

AL-MUTAWAKKIL'S EDICT ON CHRISTIANITY AND ITS RELATION TO CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM ENCOUNTERS: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Muhammad Afdillah
Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya,
Indonesia/Hartford International University for Religion and
Peace, Connecticut, United States
E-mail: m.afdillah@uinsby.ac.id

Abstract: This article examines the Christian-Muslim relations in the third/ninth century through the al-Mutawakkil's edict on Christianity issued in 235/850. Historically, al-Mutawakkil's rule in 232-247/847-861 was marked by three significant events: the ending of the Inquisition in 234/849, the declaration of an edict against Christianity in 235/850, and the lifting of the tomb of Imam Ḥusayn b. Abī Ṭālib in 236/851. Particularly, the second event highlighted the complex relations between Christians and Muslims in early Islam, and accordingly raised such a question as why the Caliph al-Mutawakkil only targeted Christians in his edict even though Muslims had encountered many religious groups (*ahl al-dhimmah*). Examining the classical and modern resources of Islamic history on this account, this article traces theological, social, and political factors in the Christian-Muslim encounters surrounding al-Mutawakkil's edict. Even though al-Mutawakkil failed to fully implement the edict on Christians, he demonstrated that he was a tactician ruler who could win over his Muslim subjects and control non-Muslim citizens, bureaucrats, and soldiers.

Keywords: al-Mutawakkil's edict; *ahl al-dhimmah*; Christian-Muslim relations

Introduction

This article examines the Christian-Muslim relations in the third/ninth century through al-Mutawakkil's edict on Christianity in 235/850. The Caliph al-Mutawakkil 'alā Allāh (r. 232-47/847-61), whose birth name is Abū al-Faḍl Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-

Mu‘taṣim Billāh is the tenth caliph in the ‘Abbāsīd empire. Al-Mutawakkil’s reign was known for his three regulations on religion: ending the *miḥna* (Inquisition) in 234/849, issuing the edict against Christianity in 235/850, and lifting the tomb of the third Shia Imam Ḥusayn b. Abī Ṭālib in 236/851. The classical historians recorded him as a wise ruler and aligned him with the first two well-guided caliphs, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar b. Khaṭṭāb, for his wisdom, while the contemporary scholars consider him a tactician ruler, if not a pragmatic one, who wanted to stabilize his power over his officials and subjects.¹ Supporting the latter view, this article argues that al-Mutawakkil’s decree on Christianity reflects his policies on religion: to ease the minds of his Muslim subjects and attempt to balance the power of Christians in his administration. To confirm this argument, using the historical analysis method,² this article cross-examines the classic and modern records of Islamic history on al-Mutawakkil’s edict on Christianity and the Christian-Muslim encounters that surrounded it.

Furthermore, this article views al-Mutawakkil’s edict on Christianity in a centripetal line that draws outward relations between Christians and Muslims within the Islamic kingdom. It stands with the idea that Muslim rulers in the medieval era treated Christians in honor and disgrace. Accordingly, A.S. Tritton,³ Hugh Goddard,⁴ Ira M. Lapidus,⁵ and Mun’im Sirry⁶ note that Christians

¹ See Christopher Melchert, “Religious Policies of the Caliphs from al-Mutawakkil to al-Muqtadir, A.H. 232-295/A.D. 847-908,” *Islamic Law and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1996), 316–342; John P. Turner, “The End of the Miḥna,” *Oriens*, Vol. 38, No. 1-2 (2010), 89-106.

² See Aaron W. Hughes, *From Seminary to University: An Institutional History of the Study of Religion in Canada* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487531263>.

³ A. S. Tritton, “Islam and the Protected Religions,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2 (1931), 311-338.

⁴ Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, Second Edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 59-61.

⁵ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 105; Ira M. Lapidus, *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 107.

⁶ Mun’im Sirry, “The Public Role of Dhimmīs during ‘Abbāsīd Times,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol 74, No. 2 (2011), 187-204.

had had widespread and noteworthy positions in the caliphate administration, ranging from a vizierate to a mere clerk. However, they also observe that Christians at the time had to distinguish themselves from the rest of the empire's subjects: clothing, riding horses, and building houses and churches. In addition, this article denotes Milka Levy-Rubin's notion that the idea of *ghiyār* (the Other) is not unique to the Muslim world; instead, it originated from the Byzantium and Persian Sasanian empires.⁷ Differentiating from the sources above, this article frames al-Mutawakkil's edict on Christianity within the framework of the Christian-Muslim encounters in the 'Abbāsīd period.

