
publicly fought with Riḍā on this specific matter even after his migration to South America.\footnote{E-mail to the present writer, 28 April 2005.}

Later we shall discuss Saʿādeh’s detailed evaluation of the Gospel, but it suffices here to stress that his very objective of translating the Gospel was spelled out in his introduction by saying:

‘I started translating this book, which is called the Gospel of Barnabas well aware of the responsibility that I had undertaken. My aim was to serve historical studies and of course our language which is perhaps the most logical medium into which this work should be translated. This is the first time this book has come out in the Arabic language. It is a gospel about which scholars and historians have differed sharply. In these closing comments, though, I do have to stress that in this introduction all my discussions are purely scientific and historical in orientation and that I have been scrupulous to avoid all religious controversies which I left to those who are better equipped to deal with them.’\footnote{As quoted in Beshara, op. cit., pp. 68-69.}

Even after the Gospel’s publication, Saʿādeh remained in solidarity with other Syrian nationalists, including Riḍā himself (see, appendix VI). Among Riḍā’s papers, I found the charter of the Ottoman Socialist Party, founded in Cairo in December 1910. The charter was signed by Saʿādeh as its secretary general. Among the founders of the Party were its president Shiblī Shumayyil and Rafīq al-ʿĀzm (1867-1925), the prominent Sunni Muslim and the chairman of the Decentralisation Party.\footnote{MS, the charter of Al-Ḥizb al-ʿUthmānī al-Ijtīmāʿī, handwritten by Khalīl Saʿādeh, Riḍā’s private archive.} Although Riḍā’s name was not included among the founders, the party’s resolutions came close to his later Decentralisation Party, which demanded administrative autonomy for the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Saʿādeh, Shumayyil and al-ʿĀzm shared Riḍā’s political cause, and later became members of his above-mentioned Decentralisation Party.\footnote{See, Hamie, ‘L’homme,’ pp. 101-104.}

2.1.7. Al-Machreq: A Jesuit Syrian Review

Let us now turn to discuss Riḍā’s polemics with the Catholic Arabic magazine al-Machreq. As the mouthpiece of the Syro-Lebanese Jesuits in Beirut since its first publication in 1898, this magazine attempted to convey for the Catholic Arabic communities the value and signifi-
cance of Western science and technology as well as the cultural heritage of the Near East. Ridā was involved in controversies with al-Machreq around a variety of issues, especially on what he often wrote in his journal on Christianity. According to Ridā’s archival documents, he used to exchange the published issues of al-Manār with those of al-Machreq. The Oriental Library of the Jesuit Saint-Joseph College was subscribing to his journal, and many of its issues were kept there. Despite their heated polemics, the library secretary praised Ridā’s journal as having been the ‘mouthpiece of the Islamic Salafi renaissance’ (see, Appendix VII).

As soon as the above-mentioned al-Manār polemicist Tāhir al-Tannīr published his anti-Christian book, Father Louis Cheikho (1859-1927), the editor of al-Machreq, fervently attacked the author. Tannīr’s treatise, for him, was nothing but ‘a childish’ attempt to emulate earlier European works of ‘unbelievers, Protestants, and heretics’ in their critique of Christianity. In the same year, al-Machreq accused Ridā’s journal of having ‘exceeded the proper bounds by attacking the Catholic belief.’ When al-Manār quoted an article from the Russian Muslim paper Shūrā (Council, founded in 1908) in which Luther had been eulogised for his reformation, the editorial of al-Machreq immediately blamed Ridā for praising him on the basis of his conflict with Catholicism. ‘Had the Shūrā and al-Manār known

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143 Letter, al-Machreq to Ridā, Beirut, 2 November 1928, Ridā’s private archive.


146 Ibid, p. 718.

who Luther and his works precisely were,’ *al-Machreq* wrote, ‘they would have entirely discarded him and would have never contaminated their pages by mentioning his name.’

In response to *al-Manār*’s postulation of the doctrine of Trinity, Cheikho counterattacked Riḍā for using the Gospel of Barnabas as a weapon against it. *Al-Machreq* challenged Riḍā that he brought forward an Arabic translation of a ‘forged’ Gospel, when he lacked solid proofs against Christianity. Riḍā, according to him, failed to recognise the sense of the Trinity’s divine mystery. Cheikho’s article was specifically formulated in reaction to Riḍā’s views (mentioned in the context of his response to the Danish missionary Alfred Nielsen, see, chapter 3) that: ‘Muslim theologians agree that there is nothing in the Islamic faith which is logically impossible (*muḥāl ‘aqlan*), meaning that the Muslim is not required to believe in anything that is logically impossible [...] Other religions than Islam require people to believe in what is rationally impossible, *i.e.*, the reconciliation between two antitheses or opposites, such as the real Unity and the real Trinity. In other terms, that God is truly one, and truly more than one at the same time.’

Cheikho rebuked Riḍā for his allegation that the Catholic doctrine insists on combining contradictions. ‘It is not logical,’ Cheikho contended, ‘that such a paradoxical faith would be adopted by more than one third of the inhabitants of the globe among whom are the most civilised nations—such as the Greeks, the Romans and the Arabs.’ He insisted that Trinitarian concepts had been taken from the divine revelation, and Biblical prophets implicitly referred to them in the Old Testament. He pointed to many examples, such as God’s use of the plural form with reference to Himself, and to the plural form for ‘Lord’ used frequently in the Old Testament. In his conclusion, Cheikho reminded Riḍā that Catholic believers do not entirely grasp the mystery of the Trinity. But it is enough for them to know that God revealed it to them. He further upheld that there are many secrets that cannot be interpreted by human intellect, and that it is

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148 Ibid., p. 719.
150 L. Cheikho, ‘Lā tanāquda fī al-tawḥīd wā al-tathlīth,’ *Al-Machreq*, vol. 22 (1924), pp. 737-744. Among Riḍā’s papers, I have found an unpublished anti-Cheikho article. It was written by a Shi‘i Muslim from Iraq, who signed it as Muslim Najafī under the title: ‘al-Qawl al-saḥīḥ fī Daḥd ‘Ulūhiyyat al-Masiḥ (The True Saying in Refuting the Divinity of Jesus).’ MS., Riḍā’s private archive.
impossible for human beings to grasp God’s true nature; otherwise they would share with God his divine essence.\textsuperscript{151}

\textit{Al-Machreq} had many criticisms with regard to Riḍā’s religious views of the church. For example, it suggested that his statement in one of his \textit{fatwās} on polygamy that the Pope had authorised Charlemagne’s polygamy was historically mistaken. As a matter of fact, although Charlemagne, who was holding power over both the Church and state, married many wives, the Catholic Church had never authorised him to do so.\textsuperscript{152} Riḍā, according to \textit{al-Machreq}, insisted on writing on many subjects about which his knowledge was deficient. A prominent example was his insistence that freemasonry organisations collaborated with the Jews to demolish the Papal power in Europe.\textsuperscript{153}

In 1922, one of \textit{al-Manār}’s readers in Beirut complained to Riḍā about the writings of \textit{al-Machreq} on Islam.\textsuperscript{154} When the tenth volume of \textit{Tafsīr al-Manār} was first published in 1932, \textit{al-Machreq} was critical of its author’s Islamic religious views. It described Riḍā’s commentary on the Qur’ān as a ‘naïve attempt to combine between the Qur’ān and modern scientific discoveries, which had been never known in the time of the Prophet of Islam.’\textsuperscript{155}

