

## QS 12 Q 9:29 – 32

9.29 Fight those who do not believe in God or the Last Day, who do not hold illicit what God and His Messenger hold illicit, and who do not follow the religion of truth from among those given the Book, until they offer up the tribute, by hand, in humble mien.

9.30 The Jews say Ezra is the son of God while the Christians say Christ is the son of God. This is what they say, from their very mouths, thereby agreeing with the speech of the unbelievers who came before. May God strike them down! How they pervert the truth!

9.31 They have taken their rabbis and monks as lords instead of God – as also the Christ son of Mary. They were commanded to worship but one God – there is no God but He, glory to Him, far above their polytheism!

9.32 They seek to quench the light of God with their mouths, but God insists on blazoning forth His light, even if the unbelievers find it abhorrent.

9.29 Combattez ceux qui ne croient ni en Allah ni au Jour dernier, qui n'interdisent pas ce qu'Allah et Son messenger ont interdit et qui ne professent pas la religion de la vérité, parmi ceux qui ont reçu le Livre, jusqu'à ce qu'ils versent la capitation par leurs propres mains, après s'être humiliés.

9.30 Les Juifs disent: «Uzayr est fils d'Allah» et les Chrétiens disent: «Le Christ est fils d'Allah». Telle est leur parole provenant de leurs bouches. Ils imitent le dire des mécréants avant eux. Qu'Allah les anéantisse! Comment s'écarterent-ils (de la vérité)?

9.31 Ils ont pris leurs rabbins et leurs moines, ainsi que le Christ fils de Marie, comme Seigneurs en dehors d'Allah, alors qu'on ne leur a commandé que d'adorer un Dieu unique. Pas de divinité à part Lui! Gloire à Lui! Il est au-dessus de ce qu'ils [Lui] associent.

9.32 Ils veulent éteindre avec leurs bouches la lumière d'Allah, alors qu'Allah ne veut que parachever Sa lumière, quelque répulsion qu'en aient les mécréants.

### سورة التوبة

قَاتِلُوا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا بِالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَا يُحَرِّمُونَ مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَلَا يَدِينُونَ دِينَ الْحَقِّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَتَّى يُعْطُوا الْجِزْيَةَ عَنْ يَدٍ وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ (29) وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ عُزَيْرٌ ابْنُ اللَّهِ وَقَالَتِ النَّصَارَى الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ قَوْلُهُمْ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ يُضَاهَوْنَ قَوْلَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ قَاتِلْهُمْ اللَّهُ أَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ (30) اتَّخَذُوا أَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهْبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ سُبْحَانَهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ (31) يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَيَأْبَى اللَّهُ إِلَّا أَنْ يُتِمَّ نُورَهُ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ (32)

### Azaiez

Cette séquence polémique est remarquable par la présence de deux « contre-discours » dans un même verset (v. 30). J'entends par cette expression les discours rapportés tenus par des adversaires réels ou fictifs dans le cadre de la polémique coranique (Azaiez: 2012). Dans le cas présent, il s'agit des deux énoncés suivants : *'Uzayrun ibnu Allāhi / al-masīhu ibnu Allāhi*. Ces deux contre-discours appartiennent à l'une des trois catégories des contre-discours coraniques : les contre-discours dits passés, présents et futurs. La somme de ces trois formes rassemble 588 versets soit environ 10% du corpus coranique total. Les contre-discours passés se définissent comme la mise en scène de paroles d'adversaires qui s'opposent à des personnages bibliques (Moïse, Abraham, Noé, Jésus...) ou péninsulaires (*Hūd, Šu'ayb...*) incarnés par les prophètes arabes. Il peut s'agir d'individus (par exemple Pharaon), de

groupes humains (les peuples réfractaires) ou d'un être surnaturel (*Iblīs*). Quant aux contre-discours présents, ils constituent l'ensemble des énoncés qui se laisse entrevoir comme contemporain à la prédication supposée du Coran. Il regroupe les discours des détracteurs, suppose-t-on, de Muḥammad. Enfin, les contre-discours futurs concerne l'ensemble des propos tenus par les damnés qui déniaient la croyance et qui sont promis aux affres de l'enfer. Dans cette perspective, les deux énoncés du v. 30 se définissent donc comme deux contre-discours présents (ou contre-discours rapportés directs présents). Selon notre nomenclature, ils constituent le 80<sup>ème</sup> contre-discours du groupe des contre-discours présents qui en compte 270 dans le Coran (cf. Azaiez 2012).