The social tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially Christians, in the 'Abbāsīd era were undeniable, based on three assumptions. First, pacifying the lands of Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, Muslim conqueror was a minority in number.⁸ However, like the Umayyads, the 'Abbāsīds did not impose Islam on non-Muslims and did not meddle in domestic and religious matters. Therefore, they were actively supporting the new regime.⁹ Second, the 'Abbāsīds decision to recall the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd 'Azīz's equality policy, by which they "swept away Arab caste supremacy and accepted the universal equality of Muslims,"¹⁰ had affected the status of Arab Muslims. Not only did Muslims suffer from losing their privilege, but they also had to compete with Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians for a position in the bureaucracy¹¹ and with Khurasān and Turks for the military.¹²

⁷ Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 167; Milka Levy-Rubin, "The Pact of 'Umar," in *Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. David Thomas (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 80-89.

⁸ David Thomas, "Christians under Muslim Rule, 650-1200: Christians in the Muslim Arab World," in *Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. David Thomas (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 69-74.

⁹ Sirry, "The Public Role of Dhimmīs during 'Abbāsīd Times."

¹⁰ Lapidus, *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*, 93.

¹¹ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 59.

¹² By the end of conquest in the Harun's reign, the 'Abbāsīd pensioned the Arab armies off and started new troops who were commonly non-Arabs. See Lapidus, *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*, 95; For more discussion about the troops in the 'Abbāsīd era, see Patricia Crone, "The 'Abbāsīd Abnā' and Sāsānid Cavalymen," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1998), 1-19; Jacob Lassner, *The Shaping of 'Abbasid Rule* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

For these two reasons, the opposition to *dhimmī* officials was due to the inferiority of Muslims who lacked skills in administration and management.¹³ Third, Baghdad, called the City of Peace (*Madīnat al-Salām*), which was the capital city of the 'Abbāsīd empire, had been a magnet for international trading.¹⁴ Since it was the most significant city then, Baghdad became the meeting point of the traders, workers, scholars, and poets coming from diverse regions such as Persians, Iraqis, Arabians, Syrians, and Central Asians. Perhaps, it was only in Baghdad that people with various ethnic and religious backgrounds encountered each other. Nevertheless, the meeting may result positively. The cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims contributed to the empire's benefit, such as the translation movement from Greek/Latin into Arabic.¹⁵ Conversely, it may also cause a dispute among the people who demonstrated *ash-shu'ūbiyyah*, by which someone raised their ethnic/religious superiority while ridiculing others.¹⁶

Considering the first reliable document on the restrictions applied to the *dhimmīs*,¹⁷ this article examines al-Mutawakkil's edict within the framework of Christian-Muslim relations in the Muslim rules. Why did al-Mutawakkil issue the edict against Christianity? What were the factors behind the issuance of the edict? How far could this edict be implemented? To answer these questions, this article is constructed into two main sections. The first describes the theological, social, and political dynamics in the Christian and Muslim encounters. It implies the general overview of Christian-

University Press, 1980), chap. V; Abū 'Uthmān b. 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasā' il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, Vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khanjī, 1964), chap. 1.

¹³ Sirry, "The Public Role of Dhimmīs during 'Abbāsīd Times."

¹⁴ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 56; Lapidus, *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*, 93; for a detail description of Madīnah al-Salām, see Bernard Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople: Religion and Society* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 69-78.

¹⁵ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, Tenth Edition (London: MacMillan Publisher Ltd., 1970), 310-316; Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 76-80; Lapidus, *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*, 131-140.

¹⁶ Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople: Religion and Society*, 78-81, 201-208.

¹⁷ Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, 103.

Muslim relations in the 'Abbāsīd era. In the meantime, the second part is al-Mutawakkil's edict on Christianity. It analyzes the codes applied to the *dhimmīs*, the rationale behind the decree, and its implementation.