The controversy between Riḍā and \textit{al-Machreq} culminated in 1934, when the Catholic journal embarked upon reacting to his above-mentioned work \textit{al-Waḥī al-Muḥammadī}. \textit{Al-Machreq} introduced Riḍā to its readers as ‘a Muslim conservative luminary in Egypt, a friend of the Wahhābī Ibn Saʿūd, and a fervent Muslim apologist, who firmly adhered to the traditions and rejected anything that is not in agreement with the way of the Salaf.’\textsuperscript{156} It also depicted Riḍā’s work as an attempt to idealise Islam, which did not add any new aspect of knowledge to the understanding of the concept of revelation in Islam.\textsuperscript{157}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{151} Ibid., p. 743.
\item \textsuperscript{152} \textit{Al-Machreq}, vol. 5 (1927), pp. 397-398; see, Riḍā’s \textit{fatwā}, \textit{al-Manār}, vol. 28/1 (Shābān 1345/March 1917), p. 29.
\item \textsuperscript{153} \textit{Al-Machreq}, vol. 30 (1932), pp. 143-144. See, \textit{al-Manār}, 14/3 (Rabiʿ Al-ʿAwwal 1929/March 1911), pp. 178; vol. 15/1, pp. 32; vol. 29/4, pp. 271-72. Cf. his article on the role of the Jews in the Freemasonry movement, vol. 6/5 (Rabiʿ al-ʿAwwal 1321/May 1903), pp. 196-200, see also, \textit{al-Manār}, vol. 8/11 (Jumādā Al-ʿAkhira 1323/August 1905), pp. 401-403.
\item \textsuperscript{154} \textit{Al-Manār}, vol. 23/4, p. 267.
\item \textsuperscript{155} \textit{Al-Machreq}, vol. 30 (1932), pp. 237-238, cf. vol. 29 (1931), pp. 315-316.
\item \textsuperscript{156} \textit{Al-Machreq}, vol. 31 (1933), p. 956.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Ibid., p. 956.
\end{itemize}
The author’s exclusive concern was to respond to Christians and verify the superiority of Islam over Christianity without giving profound treatment to any of his themes. Al-Machreq did not deny the religious value of the Qur’an and its impact on Muslim believers in their liturgy and prayers, but this was not enough to prove its miraculous nature.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 957-958.}

The writer of al-Machreq was of the view that the linguistic value ascribed to the Qur’an was no miracle in its own, and should be seen as equal to the high standard of the English or German translations of the Bible. In spite of admitting its aesthetic elements, al-Machreq alleged that there are many other linguistic and historical contradictions and defects in the Qur’an.\footnote{For examples of these, see, ibid., pp. 958-959.} With regard to Riḍā’s arguments that the Qur’ānic miracle was proved by its influence and the change achieved by Islam in many parts of the world—the same argument which was earlier used by Cheikho to prove the authenticity of Catholic belief—al-Machreq viewed it as improbable. The Arabs had conquered decadent nations with ease. Muslims also learnt philosophy and other sciences from other nations, not directly from the Qur’an. In conclusion, al-Machreq wondered why Riḍā dedicated his book to the civilised nations: ‘Is it because he knows perfectly well that Islam has not gained any of the civilised nations in the modern time? Or because he knows that the majority of the more than 240 million Muslims [in the 1930s] were formerly heathens, who considered Islam civilised as compared to their previous paganism?’\footnote{Ibid., p. 960.}

In his introduction to the book, Riḍā stated that his work was primarily a proposal to ‘call civilised countries of the West and Japan (see chapter 3) […] and free-thinking Western scholars to Islam.’ He suggested that there were three obstacles that prohibit non-Muslims from grasping the divine message of the Qur’an: 1) the Church, which opposed it by propagating a tirade of lies and accusations; therefore, its students believe every Muslim to be an enemy of Christ and Christianity; 2) Western politicians, who inherited antagonism from the Church, and accepted its fabrications in order to serve their imperialistic policy; and 3) the state of decadence among Muslims, who were blissfully ignorant of their religion.\footnote{See the English translation, The Revelation to Muhammad, trans. by Abdus-Samad Sharafuddin, Saudi Arabia, 1960. The book is also mentioned in, Fehmi Jadaane, ‘Revelation et Inspiration en Islam,’ Studia Islamica 26, 1967, pp. 23-47.}
On May 16, 1934, a letter from Beirut signed by a certain Cheikh & Ladki (?) drew Riḍā’s attention to Cheikho’s attacks on his book. According to this letter, a group of scholars intended to react to Cheikho’s critique of *al-Manār*. The sender of the letter (Cheikh & Ladki) advised them to wait, since it was the author of the book who should reply (see, appendix VIII).162 Some weeks later, Riḍā started to respond to Cheikho in a series of four articles in his journal. He understood that the writer’s aim to define him in such a way was to inoculate his readers with the idea that he and his journal would reject any modern religious, scientific and industrial innovations. Nonetheless, Riḍā defended himself by stating that his religious call was bound to the Qurʾān and the Sunna, while summoning Muslims to acquire all useful modern understanding in their lives, in as far as it did not contradict their religious principles.163 Riḍā was deeply frustrated by the writer’s belittling of his work, blaming him for looking at it ‘from behind a black-tinted Jesuit pair of glasses.’164 On the basis of an Arabic translation of the secrets of the Jesuit order (probably made by Kirām, mentioned above, chapter 1), Riḍā judged that ‘the Jesuits are more extravagant and extreme in adoring money than the Jews and capitalists.’165

In his reply, Riḍā again insisted that Islam remains a ‘friend’ of Christianity, but not a friend of the Church. For him, Islam was also completing the ‘real Christian message.’ As a Muslim scholar he still regularly wished to cooperate with Christian religious bodies (especially the Vatican) to oppose atheism.166 The author of *al-Machreq* criticised Riḍā’s delineation of Islam as the religion of freedom and brotherhood as contradictory. On the one hand, he asserted that Islam gives people of other religious denominations their rights under Muslim rule, while, on the other, he strove for ‘one Arab and Muslim world’ by claiming that social and political reform would never be accomplished without the unity of all nations in terms of religion, language, politics and judiciary system. Riḍā asserted that human reform cannot be entirely attained without homogeneity of the vari-

162 Letter to Riḍā, Cheikh & Ladki, Beirut, 16 May 1934, Riḍā’s private archive.
164 Ibid., 148.
165 Ibid., p. 150.
166 *Al-Manār*, vol. 34/3 (Rabīʿ al-ʿAwwal 1353/July 1934), pp. 227-231.
ious aspects of life, even when there is no Arab nation or Muslim legislation. Riḍā insisted that Islam is the most homogenous religion capable of achieving this goal, when we compare it to other religions. The truth of Islam, he went further, does not rely on its acceptance by all human beings; and the goal of each religion is the attainment of the highest level of human perfection.\(^\text{167}\)