### Dye

Passage obscur, qui a visiblement subi plusieurs remaniements.

V. 29 : l'expression '*an yadin* a fait couler beaucoup d'encre. Rubin (2006) examine son usage dans la poésie des VII<sup>e</sup>-IX<sup>e</sup> siècles. Trois sens se dégagent : *generously*, *voluntarily*, *submissively*. Ce dernier sens conviendrait dans le Coran, mais Kropp a raison de rappeler le caractère tardif ou douteux des vers supposés justifier cette signification. L'idée selon laquelle la seconde moitié du v. 29 (à partir de *min alladīna*) serait une interpolation est plausible.

Sur *ḡizya* : comparer moyen-perse *gazîdag/gazîtag*, qui est très exactement le nom de la *poll-tax* dont s'inspire la *ḡizya*. Il semble que le mot et l'institution aient été empruntés (Gignoux 2012: 484) : sous les Sassanides, les hommes entre vingt et cinquante ans devaient payer la *gazîdag*, une taxe de 4, 6, 8 ou 12 drachmes (montant calculé selon leur moyens – '*an yadin* !), à l'époque de Khusrô I (531–579). Au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle, cette taxe s'applique à tous les non-zoroastriens en échange de la liberté religieuse. Le principe de la *ḡizya* n'a guère de sens dans l'Arabie de l'époque du Prophète ; il est en revanche naturel après les conquêtes, lorsqu'il s'agit d'administrer un empire.

V. 30 : il n'y a aucune commune mesure entre le statut de 'Uzayr dans le judaïsme et celui du Christ dans le christianisme. La mise en parallèle paraît forcée. Sur l'identité de 'Uzayr (seule occurrence de ce nom dans le Coran), état de la question chez Comerro (2005). Je doute que la figure visée soit Esdras. Comerro suggère une hypothèse intéressante : 'Azarya, l'un des compagnons de captivité de Daniel (Dan 1:6 et Dan 3:25, où on peut facilement croire que « l'ange du Seigneur qui a l'aspect d'un fils de Dieu » est justement 'Azarya). Une certaine mauvaise foi polémique de la part de l'auteur du texte n'est pas exclue...

V. 31 : D'un strict point de vue grammatical (*a fortiori* si l'arabe du Coran est à l'origine sans *i'rāb*), il faudrait lire *wa-l-masīhi* – ce qui change radicalement le sens du propos. On peut donc se demander si *wa-l-masīḥa* ne serait pas une interpolation.

### Grodzki

A quite unambiguous tone of the passage in Ṭawba with a distinctly militant background in the beginning against polytheists or associators. Being placed within this context, can expressions such as *qātilū*, *qātalāhum Allāh* (often understood in the meaning of “fight” or “assail”) be conceived in a more metaphoric sense?

### Hilali

In the lower text of the manuscript 27.1 DAM, Yemen (the so called Ṣan‘ā’ palimpsest), the chapter *al-Tawba* (Repentance) contains the most important amount of textual issues in comparison with the Cairo edition of Qur’ān edited in the twenties and often considered in Qur’ānic Studies scholarship as the Standard Qur’ān. This passage is missing in the manuscript but the expression *bi-afwāhihim* (with their mouths) occurs in another passage (v. 8) and contains a difference with the Cairo edition (that I avoid in this context to call *qirā’a*, pl. *qirā’āt* (variant) since the manuscript is historically anterior to the very concept of Qur’ānic variant and reading.) In this passage, instead of *bi-afwāhihim* (with their mouths) we read *bi-alsinatihim* (with their tongues/with their languages). The verse underlines the opposition between the discourse of the pagans who tend to please the believers with their words (mouths/tongues/languages) and hide in the same time their rejection and keep it in their “hearts” (*qulūbihim*). The word *alsinathim* (tongues/languages) displaces the description of the pagans by adding one important descriptive element: the pagans speak a different language (*lisān*, pl. *alsina*).