Three Areas of Christian-Muslim Encounters in Medieval Islamic Empire

Some contemporary works on Islamic conquest in the Middle Ages record that Christians and other *dhimmīs* benefited from the Muslim's victory over Byzantine and Persian in Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, Persia, and the neighboring territories. Lapidus notes the revivalism of religious sects within Christianity and Judaism, such as the Melkites, Jacobites, Nestorians, Messaliens, Jewish Christians, Jews, Hermetics, Marcionites, Daysanites, Elkasaites, Mandaeans, and Chaldeans.¹⁸ In addition, Muslims were involved in the church reorganization.¹⁹ The resurgence of non-Muslim groups at the time referred to 'Umar's policy that disallowed the Muslim victors to impose Islam on non-Muslims and interfere in their internal affairs.²⁰ Tritton and Daniel J. Sahas cited an example when Caliph 'Umar met Marūtha of Tikrit and Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem to receive a submission allegation from each of them. They and 'Umar agreed that Muslims should protect them, not intervene in their faith, and not cause a problem if they pay the *jizyah*.²¹ The protected people who paid *jizyah* were called *ahl al-dhimma* or *dhimmīs*.²² The 'Umayyads and 'Abbāsīds implemented the non-interference policy with an adjustment to their respective conditions. However, the relationship between Christians and Muslims in medieval Islam was more vibrant than a submission-*jizyah* relationship. Despite his non-interference policy,

¹⁸ Lapidus, *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*, 194.

¹⁹ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 43.

²⁰ The policy is part of 'Umar's principles of settlement. See *ibid.*, 35–36.

²¹ Tritton, "Islam and the Protected Religions"; For the detail story of the encounter between 'Umar and Sophronius, see Daniel J. Sahas, "The Face to Face Encounter between Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem and the Caliph 'Umar Ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 33-44.

²² Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 15-17.

‘Umar b. Khaṭṭāb was also accused as the ruler who imposed the *ghiyār* code, which was known as the Pact of ‘Umar, by which Muslim rulers imposingly clothed non-Muslims with a particular outfit and regulated their behavior and faith in public.²³ Although the statement remains debatable—described below—it shows that Christians and Muslims in the medieval Islamic caliphate had undergone a sweet-bitter relationship. This section will explore the dynamics of the Christian-Muslim relationship in theology, society, and politics by which they met and competed. Eventually, it finds that the clash between Christians and Muslims occurred at the elite rather than the grassroots level.

Theological Encounter

The first encounter between Christians and Muslims was theological. Despite their similar religious roots, Christians and Muslims were involved in arguments regarding their respective faiths. Along with Jews, Christians and Muslims share the title *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book), referring to “those who were given the book” (al-Nisā’ [4]: 51), “those who were given a portion of the book” (al-Nisā’ [4]: 44), “those who read the book before you” (al-Nisā’ [4]: 47), and “those to whom We gave the book” (al-An‘ām [6]: 89).²⁴ By the title of *Ahl al-Kitāb*, Christians and Muslims share the prophets, such as Ibrāhīm/Abraham, Mūsā/Moses, and ‘Īsā/Jesus.²⁵ Regarding the Christians, the Qur’ān labeled them as *al-Naṣārā*, which, according to Griffith, refers to “Nazoreans” or “Nazarenes,” meaning the people of Nazareth, who was Jesus the Christ.²⁶ The conversation between these two religions became theological when, first, the Qur’ān criticizes the Trinity and considers it as a *ghulw* (overstepping the bounds [of truth]) (al-Nisā’ [4]: 171). Secondly, it warns the Muslims that

²³ Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, chap. 2; Levy-Rubin, “The Pact of ‘Umar.”

²⁴ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “Christians in the Qur’ān and Tafsīr,” in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 105-121; Yohanan Friedmann, “Minorities,” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Bowering et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 340-346.

²⁵ Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, 24.

²⁶ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, 7.