With regard to *al-Machreq’s* rejection of the miraculous nature of the Qur’an, Riḍā argued that to compare the Qur’an to English or German translations was not valid. The Qur’an, in itself, was inimitable in its language. It had been revealed to those who were known in their age for their eloquence; while Muḥammad did not belong to the category of well-known Arab poets. Islam also challenged the Arabs to produce verses similar to the Qur’an, but they failed. On the other hand, none of the English or the German translators had ever claimed that their work was inimitable.\(^\text{168}\)

Secondly, Riḍā defended the Qur’an as the miraculous word of God by stressing again that many Western scholars agreed upon that and admitted the prophecy of Muḥammad. In his book, he cited scholars such as Edouard Montet (see, chapter 1), who explained the prophetic characteristics in Islam and stressed the rationalistic essence of Islam. Riḍā moreover tried to rationalise that the prophet, without having received such a divine message, would have never been able to bring out such an ‘excellent’ book containing all those religious, literary and legislative sciences after having reached the age of forty. Riḍā associated the success of the Prophet’s mission with the growing number of Muslims throughout history. He compared the Qur’an to a medical guide brought forward by a physician to cure people. If he were able to cure all of his patients with the help of his guide, people would definitely believe in the soundness of his knowledge. In the same way, he went on, a huge number of non-Arabs adopted Islam because they believed in the power of its truth to guide them. As for the Arabs especially, they had adopted Islam as a result of the impact of its eloquent language on them.\(^\text{169}\)

\(^{167}\) Ibid., pp. 227-228.

\(^{168}\) *Al-Manār*, vol. 34/4, pp. 311-315.

\(^{169}\) Ibid., p. 315. See also, *al-Manār*, vol. 34/5, pp. 376-381.
2.2. The Egyptian Coptic Community

Some of the Egyptian Copts saw Riḍā as an intruding Syrian (dakhil), who had no right to interfere in Egyptian affairs.\textsuperscript{170} The first one to coin the term \textit{dukhalā’} (intruders) for Syrians in Egypt was the founder of the Egyptian Nationalist Party Muṣṭafā Kāmil. He advocated that the Syrians (especially Christians) were collaborators with the British and hostile to the Egyptian nationalist cause at the beginning of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{171} In the following section we will discuss Riḍā’s various reactions to the Coptic community in Egypt.

2.2.1. Riḍā’s Attitudes towards the Copts before 1911

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Coptic question and their demands for social and religious equality with Muslims had gradually become visible in the political scene of Egypt. In 1897, for example, a Coptic delegation handed a petition to the Egyptian Prime Minister and the British High Commissioner complaining that Copts were underrepresented in key political and administrative posts.\textsuperscript{172}

The Copts, who viewed themselves as alienated within their own society, undertook the defence of their interests in their different newspapers and periodicals. The years 1908-1911 witnessed one of the most critical moments of the Muslim-Christian relations in the country. Muslim and Christian papers launched mutual accusations and their confrontation came to a head. The debates focused primarily

\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Al-Manār}, vol. 15/1, pp. 48-49.

\textsuperscript{171} For Kāmil’s ideas on the concept of nationalism, see, Fritz Steppat, ‘Nationalismus und Islam bei Muṣṭafā Kamil. Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der ägyptischen Nationalbewegung,’ \textit{Die Welt des Islams} 4/4, 1956, pp. 241-341. Riḍā was a sharp critic of Kāmil’s nationalism, and was one of the early Muslim thinkers who at that moment saw the threat posed by the concept of nationalism to Islamic doctrine. About his rejection of nationalism, see, Safran, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 75-84. In his turn, Kāmil declared that the Khedive himself was not pleased with Riḍā’s stances (especially his regular critique of Al-Azhar), and had a serious plan to send him away from Egypt. See, ‘Al-‘Aṣabiyya al-Jinsiyya wā al-Liwāʾ,’ \textit{al-Manār}, vol. 10/7, pp. 536-540. Riḍā defended the existence of the Syrians in Egypt, and fervently propagated the idea that the Syrians were the closest and most united faction among all emigrants to the Egyptians. See, ‘Mūṣāfaḥat al-Sūriyyīn lil-Miṣriyyīn,’ \textit{al-Manār}, vol. 11/3 (Rabiʿ al-‘Awwal 1326/ May 1908), pp. 230-231.

\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Al-Ahram Weekly}, no. 691 (20-26 May 2004).
on representation in civil servant employment. In 1908 the Coptic Reform Party, founded by Akhnûkh Fanûs, a wealthy Presbyterian Coptic landlord and member of the Legislative Assembly, had highlighted the Coptic demands as discrimination in employment and promotion, and the practice of religious rights. But other Coptic groups were anxious about their Muslim fellow-citizens. Some prominent Coptic figures accused Fanûs of collaboration with the British authorities in destroying the national spirit in their homeland.

In the early issues of al-Manâr, Riḍâ’s views of the Copts were positive in the general sense. He constantly praised their religious zeal and concern for education, emphasising that they were more organised than their Egyptian Muslim compatriots. He maintained that following the steps of other ‘civilised lands,’ the Copts set up schools to teach their children modern sciences, while keeping up their belief and religious identity. As an active class in society, they promoted proper education to the degree that it had been said that no illiteracy was to be found among them. Muslims, on the other hand, had hardly any similar organisations.

Riḍâ later developed a negative attitude as a result of what he saw as a campaign of protest against Muslims. He denounced the way the Copts presented their demands by arguing that Muslims deliberately aimed at ‘rooting’ them out of the country. For him, it was natural from a sociological point of view that any religious minority group would be overzealous in striving for unification in order not to be assimilated within the majority group. Being of Syrian origin, Riḍâ made no distinction between any of the Egyptian minority groups including the Jews, the Copts or naturalised Orthodox Christians of Syrian or Armenian origin. He affirmed that if the Copts were serious about raising their demands of equality in the public debate, they

would have included other Christians in their appeal. The Copts should also stop claiming in their newspapers that Muslims were colonisers and conquerors, and had no right to be in the country. However, he also criticised those Muslims who exceeded their boundary by taking harsh stances and constantly offending Coptic religious feelings.\footnote{‘Al-Muslimūw wā al-Qibṭ,’ vol. 11/5 (Jumādā al-Ūlā 1326/June 1908), pp. 338-347.}

The Coptic newspaper \textit{al-Waṭan} (‘Homeland’) was launched in 1877 primarily in order to provide the Coptic community with an outlet for its collective views and grievances. It soon became one of the strongest platforms for enflaming Coptic confrontation with Muslims. According to \textit{al-Manār}, when the Egyptian government started the project of the revival of Arab literature in the beginning of the 20th century by reprinting famous literary works at the expense of the national budget, \textit{al-Waṭan} vigorously attacked the project as a return to ‘backwardness.’ The Coptic journal criticised the Egyptian government for having embarked upon a project that would ‘adulterate its people’s taste for sound literatures and useful sciences.’\footnote{As quoted in \textit{al-Manār}, vol. 13/12 (Dhū al-Hijja 1328/January 1911), p. 909.} Instead of promoting the Egyptians to the level of civilised nations, the paper went on, the government aimed at ‘thrusting them to the darkness of Arab superstitions, nonsense and ignorance.’\footnote{Ibid.}

