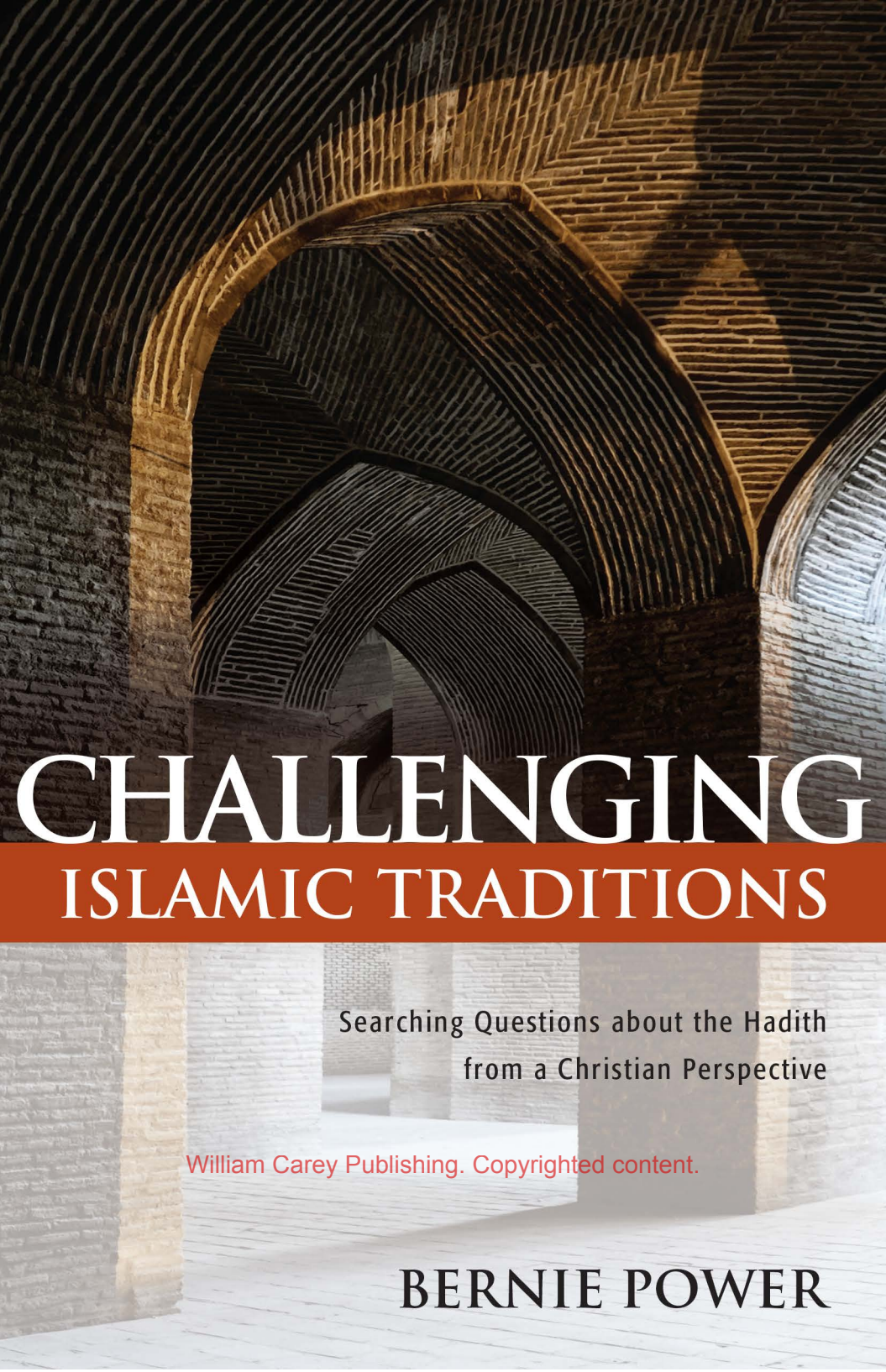


CHALLENGING ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

Searching Questions about the Hadith from a Christian Perspective

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BERNIE POWER

Challenging Islamic Traditions: Searching Questions about the Hadith from a Christian Perspective
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Published by William Carey Library
1605 E. Elizabeth St.
Pasadena, CA 91104 | www.missionbooks.org

Melissa Hicks, editor
Cheryl Warner, copyeditor
Alyssa E. Force, graphic design
Jeremy Lind, indexer