“neither the Jews nor the Nazarenes/Christians will be pleased with you until you follow their religion” (al-Baqarah [2]: 120). Third, the Qur’ān accuses Christians of having corrupted the holy book because of their desire (al-Baqarah [2]: 75 and Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 78). Fourth, it judges whoever says that ‘Īsā/Jesus is the son of God (al-Mā’idah [5]: 19) or believes in the Trinity (al-Mā’idah [5]: 73).²⁷ Finally, the Qur’ān also declares that Muḥammad sealed the prophethood (al-Aḥzāb [33]: 40), and thus, the Qur’ān completed the previous revelation, including the one ‘Īsā/Jesus preached to Christians. In this sense, the previous Books were no longer authenticated and should follow Muḥammad as the last prophet.²⁸

Corresponding to the Qur’ān acquisition, some Christian theologians conceptualized the doctrine of the Trinity and even ridiculed Muslims and their faith. One example of a Christian apologist is John of Damascus (d. 749), a civil servant in the Caliph ‘Umar II’s administration who turned into a monk, writing a book in Greek entitled *On Heresies*. He labeled Islam as “a kind of Christian heresy.”²⁹ Through his book, he listed four heresies of Islam: that Muḥammad received his book from heaven, that Jesus was not crucified, that the Ishmaelites (Muslims) kiss the black stone of Ka’bah, and that polygamy and divorce are permissible.³⁰ The ‘real’ encounter was when Christian theologians started their writings about Christianity or against Islam in Arabic and when Caliph al-Ma’mūn regularly hosted a religious debate (*jadal*) and disputation (*munāẓarah*) in his *majlis*. There were three famous Arabic Christian theologians whose arguments became prominent among scholars in Christian-Muslim relations: the Melkite Abū

²⁷ Ibid., 9-10; Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 11; Sandra Toenies Keating, *Defending the “People of Truth” in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā’īṭah* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 5.

²⁸ Sandra Toenies Keating, “The First Arabic-Speaking Christian Theologians,” in *Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. David Thomas (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 90–97.

²⁹ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, 30–31; Keating, *Defending the “People of Truth” in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā’īṭah*, 5.

³⁰ I. Mark Beaumont, “Early Christian Attitudes towards Islam,” in *Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. David Thomas (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 107-114.

Qurra, the Jacobite Abū Rā'īta al-Takrītī, and the Nestorian 'Ammār al-Baṣrī.³¹ Although these scholars came from different Churches and had mixed views about Christ and the Trinity, they were united to defend their faith from Islam.

Social Encounter

As it is the nature of the social relation, there was momentum when Christians and Muslims met and when they separated. However, there was no significant separation between Christians and Muslims. Al-Jāhīz records that Muslims had a better relationship with Christians than Jews and Zoroastrians. Compared to Jews, Christians had less contact with Prophet Muḥammad and were rarely involved in the wars. In this context, Muslims had less harmful historical records with Christians than Jews.³² Al-Jāhīz also notes that Muslims honored Christians with promising government or private sector professions: theologians (*mutakallimūn*), physicians (*aṭibbā'*), philosophers (*falāsifah*), and judges (*ḥukamā'*). Some professions that Muslims could find in Jewish links.³³ It can be inferred that Muslims in the ninth century had more contact with Christians than with other religious groups. Consequently, the policy on the *dhimmīs* applied more to Christians than to other *dhimmīs*.

Tritton finds that it turned into an interfaith marriage between these two religious groups for the close relationship between Christians and Muslims. He observes that some male Muslims married female Christians.³⁴ However, this type of marriage invites criticism because only male Muslims can marry female *dhimmīs*, but not the other way around.³⁵ According to Keating, the practice of interfaith marriage between Christians and Muslims became a significant factor in conversion to Islam.³⁶ Another aspect

³¹ Keating, "The First Arabic-Speaking Christian Theologians."

³² Abū 'Uthmān b. 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhīz, *Rasā'il al-Jāhīz*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, Vol. 3 (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khanjī, 1964), 308-309; Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 59-60.

³³ Al-Jāhīz, *Rasā'il al-Jāhīz*, 3:313-314; Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 60.

³⁴ Tritton, "Islam and the Protected Religions."

³⁵ Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 27.