Riḍā was very discontent with these writings and contrasted \textit{al-Waṭan}’s stance with the initiatives of European scholars and other Arab Christians (such as the Jesuits in Syria), who were keen on preserving Arab literary works by printing them. Riḍā counterattacked by maintaining that \textit{al-Waṭan}’s campaign aimed explicitly at ‘erasing’ Islam, its language and literature from Egypt and replace them with their sense of ‘Coptism.’ He described the Coptic writer of this article as ‘fanatic,’ ‘rude’ and ‘ignorant’ of Arab literature and civilisation. The Arabic language was not confined to Muslims, but was always a common ground for Jews and Christians of the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. Riḍā reminded the writer of ‘fair-minded’ Western thinkers (such as Le Bon and others), who admitted the significance and position of the Arabs and their language and literature in history. If the Coptic writer had been motivated to reach his conclusion by the anti-Christian statements in some of the circulating
Arabic works, he should have not ignored the anti-Islamic tone in Arabic Christian as well as in Western missionary works. Riḍā ascribed all these remarks to al-Watani’s insistence on causing religious strife between Muslims and Copts with confidence that the British authorities would support them in their campaign.179

2.2.2. The Coptic Congress of 1911

Before analysing Riḍā’s response to the Coptic Congress and the assassination of the Coptic Prime Minister Buṭrus Ghālī, we should dwell briefly upon some parts of the historical background of the crisis and its impact on the political scene of the Egypt of 1910-1911.

During his interrogation, the afore-mentioned al-Wardānī (see, the introduction), confessed that he had murdered Ghālī for his mediation between British imperial officials and Egyptian officialdom. Most Egyptian Muslim nationalists viewed Ghālī as too pliant and too willing to serve the British interests. He also represented the cabinet on the bench in the notorious Dinshiway trial in 1906, which resulted in the death sentences for many Egyptian farmers, the event that gave rise to the National Party of Muṣṭafā Kāmil.180

Although al-Wardānī was sentenced to death, common Muslims held him in esteem as a national hero. During his diplomatic trip in Egypt, the former president of the United States Theodore Roosevelt fanned the flames during his speech at the Egyptian University. In that speech, he praised the British rule, condemned nationalists and vilified the assassin.181 However, al-Wardānī made it clear that although he was a Muslim and Ghālī a Coptic Christian, religion had no bearing on the motives for shooting the Prime Minister, whom he considered a traitor.182

Soon in 1911, a lay Coptic Congress was convened at Asyūṭ (Southern Egypt), whose main agenda was to ask for equal rights of citizenship. Asyūṭ was chosen because it was an important center for

179 Ibid., pp. 908-912.
181 Reid, ‘Cairo’, pp. 51-75.
182 Badrawi, op. cit., p. 22.
the Coptic community, a very significant centre for Protestant missionaries who also supported the idea. The Coptic Congress, numbering 500 members or more (Riḍā counted more than 1000), was held in spite of the opposition of Patriarch Kyrollos V and many other notable Coptic figures. They, as well as the government, feared that the Coptic meeting in Asyūṭ would agitate the public. The Egyptian Khedive ‘Abbās Ḥilmî did not welcome the idea of the congress either, and refused to meet its delegation in the Palace. The congress, however, resulted in a petition briefing the Coptic demands before the khedive and the British. The representative of the Coptic Press in London, Kyriakos Mikhail, recorded the works of the congress and other relevant discussions. The congress demanded the government: 1) to exempt the Coptic government officials from their jobs and students from study on Sundays, 2) to open all administrative posts in the government services to the Copts, 3) to change the electoral system in the Egyptian provincial Councils to one similar to that in operation in Belgium in order to secure their rights as minorities, 4) the Copts should have equal rights to take advantage of all educational facilities provided by the new Provincial Councils; and 5) government grants should be bestowed on deserving institutions without any distinction of race or creed.

In April 1911, Muslim Egyptians denounced the requests by organising a rival congress in Heliopolis in Cairo under the auspices of the then Prime Minister Muḥammad Riyāḍ Pasha, and other politicians. The congress committee reported that the Copts were planning to establish ‘a separate state for themselves.’ They also protested against the endeavour of the Copts ‘to divide the Egyptian nation as one political unit into two religious groups, a Muslim majority and a

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183 Bishrî, op. cit., p. 88.
184 Ibid., pp. 86–87.
185 Mikhail, op. cit. The Coptic community was planning to hold such a congress even before the murder of Ghalî, but that incident encouraged them to put it into reality. See, Bishrî, ibid., p. 82. The demands of the Congress were not different from the ones presented to Lord Cromer and Muṣṭafā Fahmî Pasha (d. 1914), who was a strong supporter of British interests in Egypt. The Copts submitted a similar petition to Lord Cromer and Fahmi Pasha in which they requested complete equality in the appointment of administrative jobs, closing the courts on Sunday, appointing an additional member to consultative council, and teaching Christianity to Christian students in governmental schools, see, Tagher, op. cit., p. 215.
186 Mikhail, ibid., pp. 28–30.
Coptic minority.' It also concluded that the prime reason behind the escalation of the problem was the close relation of the Coptic organisers with Western missionary bodies in Southern Egypt, who had convinced them that the Europeans could give them protection in the event that they failed to get their demands.

In his immediate reply, Riḍā reacted to the Coptic demands in some articles in *al-Manār* and *al-Muʾayyad*, which he later compiled in one small volume. He considered the Coptic congress as exercising influence in awakening Egyptian Muslims to organise their own Islamic one, and making them seriously deliberate their common social and religious affairs. He propounded to the Muslim Congress that its participants should try to avoid any discussions on politics, and to engage themselves instead of that in preparing statistical tables on the number of Coptic employees in various sectors in Egypt.

Riḍā deplored the loss of Buṭrus Ghālī as a prudent leader. Contrary to the organisers of the Coptic Congress, he was capable of defending the interests of his community in a peaceful way. Despite Ghālī’s participation in the Dinshiwāy trial and his siding with the British, Riḍā enumerated many of his attributes. The most important of these was his concern for his own community, while being fair in dealing with other groups. Riḍā was convinced that the real motive behind his assassination was secular, not religious. Al-Wardānī made his attempt on the basis of the ideas he learnt during his stay in Europe, not at Al-Azhar or any other religious institution. The Copts, in Riḍā’s view, were not satisfied with the official Muslim condemnation of the act, but intensified their accusation of Muslims as fanatics on the basis of this individual case only. It might be interesting to know that al-Wardānī had mixed with anarchists in Lausanne, and was influenced by their ideas. His two-year sojourn in Switzerland

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188 The congress proceedings, Cairo, 1911; as quoted in ibid., p. 218.
189 *Al-Manār*, vol. 14/5, p. 356.
190 Riḍā, *Muʾtamar*.
191 *Al-Manār*, vol. 14/2, p. 158. Participants of the congress probably presented such statistical numbers before the congress; see, for example, the report of education in Egypt and the share of Muslims and Copts. See, *al-Taʿlīm fi Miṣr wā Ḥaẓ al-Muslimin wā al-Aqbash Minhū*, Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-al-Adāb wā al-Muʾayyad, n.d. In his report, Sir Eldon Gorst also presented statistics of employment of Copts and Muslims in the Civil Service, see, Mikhail, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.
193 Ibid., pp. 203-204.
stimulated his interest in European institutions, and induced him to obtain pamphlets on different aspects of humanitarian concerns. 194