### Kropp

There are other verses opening with *qātilū* “fight!” V. 29 is different and does not fit into the series; especially strange is the mention of taxes and the “People of the Book” in this context. I propose to see an addition. It fits into the political and social situation of the late 7th century when Muslim administration was developed. This verse can be seen as legitimising the actual tax system towards non-Muslims. As there was no *naṣṣ* for it in the Qur’ān one was fabricated out of existing elements combined to juridical terminology. ‘*An yadin*’ probably was the Arabic rendering of an earlier Sasanian principle that taxes should be paid according to means of the tributaries, as the word *ḡizya* itself is best explained as a Persian loan-word.

Rubin’s analysis (2006) of ‘*an yadin*’, according to tax treaties and to Arabic poetry, gives the relevant material, but comes to another conclusion (“generously, submissively”). But the two examples of pre-Islamic poetry he adduces are of uncertain authenticity. All others are later and under influence of the Qur’ānic text. In conclusion he cites a passage which gives all the history of the text in a nutshell.

By way of conclusion, a look at what Ibn al-Qayyim al-Ġawziyya (d. 751/1350) has to say on the matter might be useful:

'*An yadīn* describes a state (*ḥāl*), i.e., they must give the *ḡizya* while they are humiliated and oppressed (*aḍillā' maqḥūran*). This is the correct (*al-ṣaḥiḥ*) interpretation of the verse. Some said that the meaning is "from hand to hand, in cash, not on credit." Others said: "From his hand unto the hand of the receiver, not sending it nor delegating its payment." Others said: "It means due to a benefaction on your part unto them by agreeing to receive payment from them." But the accurate opinion is the first one, and the people are agreed on it. The most far-fetched opinion that misses God's intention is that of those who say that the meaning is: "Out of their ability to pay it, which is why [the *ḡizya*] is not collected from those who can't afford it." This rule is correct, but its application to the verse is wrong. No one of the Companions of the Prophet and of the Successors interpreted it in this manner nor anyone of the old masters of the *umma*. It is only the witty inference of some later scholars."

One cannot better describe how this verse was created and what happened to it, just by reversing the last statement into its contrary. A fine example of ideological exegesis and history writing.

### Pregill

V. 29: Those to be fought are defined by their deficient belief and practice, but not (at least at this juncture) by their nominal communal affiliation. Much ink has been spilled regarding the *ḡizya* verse; the interpretations of Bravmann (1963) and Kister (1964) are mostly acceptable, though it is probably a mistake to read this as already implying establishment of something like *ḍimmī* status for those defeated in battle and subordinated to the community (note also Rubin 2006, who updates the older treatments on the basis of new philological data culled from previously neglected samples of Arabic poetry). By identifying this *sūra* as revealed almost at the very end of Muḥammad's career, the tradition conveniently establishes a foundation for presenting what became the classical doctrine of jihad (fight polytheists until they convert, monotheists until they submit and pay the *ḡizya*) as the culmination of the Qur'ān's supposed progression from tolerance to truculence. That is, the less strident passages are assumed to have originated in the Meccan period and are thus presumably abrogated in favor of the more militant approach of the Medinan period that carried the community into the *ridḍa* wars and the campaigns of conquest.

V. 30: Probably too much effort has been expended in the attempt to identify the specific sects of Jews and Christians intended here. I am sympathetic to the hypothesis (most recently advanced by de Blois) that *naṣārā* are specifically "Jewish Christians," "Nazoreans," as this correlates well both with the Christological conceptions attributed to these people by the Qur'ān and with what we know about the varieties of heterodox Judaism, Christianity, and "Jewish Christianity" that populated the literal and figurative margins of the Roman and Persian dominions in Late Antiquity. On the other hand, *nāṣrāyā* is the standard term that was supposedly applied to *all* Christians by non-Christian Persians, at least according to the testimony of Sasanian-era Syriac texts; the possible derogatory connotation in that context is interesting when we consider the term's largely polemical use in Qur'ānic discourse.

Assuming it is not mere rhetoric, the complaint about what the Jews say about ‘Uzayr, paralleling what the Christians say about the Messiah, most likely points to some conception of an angelic being as an intermediary figure, an idea that is now generally recognized as a common feature of various forms of late antique Judaism, especially those found in the imperial interstices of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Arabia. I find the suggestion that ‘Uzayr may be linked to ‘Azazel, and thus to Metatron, to be provocative but difficult to substantiate (cf. Crone 2013; Crone QS 32); another possibility, probably requiring a less tortured manipulation of the evidence, is that this claim about ‘Uzayr reflects ascent traditions associated with Ezra/Esdras.