William Carey Library is a ministry of
Frontier Ventures
www.frontierventures.org

Printed in the United States of America
20 19 18 17 16 5 4 3 2 1 BP

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Power, Bernie.
Challenging Islamic traditions : searching questions about the Hadith from a Christian perspective / Dr. Bernie Power.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-87808-489-0 -- ISBN 0-87808-489-4 1. Hadith. 2. Christianity and other religions--Islam. 3. Islam--Relations--Christianity. I. Title.
BP135.P69 2015
297.1'2516--dc23

2015022505

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1

THE CHALLENGES OF IDENTIFYING THE HADITH

1. COMPARING TEXTS

This book begins with a comparison between the Islamic Hadith and the Bible, taken from a Christian perspective. Working with the texts of another religious tradition needs to be carried out perceptively. Any religious tradition will internally present a range of beliefs. These could be displayed on a continuum (see Illustration 1),[1] from agreement, i.e., concepts that the tradition strongly asserts or affirms, to disagreement, i.e., concepts that it negates or refutes.[2] In the middle of the continuum will be aspects on which the religion's teaching is uncertain or undefined.

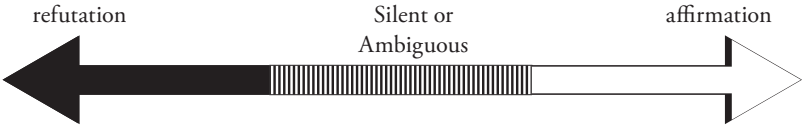


ILLUSTRATION 1: Affirmation/Refutation Continuum

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An example may illustrate this. Muslims clearly assert that "there is only one God" (Q.112:1). They would oppose the statement that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (c.f. Q.9:30). Muslims, however, disagree among themselves about the meaning of the term "seeking His face" as applied to Allah (Q.18:28). Their theologians have come up with a wide variety of interpretations of this phrase. The Qur'an itself admits that some of its verses are "not entirely clear" (Q.3:7, Hilali and Khan translation).[3] Even for Muslims, it is not always easy to identify what they all hold in common.

But when another religion or spiritual tradition is brought in, the picture becomes even more complicated. No two religious traditions are identical: when their teachings are overlaid on each other, patterns emerge and possible responses become evident. (See Illustration 2.)

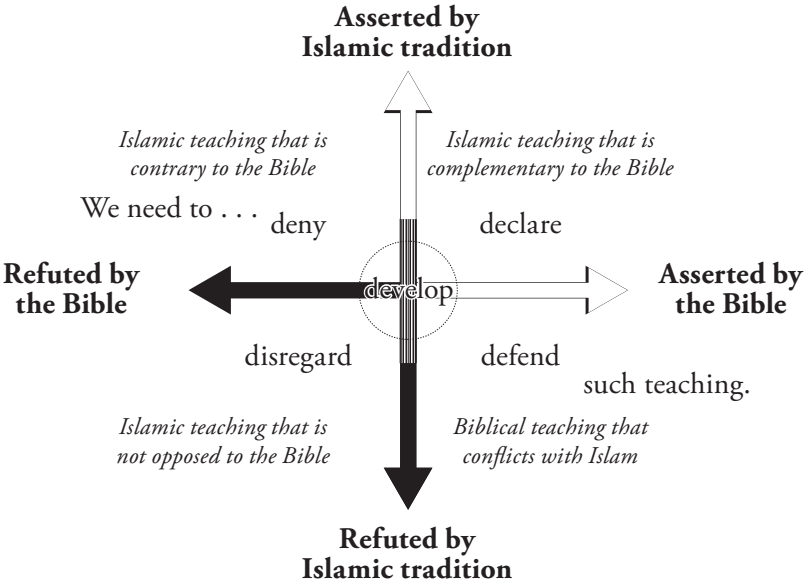


ILLUSTRATION 2: Responses to Affirmation/Negation

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If an Islamic Hadith is *complementary*, that is, it agrees with the revelation found in Christian Scripture, there should be no difficulty in a Christian affirming or publicly declaring such information.[4] Some of the material in the Hadith will be *contradictory*. It will refute biblical teaching. Christians are called to "contend for the faith"[5] and deny such teaching. Some will be *conflicting*, i.e., it will disallow what Scripture affirms. This calls for a defensive apologetic.[6] Paul states that "we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God."[7]

Material which is *contrary* to or not dealt with by both traditions can generally be ignored,[8] for it generally adds little to the common understanding. Some material will be *supplementary*—it may not be found in Scripture, but it does not contradict biblical revelation. This can be explored and even developed. Paul takes this approach when debating with the Greek philosophers on the Areopagus.[9] Paul notes that "we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."[10] Throughout this study, certain propositions and ideas found in the Hadith will be challenged and denied, significant differences will be unveiled, and the teaching of the Bible will be presented as an alternative.