In his judgement of the religious motives behind the Coptic Congress, Riḍā was cynical. He stressed that the Muslim majority would have the right to determine the weekly day off. ‘If they had no desire to work on Sundays in the Muslim government of Ḥājj ʿAbbās Hilmi [Khedive of Egypt],’ Riḍā said, ‘they would better relinquish their jobs and exclusively devote themselves to contemplation and prayer.’ 195 He also refused any Coptic claim that they as original inhabitants of Egypt had the right to rule the country. The Copts were, for Riḍā, subjects to the ‘Muslim Prince’ of Egypt, who granted them their posts in the government services by means of tolerance, and not as a matter of obligation. 196

Riḍā, nevertheless, demonstrated that the Islamic government throughout its history contained different people with other religious beliefs, though its legislative and political principles remained decided by the majority group. He also stressed that the Islamic law gave other religious groups the right to follow their religious laws freely, without complying with Islamic rules. 197

In Riḍā’s thinking, ‘Coptism’ should remain a religious identity, and not to be mixed with any political ideologies. In other words, the Christians of Egypt should use the word ‘Copt’ only in addressing their religious affairs. They should only express themselves as ‘Arab Egyptians.’ He warned the Copts that Muslims were the majority, and they should avoid any clash with them; otherwise it would certainly end up in the loss of their rights as a minority group in case Muslims decided to boycott them. Riḍā postulated that the Copts might have been swayed by the idea that ‘Christian Europe’ would interfere to force the Muslim majority to yield to their demands. In that case, Muslims would subtly try to exclude them from social life, by favouring Muslims by all means in all official posts. 198

194 His landlady in Lausanne would later speak of his gentleness, loyalty and kindness, but he became quite agitated and upset whenever he spoke of Egypt. Another Swiss would observe that the youth spoke of nothing but politics, and that he did so very passionately. Bardawi, op. cit., p. 28.
195 Ibid., p. 207.
196 Ibid.
197 Ibid., p. 208.
198 Ibid., pp. 211-212. In December 1930, Riḍā, as advocate of Arabism, was invited to take part in a public debate held at the Faculty of Law (the Egyptian University) on the concepts of ‘Coptism’ and ‘Pharaonism.’ His counterpart was the
In his address to the Coptic Congress, the orator of the Coptic movement Akhnūkh Fanūs stressed that working on Sunday was a violation of the divine obligation upon Christians as ‘a holy Sabbath.’ He further clarified that ‘any Christian who intentionally works on Sunday should be put to death.’ As a reply to the congress’ demand in this regard, Riḍā turned to expound his religious views on the ‘weekly feast’ in the three monotheistic religions. As compared to Riḍā’s analysis, the Muslim Egyptian Congress accused the Copts of raising the issue out of ‘greediness’ and ‘opportunism’ because they had certain expectations from the ‘Christian’ imperial powers to assist them in removing Islamic features from the whole of society.

Riḍā maintained that he did understand the prime significance of weekly holidays for all nations as a sign of unity, without which religious minority groups could also become weak and liable to vanish. But the national unity of each state should be given priority. He pointed out to the Coptic Congress that the Sabbath was clearly based on many passages in the Old Testament. The sanctification of Sunday, however, was not obviously established in the New Testament; and nowhere did we find in the Bible that Christ or the Apostles ordered the Sabbath to be changed from Saturday to Sunday. Riḍā referred to passages from the Old Testament relating that it was a ‘perpetual covenant ... [for] the people of Israel’ with regard to the day during which God rested after having completed the Creation in six days. He insisted that Jesus did not break the Sabbath, and did not permit his disciples to break it. Riḍā quoted other New Testament passages in which it was related that Jesus allowed his followers to do a little or good activity on the holy day. In order to differ from the Jews, Riḍā went on, the Church replaced Saturday with Sunday, and Paul named it the Lord’s Day. He also stressed that Jewish and Muslim scriptures proving the importance of the weekly day of rest were clearer than the Christian ones. Riḍā was not concerned that minorities would follow the majority in this regard,


200 Al-Manār, vol. 31/6, p. 216.

201 Al-Manār, vol. 14/5, p. 358.


as was the case with Christians leaving work on Fridays under the Islamic rule, and Muslims on Sundays under the Russian Christian government. Riḍā, however, lamented that religious Christians were able to convince Muslim traders in some Islamic states to leave work on Sundays instead of Fridays. Muslims were not entirely prohibited from working on Fridays. But Riḍā argued that it was not acceptable to open government offices on Fridays, because it was highly recommended in Islam to attend the service on Friday at the mosque as early as possible. For the sake of public interest and social unity, Riḍā concluded that all religious groups in Egypt should accommodate their official schedules according to the majority in matters of labour and government office hours.\textsuperscript{205}

The Coptic Congress also raised the question of equality between Muslim and Coptic children in religious education. They pleaded that all the \textit{kuttābs} (local religious schools) and the official schools should be open to all Egyptian children irrespective of their religion. The \textit{kuttābs} were officially declared by the Ministry of Education to be purely Islamic institutions. The Coptic Congress requested that Coptic children should have their religious teaching within the \textit{kuttābs}, just as their Muslim counterparts did. According to the Provincial Councils, none of the tax revenues were devoted to Coptic educational interests, and the children of poorer Copts were dependent for their education upon private enterprise and generosity.\textsuperscript{206}

The issue of Copts partaking in religious education in primary schools had been debated in Egypt earlier. In 1907 Riḍā asserted that the Coptic demand had its religious and political aspects. From a religious point of view, accepting their demand would be also profitable for Muslims, who would be stimulated to revive their religious education parallel to that of their Christian fellows. Riḍā warned the Copts against the harm that might be caused by random attacks on the part of Muslim riot-makers in the event that the government should take any positive decision in that regard. The riot-makers would use it as a pretext to warn public opinion against what they would see as a potential plan to replace the Islamic government entirely. At that time, Riḍā however was not anxious about the introduction of Coptic religious education at primary schools, and did not

\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., pp. 218-219.

\textsuperscript{206} Mikhail, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 29.
fear that it would lead to any kind of religious fanaticism among the members of both communities.\textsuperscript{207}

In response to the Coptic Congress, Riḍā argued that it was known that there were many states which were not obliged to provide religious education to different religious groups. As it represented the majority group, the Russian state schools for instance did not teach any other religious faith, except the Orthodox doctrine. Jewish and Muslim communities had no right to give their children their own religious education in public schools. As part of the Ottoman Empire, Egyptian state schools confined their religious education only to Islam according to the Ḥanafī School of Law. For Riḍā, it was reasonable that the ruling majority would have the right to decide upon religious education. It was unreasonable of the Coptic Congress to appeal to the Muslim government in Egypt to change the religion of the majority. It would be unfair if the government introduced Coptic religious education in state schools, without including other religious denominations, such as all the various divisions of Judaism and Christianity.\textsuperscript{208}

‘Opening the gate’ of pluralism would also make the followers of the other Islamic madhāhib (schools of law) require the government to include their doctrines in religious education.\textsuperscript{209}