That the problematic statements of the Jews and Christians are like the ones of disbelievers of old (*kafarū min qablī*) is an important indication that *kufr* is an error associated with monotheists in the Qur’ān, and not (or not necessarily) “pagans.” Cf. also the next verse: “He is exalted above what they associate with Him” (*‘ammā yuṣṣrikūna*) – that is, beyond the *ṣirk* of their flawed worship, which cannot truly be called monotheism. As Hawting and others have argued, there is strong internal evidence that *kuffār* and *muṣṣrikūn* are Jews and Christians (or “Jewish Christians” and the like).

V. 31: Condemnation of sanctified religious personnel as tantamount to deification of prophets or angels. This is wholly compatible with the ideal hierarchy presented in the Qur’ān: one God, without any rivals or intermediaries, and one prophet-lawgiver, also without rivals or intermediaries.

### Rippin

It would be valuable to compile a list of ways in which the statement “Ezra is the son of God” has been “explained” – from “deviant Jewish group” to “Uzayr is not Ezra.” The explanation that involves the association of Ezra with “taken their rabbis ... as lords apart from God” still makes sense to me but it does seem to gloss over a good deal of historical difficulties. Is there a way to solve this that does not involve a “misunderstanding” on the part of the author when speaking to the presumed audience or inventing a historical context for which there is no evidence?

### Sirry

One of the exegetical problems facing Muslim Qur’ān exegetes, classical and modern, is why the Qur’ān (v. 29) refers to the People of the Book as not believing in God and the Day of Judgment. In fact, this passage describes the People of the Book with three negative attributes: [1] they do not believe in God and the Last Day, [2] they do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, and [3] they do not follow the religion of truth. Are the three negative attributes sufficient causes for fighting against the People of the Book? One may argue, as Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) does, that the passage indeed restricts the general applicability of the doctrine of war against the People of the Book. Rāzī has his imaginary inter-

locutor posed the following question: What is your opinion about the fate of Jews who believe in the unity of God? He responds to this question in this way: “We say that those Jews are not included within the scope of this verse” (1980: vol. 16, 28). The problem is that the three negative attributes can be interpreted differently.

Richard Bell contends that the phrase *min alladīna ūtū l-kitāb*, which is usually rendered as “the People of the Book,” might have been a later insertion. In the footnote of his translation of the verse Bell asserts “The position of this phrase [*alladīna ūtū al-kitāb*] suggests that it may have been interpolated, or that the verse, originally earlier, has been added to at the end” (1937: vol. 1, 177). Commenting on this suggestion, Jørgen Bæk Simonsen notes: “Bell’s view is supported by the fact that it was not until later that the main opponents of the Islamic State were Christians. Apart from a few scattered Jewish settlements and the Christians in Najrān, the main enemy of Arabia had surrendered to Medina at the time of the revelation of Q 9, but there were still some tribes that had not entered Pax Islamica. These were the ones meant by this verse” (1988: 87).

Other key terms in the passage that have been much discussed are *ġizya*, ‘*an yadin* and *ṣāġirūn*. Modern Muslim scholars, such as the Indian Shibli Nu‘mani and the Egyptian Rashid Rida, tend to downplay the importance of the concept of *ġizya*, claiming that *ġizya* was not an Islamic invention but one that had existed before Islam. In his widely read monograph, *Muwāṭinūn lā dīmmiyyūn*, Fahmi Huwaydi contends that *ġizya* should be discarded altogether, arguing that *ġizya* was a political institution, rather than religious one, and with the emergence of nation states it has been overtaken by the modern concept of citizenship. What concerns Huwaydi and other progressive Muslims is the depiction of Islam as discriminately restricting the political rights of non-Muslims living in Islamic lands as “second class citizens.”

### Stefanidis

This passage seems to construct Jews and Christians as *de facto* (but not *de jure*) *mušrikūn*. Not only do Jews and Christians refuse to obey God and his messenger but they also ascribe partners unto him: first by affirming that God has a son, then by worshipping their religious dignitaries (v. 31). The insistence that Jews and Christians have practices that can reasonably be understood, from a Qur’ānic perspective, as *širk* could indicate that fighting those “to whom the book was given” (v. 29) was not a straightforward affair but required a redefinition of their status.