Problems within the Hadith that raise substantial issues can be identified. As a matter of integrity, these problems cannot be ignored. These are roadblocks or barriers which must be uncovered and inspected. Erroneous accounts must be exposed and corrected, and Christian teaching which is under attack should be defended. Honesty and frankness are required, as well as sensitivity and respect.

2. THE EARLIEST COLLECTIONS OF HADITH

After Muhammad and the early Muslims had died, Muslims began to write historical accounts of their lives. Some of the earliest collections of these writings are listed in table 1.[11] Generally they followed a less rigorous methodology than the later collections (e.g., they lacked complete *isnāds*) giving them a lower status in the eyes of later Muslims. Although earlier anthologies than these may have existed, there are "no authentic remains of any compilation of an

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earlier date than the middle or end of the second century of the Hijra."[12] The *Hijra* was the migration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in AD 622. It signifies the beginning of the Muslim community.

	NAME OF COLLECTION	NAME OF COMPILER	DATE OF COMPILER	NO. OF HADITHS
1	Muwaṭṭa'	Mālik b. Anas	d.179/795	1,823
2	*Minhat al-ma'bud fi tartīb Musnad al-Tayālisi Abi Dāwūd*	Abu Dāwūd al-Tayālisi	d.203-4/ 819-20	2,767
3	*Muṣannaf* (lit. 'classified')	Abd al-Razzāq	d.211/826	21,033
4	Musannaf	Abu Bakr b. Abi Shayba	d.235/849	37,943
5	*Sunan* (lit. 'paths'. sing. *Sunnah*)	'Abdallah b. Abd al-Rahmān al-Darīmi	d.255/869	3,503

TABLE 1: List of Earliest Anthologies[a]

Some terms should be explained. A musnad classified Hadiths according to the name of the transmitter closest to Muhammad, e.g., "Abu Hurayra," whereas a *muṣannaf* classified them by topical headings, e.g., "prayer" or "fasting."

But a problem soon arose. As Muslim scholars gathered the accounts of Muhammad's life and early Islamic history, they found that discerning real traditions from fictitious accounts was no straightforward task. "In the first two centuries after Muhammad's death the number of Hadiths increased in direct proportion to the demand. Whenever the community faced a new issue each party concerned would seek authority for its view in a Hadith….

a Dates will be given in the format : Hijri/Gregorian e.g. 179/795. Dates after 1500 AD will only be given in Gregorian format.

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This became a flourishing industry."[13] One man, ʿAbd al-Karīm Abū ʿl-ʿAuja, when sentenced to death for apostasy and atheism, confessed to fabricating 4,000 Hadiths which he attributed to the Prophet. He was executed by crucifixion in 104/722 by Muhammad b. Sulaimān b. ʿAli, governor of Basrah.[14]

By the beginning of the third century after Muhammad, there were many Hadiths in circulation.[15] Margoliouth claims that al-Bukhāri had heard 90,000 of them.[16] Guillaume quotes a figure of 600,000 but notes that "these figures must be taken with a grain of salt."[17] This larger figure has been questioned by Kamali:

> It may be that these figures consisted mainly of the number of reports and reporters rather than of actual *aHadith*…. If we were to eliminate repetition and reduce all of this to the actual number of Hadith, we would have a much smaller number of *aHadith* left, that may or may not exceed ten thousand in number.

However he does admit this springs from his concern that "citing figures in the order of hundreds of thousands of Hadiths … overshadowed and minisculed the significance of the earlier collections."[18]

Abbott, on the other hand, finds the numbers quite acceptable, because

> using geometric progression, we find that one to two thousand Companions and senior Successors transmitting two to five traditions each would bring us well within the range of the total number of traditions credited to the exhaustive collections of the third century. Once it is realised that the *isnād* did, indeed, initiate a chain reaction that resulted in an explosive increase in the number of traditions, the huge numbers that are credited to Ibn Hanbal, Muslim and Bukhāri seem not so fantastic after all.[19]

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