The Copts pleaded for more rights than any other religious community, as they considered themselves to be the native population of the country. Riḍā did not entirely disagree with that view. But his remark in this regard was self-contradictory. He contended that ‘suppose that you [Copts] were the original descendants of the ancient Egyptians, then we [Muslims] would also have the option to follow the model of America—the most civilised Christian government in knowledge, justice and freedom—in [persecuting] native Americans.’\textsuperscript{210}

But he immediately renounced that by stating that the Muslim Egyptian government gave equal rights to the Copts as nationals of the country. All holders of Egyptian citizenship, Riḍā went on, had equal rights with no regard to their Pharaonic, Israelite, or Arab origin. However, if the Copts’ allegation of being descendants from the ancient Pharaohs was true, the Jews in their progeny should be, according to Riḍā, nobler, since they descended from the line of

\textsuperscript{207} ‘Al-Ta‘līm al-Dīnī,’ \textit{al-Manār}, vol. 10/2, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{208} \textit{Al-Manār}, vol. 14/3, pp. 221-222.
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., p. 224.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., pp. 222-223.
Prophets. But Islam did not make any differentiation between both groups regarding their religion.\textsuperscript{211}

Riḍā argued that it would not have been unusual if the Egyptian government had followed the European example in stipulating one religion to be taught to all children in public schools. In Egypt, however, there were Muslim institutes, which were supported by the ‘Awqāf system (religious endowments) and fed by Muslims resources, donated for teaching Muslim children. Such institutes, which were run by the government, accepted both Muslim and Coptic children. These endowments, according to Riḍā, used to pay the Egyptian University five thousand pounds annually (which accepted members of both communities as well). Riḍā was convinced that although they were a minority, the Copts were more active, and their demands were merely a token of their being immoderately desirous of acquiring more power over the Muslims.\textsuperscript{212}

The Coptic press attacked Riḍā for his articles about their congress. Riḍā defended himself by stating that he never thought of causing discord between the two communities. His contribution to the whole debate was purely intended for the sake of public interest. He reminded his Coptic opponents of his earlier writings in which he as, a non-Egyptian, had drawn attention to the religious and social unity and strength of the Coptic minority community in comparison with their Muslim counterparts whom he frequently accused of religious laxity.\textsuperscript{213}

What troubled Riḍā was what he saw as a Coptic demand of establishing a secular system in Egypt. His reaction to this point can be seen as a new phase in his thinking. He considered their demand as a threat that would diminish the Islamic presence in Egypt. The Coptic Congress had actually softened its language by asking for equality between Muslims and Copts.\textsuperscript{214} Despite its mild tone, Riḍā still understood the Coptic plea as an attempt to replace Islam altogether with a new Coptic religious system. In line with the Muslim Egyptian Congress, he reconfirmed that the Egyptian ‘Islamic’ government treated the Copts with ‘excessive tolerance and generosity.’ Foreign powers had accused the ‘fragile’ Muslims of discriminating against religious minority groups. He understood that members of the Coptic

\begin{footnotes}
\item[211] Ibid., pp. 223-224.
\item[212] Ibid., pp. 225-226.
\item[214] Bishri, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 97-100.
\end{footnotes}
Congress not only claimed more rights for the Copts, but also pleaded for an Egyptian government which should remain Islamic. Despite the spread of non-Islamic ‘illicit’ acts (such as wine-drinking and adultery), Riḍā defended the Egyptian government as Islamic. Islamic Law, he argued, does not consider those who commit sins as unbelievers. Although the foreign authorities did not give Egypt complete independence at that time, Riḍā still believed that the government had not entirely lost its Islamic face. Many Islamic features characterised Egyptian society, such as the Sharʿi judicial system, religious endowments, Al-Azhar’s religious institutions, and religious feasts. In their demands, the Copts, Riḍā stressed, aimed indirectly at ‘erasing’ these Muslim aspects and replacing them with their own.\\215

Riḍā believed that due to their Western education Eastern Christians in general became very keen on power and authority; and had a strong desire that both Ottoman and Egyptian governments had to forsake their Islamic character altogether. He concluded that the Copts rushed to put forward their demands out of their ‘hatred’ against the Arabs. At the same time he referred to those whom he often called ironically ‘geographic Muslim leaders,’ who he had a stronger desire to remove the Islamic nature of Egypt as well. He was convinced that such a secularist group among Muslims would gradually attain the same aim by weeding out Islamic elements in their opposition to any Islamic initiative in the society. Riḍā again warned the Copts that they should remain content with the rights they had already been given enabling them to reach high official positions in Egypt. He further notified the Copts that their demands would agitate the Muslim public feelings against them, if their wishes to replace the Muslim character of the government were to be put into practice. The Supreme Porte might also take strict measures to retain its Islamic state. It would also widen the gap of understanding between Islam and Christianity in other Muslim lands, since Egypt was seen as one of the pivotal centres of Islam. The British officials, as a result, would try to quell any discontent among Muslims in their colonies (especially India) by opposing the Coptic plans. The Copts, Riḍā argued, would in this way harm their status and lose some of their rights instead of gaining any.\\216

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\215 *Al-Manār*, vol. 14/4, pp. 279-284.
\216 Ibid., pp. 285-287.
Although he did not take part in its activities, Ridā stood firmly behind the Muslim Egyptian Congress. It was, in his view, effective, but belated. The first fruitful consequence was the change of tone in the Coptic protest. He believed that the Copts adopted a milder tone in presenting their requests after they saw that the Muslim majority were attempting to recover their unity. He compared the situation in Egypt with India. Muslims of India had recognised the importance of their unity by holding their annual meetings and congresses, when they saw the Hindus trying to promote their social unity. The same held true for Egyptian Muslims who through this congress achieved a remarkable progress in the direction of their unity. The dependency of Muslim Egyptians on their government in regulating their affairs was, in Ridā’s view, the reason they had been tardy in achieving integrity and unity. Following al-Afghānī’s political ideas, Ridā strongly believed that any governmental reform could not be established without the reform of the state as a whole. The leaders of any state should also exert many of their efforts and the natural resources of their countries in serving their subjects, preventing their people from any unneeded involvement in politics. Politics, as well as religious, economical and social public affairs should be run by a group of experts whom the people trust. Ridā related the success of Western societies to their careful concern to promote talented people in various fields and giving them leadership in offices and institutions. He was therefore satisfied with the decision of the Muslim Egyptian Congress not to interfere in any political discussion or conflict, and to concentrate on investigating the Coptic demands only, and on collecting facts and statistics about Coptic and Muslim officials in various offices. He again warned the Copts to stop accusing Muslims of stirring up religious fanaticism and to make an end to their writings in such a ‘despising’ language in their press.217

Ridā concluded by recommending that the Muslim Egyptian Congress should regulate religious and social Islamic affairs. His proposal was general and did not include any suggestion directly related to the Coptic question. He prompted its members to have its center in Cairo and establish five permanent committees: 1) an administrative committee to regulate all further work; 2) a committee for education, which would organise charitable educational institutes and

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schools, and would in the future make a plan for establishing an Islamic college for girls; 3) a committee for preaching and guidance (al-Wa’z wā al-ʾIrshād), which would be entrusted to supervise preachers who would be sent all over the country; 4) an economic and financial committee, which would take care of investigating the matter of giving loans to poor families and combating usury and non-Islamic financial transactions; and 5) a charitable committee, which would provide assistance for aged, orphans and needy people.218

2.2.3. Salāma Mūsā

Even after his sharp critique of the Coptic Congress, Riḍā still admitted its success in strengthening to the social and ethnical bond among the Copts. At the same time, he constantly accused ‘Coptic Egyptianists’ of attacking al-Manār as a platform for Islamic ideas. Some of the Coptic newspapers also heavily criticised Riḍā for his anti-Christian writings.