It is, however, particularly noteworthy that the polemical representation of Jews and Christians as “associators” is performed without *explicitly* calling them *mušrikūn*. *Subḥānahu ‘ammā yušrikūna* (v.31) is, to my knowledge, the only instance where the root Š-R-K is used in relation to Jews and Christians. By contrast, the Qur’ān uses the root K-F-R a number of times to refer to members of these communities (Q 2:105; 5:17, 59:2, 11; 98:1, 6). While it has recently been suggested that the term *mušrikūn* is better understood as a derogatory address to Jewish and Christian groups rather than to actual polytheists (Hawting 1999; Crone 2010), this passage underlines

the extent to which these distinctive audiences are consistently differentiated in Qur'ānic discourse.

### Stewart

*Qātalahumu llāh* is a curse – literally “may God fight them” – and one of the most common in the Qur'ān. Curses most often occur in the perfect form, understood with an optative sense, and in a number of passages, the translators get them wrong because they render them as ordinary verbs in the past tense. Other curse forms include noun phrases such as *waylun li-* etc. In this case, one suspects that the functional equivalent would be a notch down from the literal meaning, just as a curse like *lā abālaka* “may you not have a father” might be understood as “you sly dog!” Ibn Haḡar states that it is used to urge one to do something—perhaps “get a move on, lazybones!” In this case, perhaps “God confound them!” would be the correct level of invective, for the Jews and the Christians are making heretical statements. But why is this particular curse used here? One might argue that it is referring back to the imperative *qātilū* two verses earlier. I would argue, however, that it is used primarily because of the forms of the verb *qāla* that occur earlier in the same verse: ***wa-qālat*** *il-yahūdu ‘Uzayru bnu llāhi* ***wa-qālat*** *in-naṣārā al-masīḡu bnullāh dhālika* ***qawluhum*** *bi-afwāhihim yuḡāhi’ūna* ***qawla*** *lladhīna kafarū min qablu* ***qātalahumu*** *llāhu annā yu’fakūn* in v. 30 refers back to *qātilū* in v. 29 a cognate curse in effect. Four forms derived from the verb appear in quick succession in the same verse, and this is a case of a cognate curse. The cognate paronomasia is not complete because the root consonants of *qāla* are Q-W-L and those of *qātalahum* are Q-T-L, but they are quite close, and the -T- actually occurs twice in the forms *qālat* and *qālat*. It is worth noting the occurrence of *qablu*, also with *q* and *l*, just before the curse. I have discussed cognate curses, including several in the Qur'ān and classical Arabic literature, in Stewart (1997) and Stewart (forthcoming).

*Ittaḡadhū aḡbārahum wa-ruhbānahum arbāban min dūni llāh ...* This verse is also cited in Islamic contexts to argue against assigning excessive authority to claimants to religious authority. For example, the Fatimid jurist al-Qāḡi al-Nu‘mān uses it against Sunnis who uphold the religious authority of the jurists, as opposed to the Imams, claiming that the Sunnis are treating them as the Jews and Christians have treated rabbis and priests. He cites *ḡadīṡ* reports to show that the Jews and Christians did not actually worship rabbis and priests, but they accepted their rulings on legal issues without any evidence, and acquiescing to their declarations regarding forbidden and permitted things was tantamount to worshipping them.

### Toorawa

Both *‘Uzayr* (“Ezra”) and *yuḡāhi’ūna* (“mouthing, mimicking”) in v. 30 are hapaxes. If one of my broad claims about the presence of hapaxes is correct—namely, that they are often deployed to underscore wonder/awe/surprise (Toorawa 2011a: 243)—then



the presence of *yuḏāhi'ūna* is apposite, perhaps even expected, given the presence of the first and the tenor of the claim. Like *rikzā* (“murmur”) in Q 19:98, which I see no reason to emend, *yuḏāhi'ūna*—which I also see no reason to emend—is about speech. Indeed, there appears to be a link in the Qur’ān generally between speech on the one hand, and asserting that God cannot have offspring on the other (see Toorawa 2011b: 61–62).

Regarding the unusual use of *wa-l-masiha* (accusative), which is the dominant reading, versus *wa-l-masīhi* (genitive), I do not know the reason of course, but I can observe that the use of *masīh* (“Messiah”) rather than the uninflected ‘*Isā* (“Jesus”) may be relevant (especially as ‘*Uzayr* is named...).