³⁶ Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth" in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'ītah*, 12.

separating Christians and Muslims at the grassroots was the inheritance. Lewis notices the different treatments between Muslims and other *dhimmi* groups. The general rule says that Muslims and the *dhimmīs* could not inherit from each other. Therefore, a convert to Islam could not inherit from their unconverted family members. However, some Muslim clerics considered the matter of inheritance like marriage, which Muslims could inherit from their *dhimmi* families, but not vice versa.³⁷ The last issue that encouraged Muslims to humiliate the *dhimmīs* is the different greetings between Muslim-to-Muslim and Muslim-to-*Dhimmīs*. In addition, the *dhimmīs* were not allowed to give their children Islamic names.³⁸ It was probably a result of religious regulation imposed on the *dhimmīs*. Nevertheless, this differentiation separates society based on religious identity.

Political Encounter

Like the Umayyads, the primary policy of the ‘Abbāsids for their conquered lands was a non-interference policy. The caliphs did not impose non-Muslims to convert to Islam and did not intervene in their domestic religious matters. This policy originated from the second principle of settlement by ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb.³⁹ Then, the community that surrendered to Muslim conquerors was called *ahl al-dhimma*, or the *dhimmīs*, meaning the “protected communities.” They are under the protection of Muslim rulers as long as they pay the poll tax or *jizyah*.⁴⁰ By this system, the *dhimmīs* enjoyed religious freedom, which they could elect their leaders, build their worship place, and have their religious law.⁴¹ Therefore, they were keen supporters of the Muslim regime.

However, the implementation of *ahl al-dhimma* was more complicated than its concept. Besides *jizyah*, Christians had to pay security tax, blood money, and bribery. So, the first is security tax. Tritton reports that one day the Turks attacked the monastery of Mattai and robbed some booties there several times. The empire

³⁷ Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 26–27.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁹ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 36; Lapidus, *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*, 63.

⁴⁰ Friedmann, “Minorities,” 342.

⁴¹ Tritton, “Islam and the Protected Religions.”

troop from Mosul, to whom the monastery paid their *jizyah*, came to Mattai, attacked the Turks, and killed some of them. As revenge, the Turks attacked the monastery, burned the Church and housings around it, killed the men, and enslaved the women and children.⁴² Similarly, second, Christians had to pay blood money to the officials. It is a kind of redemption money provided for local rulers if they found a dead body in an area inhabited by most of the *dhimmīs*. To avoid the payment, the *dhimmīs* surrounding the body had to find someone responsible for the killing. Otherwise, the local rulers had the authority to devastate the village.⁴³ The third is bribery. According to Tritton, patriarch or Catholicus candidates often offered money to the caliph and local rulers to support their candidacy. The rivalry between churches also led the patriarch to bribe officials to cancel the building of rival churches or disturb their religious activities.⁴⁴

The last and most sensitive problem is the occupation in the government offices. As part of the non-interference policy, the Muslim conqueror left the administration of the empire they overthrew as it was. Therefore, the officers were dominated by the *dhimmīs* serving new masters, Muslim victors. The problem was that when the 'Abbāsids decided to retire almost all its Arab troops and replace them with a professional army, the Turks.⁴⁵ In this case, many Muslim veterans complained to the caliph because they did not find a suitable job. Besides, the Islamization of the empire also encouraged the idea of Islamizing the officers.⁴⁶ As a result, some 'Abbāsids caliphs attempted to issue an order to ban the *dhimmīs* from their position in the government and hopefully replaced them with Muslim officers. However, as described in the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Charles Pellat, "Al-Jahiz: The Peculiarities of the Turks," in *Islamic Central Asia*, ed. Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, An Anthology of Historical Sources (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 55–59; Crone, "The 'Abbāsīd Abnā' and Sāsānīd Cavalrymen."

⁴⁶ It was the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān of the 'Umayyad who started the Arabization of its regime. It then turns into Islamization during 'Umar II's reign. See Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, 100; Keating, *Defending the "People of Truth" in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'īṭab*, 17.

latter section, several attempts to substitute the *dhimmīs* with Muslim officers failed. Ultimately, this issue overwhelmingly colored the relationship between Muslims and Christians.

Al-Mutawakkil's Edict on Christianity

Was al-Mutawakkil the first Muslim ruler who issued the edict?