Riḍā took part in polemics against the Coptic intellectual Salāma Mūsā (1887-1958) for his writings on Islam and religions in general. It is worth noting that Mūsā was the foremost disciple of the Syrian intelligentsia in Egypt. By the 1920s, when the zenith of the Syrian Christians in Egypt started to be on the wane (Zaidān died in 1914, Shumayyil in 1917, Anṭūn in 1922, and Ṣarrūf in 1927), Mūsā adopted without any hesitation the secularism of Syrian Christians. His readings in their works had clearly moulded his ideas on various subjects. Unlike his Syrian mentors, Mūsā was blunt and straightforward in his critique of Islam. Zaidān once advised him to omit a few offending paragraphs in one of his articles on Islam. ‘Never mind,’ said Zaidān, ‘if we criticise the Christians, for they themselves have already written the critique of their religion [Christianity]. But we must treat Muslims with circumspection. They have not yet produced any self-criticism.’219 Mūsā developed his philosophy of ‘Egyptianism,’ and advocated the idea of liberating society from what he deemed as shackles of theological traditions. Unlike the sense of ‘Arabness’ we have noted among Syrian Christians, Mūsā argued that Arabic should

218 ibid., pp. 295-298.
be ‘declassicised’ for the sake of Egypt. He encouraged therefore the idea of promoting the Egyptian dialect in literary works. In 1912 Salāma Mūsā published his Arabic translation of the treatise of the famous British writer Grant Allen (1848-99), *The Evolution of the Idea of God*. Throughout his work, Allen tried to demonstrate that theology is a product of the human mind, and Christianity is riddled with pagan traditions. Two years later, Riḍā reviewed the book by stating that such attacks of modern atheists on religion have no impact on the conception of monotheism in Islam. Such European writers, he argued, became very critical of Christianity once they observed its ‘pagan’ elements. Consequently, the Coptic newspaper *Miṣr* (‘Egypt,’ firstly published 1895) launched a campaign against Riḍā for his assault on Christianity as a pagan religion. The paper appealed to the Egyptian government to ban Riḍā’s journal and banish him from Egypt for causing religious strife among Muslims and Copts. Ḥusayn Rushdī (1863-1928), the then Prime Minister, invited Riḍā to his house to discuss the matter. Riḍā explained to him that he had published a review of the book just as many other Egyptian papers had done. He also elucidated that his intention was to defend Islam against missionary writings by using such critical writings in his counterattack. He adamantly added that his journal would continue its anti-missionary campaign as long as they continued to publish their attacks on Islam. Rushdī requested Riḍā to confine his writings to defence only. Riḍā expressed his readiness to prepare a long list of anti-Islamic citations in missionary literature. He also tried to convince the Prime Minister that the Coptic daily was seeking the support of British missionaries in order to close down his journal and his preaching of Islam in Cairo.

According to Riḍā, the anti-*Mānār* campaign was led by Yūsuf al-Khāzin (died in Italy, 1944), a Christian Syrian editor in Cairo.

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224 Ibid., p. 479.
was a member of the staff editorial of the above-mentioned Coptic newspaper *al-Waṭan*. Riḍā accused him of being one of the most fanatic Christians. According to *al-Manār*, al-Khāzin was reported to have said that he ‘felt uncomfortable when a Muslim would greet him.’ Riḍā again claimed that his opponents made another attempt to request the British Commissioner and the Egyptian government to imprison or banish him from Egypt, but that their campaign was not successful. He moreover stressed that people knew the objective of his journal from its early beginning; it never intended to propagate any religious strife or animosity against Christians.

In Riḍā’s view, worse than missionaries were those westernised Muslims and Christians. He deemed that Salāma Mūsā, born a Christian, was one of the strongest propagators of ‘atheism’ and ‘absolute looseness,’ who certainly endangered the Egyptian nation through his contributions in *al-Hilāl*, in which he became the principal writer and a leading pundit by the 1920s. He had also published nine books since he had joined the staff of its company. Riḍā became upset that Emile Zaidān, the subsequent editor of *al-Hilāl*, gave Mūsā this opportunity of attacking religion, and did not follow the line of his father who was more mindful of religions, their values and the entity of the Arab nation. Riḍā saw Mūsā’s books published by *al-Hilāl* as a ‘destructive propaganda against any oriental nation, which might be dazzled by his subverting materialistic philosophy.’ On its part, Mūsā’s own magazine *al-Majalla al-Jadīda* accused Riḍā of accumulating huge wealth through the distribution of his journal in which he offended Muslim thinkers by constantly charging them with infidelity.

Riḍā was one of the founding members of the above-mentioned Jamʿiyyat al-Rābiṭa al-Sharqiyya (Association of Oriental League, established 1921-1922). When the mouthpiece of the association,
Majallat al-Rābiṭa al-Sharqiyya, first appeared in 1928, its editorial included the controversial modernist ‘ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Rāziq, and several of its contributors were leading Egyptian liberals, including Salāma Mūsā. Mūsā openly proclaimed his ‘disbelief’ in the East and ‘faith’ in the West. His ‘anti-Easternism’ caused controversy and he was criticised for his assertions that Egypt was historically part of the Western rather than the Eastern world and that even the ethnographic and linguistic roots of Egypt were closer to the peoples of Europe as opposed to those of Asia.233

Riḍā immediately attacked the association for its drift towards ‘spreading atheist culture’ by publishing the views of such liberals in its magazine.234 He was disappointed that the association, which had earlier gained his support, had now given an opportunity to Mūsā as ‘propagator of unbelief and impudence’ and an ‘enemy of religions in general and Islam in particular, of morality and spiritual values, and of any Eastern nationalist, ethnical or linguistic bond.’235 Riḍā was concerned at Mūsā’s demands for a ‘westernised’ Egyptian society, and the excessive praise in his writings of the British as an attempt to convince his readers of the necessity of ‘assimilating Muslims into the English nation.’236 For him, the westernisation of Muslims would only be achieved at the expense of Islamic traditions and values. The present Christianity and its doctrine of the Trinity, for Riḍā, were far removed from the authentic message of Jesus, which was only to be found in the Gospel of John: ‘Now this is eternal life: that they may...’

234 Ibid., p. 660. Riḍā’s major opponent in the League was ‘ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Rāziq, the author of the well-known book al-ʾIslām wā ʿUṣūl al-Ḥukm, who was also appointed as the editor of the magazine. The tension between al-Manār and the League’s magazine escalated, and both sides exchanged insults. Amin al-Ḥusaynī, the mufti of Jerusalem, had to interfere to reconcile between both sides. See, al-Manār, vol. 29/10 (Shawwāl 1347/April 1929), p. 788-791
236 Ibid., p. 623; Mūsā described the English as ‘the greatest nation on earth,’ their government is the most advanced, England surpasses all other countries, the English are unsurpassed in quality of character. See Egger, op. cit., pp. 126-127.
know You, the Only True God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent’ (3:17).

