PART ONE

THE LEGEND OF SERGIUS BAHĪRĀ IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIAN APoloGETICS VIS-À-VIS ISLAM
CHAPTER ONE

MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN CONFRONTATION
AND COUNTERHISTORY

As for negation, it is not proof; just as assent is not proof, any more than our faith in our Prophet is a proof against others, or their unbelief a proof against us. Proof is something transmitted in such a way that falsity is impossible.

Al-Jaḥiẓ, Ḥujaj al-nubuwwa

In the Qur’an God declares ‘what We have revealed to you from the Book is the truth, confirming what was before it’. Muhammad is represented in the Qur’an as following in the footsteps of the earlier prophets, with whose message his own agrees. The ancient prophets themselves had already promised to God that they would give faith and support to a prophet who was to come in the future and who would confirm their message. But, as is well-known, the Qur’an passes several unambiguous and acrimonious judgments on the communities to whom these earlier prophets were sent. The fact that the message of the earlier prophets has been altered or forgotten by the peoples to whom they were sent is one of the principal reasons for Muhammad’s own mission. In the case of Christians, their belief in the Trinity and the Incarnation comes under direct attack. The rejection of these doctrines is voiced in clear terms. God is not ‘a third of three’ and ‘He begets not nor is He begotten’. None of these doctrines were ever propagated by Christ himself, according to the Qur’an.

Behind this directly confrontational aspect of the Qur’an lies a much more hidden and subtle kind of polemic vis-à-vis non-Muslim communities. Its aim was to explain how it was that Muhammad could

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2 Q 35:31, cf. Q 2:14, Q 2:41, Q 2:91, Q 97, Q 3:3, Q 4:47, Q 6:92, Q 5:46–48, Q 10:94
3 Q 3:81
4 Q 5:73, Q 112:3