### Winitzer

The complexities in a clear-cut identification of the character behind the “Ezra” character mentioned in this passage are clearly presented by fellow commentaries in these pages. To the materials cited I only add the observation that in normative Judaism Ezra was already the bearer of considerable prestige – second, indeed, to Moses himself (*b. Sanh.* 21b), as the conduit of the Torah to Israel. It is from this fountainhead that the Esdras tradition springs, and thus while it makes sense to include all of the latter in considerations of the background of this character’s mention in v. 30, one should not forget the origin of this tradition. As in the case of Enoch, the Biblical picture of Ezra is eclipsed in Late Antiquity by a rich literature that refashions the character practically beyond recognition, providing for him new meanings and relevance. But still it seems rash to disconnect entirely the ‘*Uzayr* tradition from the Biblical Ezra, even if the connection is faint at best.

### Zellentin

The Qur’ān here uses an insider’s term to designate Jewish dignitaries, *aḥbār* (often translated as “scribes”): rabbinic literature often uses the cognate Aramaic *ḥbry* to designate members of the rabbinic movement. Moreover, while “rabbis” are not named explicitly in the passage at hand, the Qur’ān elsewhere associates the *aḥbār* with the *rabbāniyyūna*, a morphological cognate of Aramaic *rabbanan*, “the rabbis” (see Q 5:44 and 64), indicating that the audience should consider both titles here as well. And indeed, just as the Qur’ān, with polemical hyperbole, here charges that the Jews have taken their scribes as *arbāban min dūni llāhi*, as “lords besides God” (v. 31, note the wordplay on “*rb*”!), the Rabbis have indeed long expressed human authority in terms of the divine, for example when instructing its audience to let “the honour of your *ḥbr* be as the fear of your *rb*, and the fear of your *rb* as the fear of Heaven (*Mishna Avot* 4.12, see also e.g. *Mekhilta Amaleq* 1, *Yerushalmi Nedarim* 29.1 (41b, 36); “Heaven” designates God in rabbinic parlance).

In parallel, the Qur’ān accuses the *Naṣārā* of bestowing divine honors on *ruhbānahum*, “their fearing ones,” by making them, as well as Jesus, lords, ‘*arbāb* (note



the playful homophony of *rhb* and *rb*). The title *rb*’, “lord” for Jesus is indeed attested in Syriac, e.g., in the *Didascalia* (see XIX, Vööbus 1979:190). In my view, the deictic field of the Qur’ānic term *ruhbān*, often understood narrowly as “monks,” must surely been broadened in light of the prominent ideology built on the central notion of the “fear” of God in Syriac literature (Becker 2009), to include other kinds of Christian leaders either awesome themselves or in perpetual state of the fear of God, such as ascetics, holy men, and especially clerics, or more precisely, bishops (see also Q 57:27). My arguments for doing so, spelled out in Zellentin (2016), are threefold.

First, the Qur’ān correctly identifies the rabbinic dignitaries. In parallel, it associates two dignitaries among the *naṣārā*, namely the “*qissīsīn and ruhbān*” (Q 5:82). The former term designates the elders, *qšyš’* in Syriac, and I have argued that the latter term designates the head of the elders, or bishop, for it makes as little sense to name the elders without their head (on the bishop as the head of the elders see DA XII, Vööbus 1979 143.23–5).

Second, the charge of elevating the bishops highly (as is also the case with rabbis), reflects late antique practice since the first century. Especially, consider the following passage from the *Didascalia*, ripe with designations in conflict with the Qur’ān’s own theology: “The bishop is ... your chief (*ryshkwn*) and your leader and he is a mighty king (*wmlk’*) to you. He guides in the place of the Almighty (*’hyd kl*). But let him be honoured by you as God, because the bishop sits for you in the place of the Almighty God” (IX, Vööbus 1979:103). Again, the Qur’ān seeks to lead Christian tradition ad absurdum by pointing to the consequences of such high regard for religious leaders: it may end in taking humans for God.

Thirdly, the charge of “wrongfully eating up the people’s wealth” in the sequel (v. 34) places the dignitaries in question in a position of financial responsibility. This is well attested for rabbinic and episcopal recipients of the tithe, along with warnings against the misappropriation of these funds, equally expressed as “swallowing” in the *Didascalia* (VIII, Vööbus 1979:94.13–24). The Qur’ān’s polemic seems to incorporate an established Jewish and Christian discourse and to turn it against its authors.