In the 1930s Riḍā became involved in public discussions about Egypt’s religious and national identity. A well attended debate over the issue of whether Egypt’s culture was ‘Pharaonic’ or ‘Arab’ was held at the Faculty of Law of the Egyptian University in December 1930. In this debate Riḍā claimed the massive and decisive Arab and Islamic character of Egypt, while his counterpart the Egyptian lawyer, Muhammad Luṭfī Jumʿah, defended the uniqueness of Egyptian culture.237 Mūsā advocated the Pharaonic identity of Egypt as well, which he considered as superior to the Arab-Islamic heritage both by virtue of its more ancient age and its remarkable achievements.238 In his debates on the ‘Arabness’ of the Egyptian culture, Riḍā frequently ridiculed Mūsā for his backing of the concept of Pharaonism. What irritated Riḍā was Mūsā’s giving precedence to the ancient Egyptian culture above the Sharīʿa besides what he understood as ‘insults’ and ‘offences’ against anyone who would advocate Islam and its establishments in Egypt. He was very saddened by Mūsā’s depiction of Shakīb Arslān as ‘villain’ (waqṭd). Riḍā also felt very offended and tried to prove his Egyptian nationality, when Mūsā personally debunked him as a non-Egyptian, who had no right to interfere in such Egyptian affairs. Mūsā now reminded his readers of Riḍā’s part in the ‘Abduḥ-Anṭūn debate by pointing out that al-Manār had assassinated al-Jāmiʿa. By this the Egyptian youth had thus lost one of the significant intellectual sources in the country. In his words, Mūsā commented: ‘we [Egyptians] should understand our duty […] the Egyptian press should remain an Egyptian craft, not only with its Egyptian public readers, but also with its craftsmen and editors, who must also remain Egyptian.’239

Riḍā related Mūsā’s views on Islam to his ‘ignorance’ and ‘animosity.’ An example was his critique of the inequality between men and women in the inheritance law. Riḍā believed that the reason behind Mūsā’s criticism was his ambition to replace Eastern identity with Western models of life and style of dress. Again Riḍā was disappointed that the mouthpiece of the Oriental League had given Mūsā the chance

238 Egger, op. cit., pp. 136-139.
to spread his ideas. Unlikely, the famous Egyptian feminist Hūdā Shaʿrāwī (1879-1947), according to Riḍā, had once rejected a request put forward to her and her feminist society by Mūsā in which he appealed to the Egyptian government for the equality of inheritance law. She rejected his request because she was convinced that any plan to reform the social standards of women should emanate from Islamic Law itself.\textsuperscript{240}

Riḍā took up the issue of women’s inheritance law once again in a lecture which he delivered at the Egyptian University.\textsuperscript{241} He attacked Mūsā again, suggesting that the overriding reason for his hatred against the Arabs was that they had conquered his land and had changed it into a Muslim state. He added that he would probably have preferred that Egypt should have remained a part of the Christian Roman Empire despite their persecution of his Coptic people for many years. Looking at Mūsā’s own writings, we find that although he gave priority to the Pharaonic culture, he did not deny the social impact of Arabs and Islam on the Egyptians. He believed that the Arab conquest of Egypt had brought a new era of civilisation, and that Islam had unfettered its people from sectarian disputes and the Roman political and economical exploitation.\textsuperscript{242}

In addition to his propagation of atheism, Riḍā continued, Mūsā in his animosity spared no effort to drive Muslims away from their religion. Some Muslim ‘atheists’ rallied behind him under the slogan of tajdid (renewal). Riḍā referred to one of the lectures delivered by Mūsā in 1928 to the members of the Association of Christian Young Men (A.C.Y.M.). In this he held that the status of women in Islam was inferior, especially in its stipulation of inheritance. Riḍā maintained that Mūsā was the first writer to raise these allegations. The Egyptian Constitutionalist Māhṭūd ‘Azmī and the Coptic-Catholic Faraj Mīḥāʾil delivered a similar lecture on the same subject. The three of them, Riḍā believed, brought forward the issue of women’s inheritance not because they were concerned with removing inequality

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{240} Al-Manār, vol. 29/8, p. 624.
\item \textsuperscript{241} Al-Manār, vol. 30/9 (Dhū al-Qi’da 1348/April 1930), pp. 690-709.
\item \textsuperscript{242} See, for instance, Ghālī Shukrī, Salāma Mūsā wa Azmat al-Dāmīr al-ʿArabī, Beirut, 4th edition, 1983, p. 137. Mūsā admitted the tolerance of Islam given to other religious groups, and attributed the negative behaviour to some Muslim rulers, id., p. 219.
\end{itemize}
between men and women, but by raising such discussions they aimed at causing the umma to disintegrate.243

2.3. Conclusion

In order to evaluate Riḍā’s attitudes towards the Arab Christians of his age, we have analysed various cases. Syrian Christian émigrés in Egypt, who had lively relations with him, were mostly drawn to the world of journalism and political activism. We have observed how complex his approaches were towards them as secularists: sometimes they were on friendly terms, but he sometimes tended to have religious and intellectual controversies and heated polemics with some others as well. His positive or negative postures were mostly determined by his counterpart’s stances towards the concepts which he adamantly espoused in his writings, especially those related to Islamism or Arabism. He was therefore pragmatic in his political co-operation with them, and ready to co-operate with many of them as long as they accepted the Islamic character of society. Riḍā’s critique was coupled with an assault on those whom he called ‘geographic Muslims,’ who were also trying to weed out Islamic elements from society. I would venture to say that the rejection by Arab Christians of many Christian fundamentals and their sharp criticism of Christian clergymen were likely to be among the prime motives behind his willingness to cooperate with them. He, on the other hand, was not willing to tolerate the Jesuit attack on Islam and Mūsā’s critique of Islam.

Riḍā’s stance towards the Coptic community was more sensitive. Some Copts considered him a non-Egyptian ‘intruder,’ who had no right to interfere in Egyptian affairs. In its response to the Coptic Congress, al-Manār did not attempt to analyse in depth the drastic impact of al-Wardānī’s assassination of Buṭrus Ghālī on the long-standing and sensitive relation between Muslims and Copts. Riḍā’s position was more apologetic towards their demands. He did not take the issue further than discussing the status of non-Muslim minorities under Islamic rule, and accusing some Coptic groups of inflaming the religious strife among different communities. His tone was sometimes cynical. This was clearly shown when he cautioned the

Copts to be ‘satisfied’ with the rule of the Khedive ‘Ḥājj Abbās.’ Throughout his articles, Riḍā neither severely condemned Wardānī’s crime, nor extolled his act. He was also silent on the religious discourse prevalent among Muslim scholars (who did not condemn his act) and some other nationalist groups (who hailed al-Wardānī as a national hero).\footnote{The then mufti of Egypt, for example, did not support the verdict of the Egyptian court by considering imposing the death penalty on al-Wardānī as unjustified from his own religious point of view. See, Badrawi, op. cit., p. 41.}