Several arguments are responding to this question. Yarbrough's *Origins of the Ghīyār* surveys three primary opinions about the first Muslim ruler implementing the code for *ghīyār* (non-Muslims): 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb ('Umar I) (r. 13-23/634-644), 'Umar b. 'Abd 'Azīz ('Umar II) (r. 98-101/717-720), and Ja'far al-Mutawakkil 'alā Allāh (r. 232-247/ 847-861). Each argument has its supporting historical evidence. This article views that all evidence did not stand independently but rather interdependently. Thus, they portray the historical development of the edict or code of non-Muslims, especially Christians.

The first view is that 'Umar I was the first Muslim ruler who regulated the code for non-Muslims, known as the Pact of 'Umar. According to Lapidus, it is one prominent legacy of 'Umar I in the caliphate administration. For example, instead of giving the booty to his conqueror troops, he kept all booties to specific offices. He also mandated his soldiers and governors in the conquered lands not to intervene in the internal affairs of the faith of the protected people (*ahl al-dhimma*) as long as they paid head tax (*jizyah*).⁴⁷ To support this policy, he “appointed governors who in turn appointed judges (qadis)... [who] were initially multicompetent state officials dealing with justice, police, tax, and finance issues.”⁴⁸ The most apparent evidence of 'Umar I's policy that harmed the position of the *dhimmīs* is when 'Umar I banished all non-Muslims from the entry of Mecca and designated it only for Muslims.⁴⁹ This policy remains until today. Moreover, Yarbrough surveys classical resources about 'Umar I's policy on non-Muslims, by which 'Umar I released an edict on how non-Muslims rode horses or wore clothes.⁵⁰ However, to Yarbrough and other scholars, the

⁴⁷ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 34-36.

⁴⁸ Lapidus, *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*, 156.

⁴⁹ Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 28.

⁵⁰ Luke Yarbrough, “Origins of the Ghīyār,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 134, No. 1 (2014), 113-121.

document's authenticity supporting the policy is debatable yet mysterious.⁵¹

Another opinion is that 'Umar II was the first Muslim ruler to regulate the code of non-Muslims.⁵² It was simply because the Pact of 'Umar refers to 'Umar II, not 'Umar I. Levy-Rubin's reviews on classical resources find that 'Umar II had issued regulations on how non-Muslims behaved in public, such as a prohibition to use a saddle, a mandatory to cut the forelock, to wear a (leather) girdle, and not to wear shoes with straps.⁵³ Compared to the puzzling 'Umar I's edict, 'Umar II's edict on non-Muslims was drafted and formed.⁵⁴ Historical evidence hints that 'Umar II was responsible for the edict. During his short reign, about two and half years, he introduced an assimilation program that drove Arabs to "accept the equality of Arabs and non-Arabs and value Muslims and Arab identifications."⁵⁵ By this policy, 'Umar II based his regime on Muslims, not Arabs! As a consequence, he acknowledged the equality of all Muslims, Arabs, and non-Arabs (*a'jamīs*). Furthermore, he propagated new economic equality laws for all Muslims regardless of their ethnicities, therefore implementing heavier fiscal and other restrictions on non-Muslims.⁵⁶ According to Levy-Rubin, the policy referred to the idea that Arabs were dishonored and shameful until they embraced Islam, by which God honored them with wealth and power. Implicitly, 'Umar II established "the superiority of Muslims over the non-Muslims who were still in control in many vital places" in his administration offices. Therefore, Levy-Rubin emphasizes that 'Umar II's code of non-Muslims (*ghiyār*) stirred the idea of Muslim supremacy over non-Muslims.⁵⁷ Given that 'Umar II only ruled for two-and-half years and that he was assassinated by probably the 'Umayyads and other

⁵¹ Ibid., Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, 60; Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 24.

⁵² Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, 88.

⁵³ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 62.

⁵⁵ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 43.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 43, 53; Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 46-47.

⁵⁷ Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, 95-97.

Arab tribes who discouraged his policy, the question about the implementation of the policy.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the approach seemed to encourage the massive conversion of non-Muslims to Islam and the integration of Arab Muslims and new convert non-Arab Muslims.⁵⁹ As evidence, a small number of Muslims (about three percent of the whole population) inhabiting Baghdad in 64 A.H./675 AD turned to forty percent during the reign of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.⁶⁰

The last theory that the one issued the code of non-Muslims is al-Mutawakkil.⁶¹ Al-‘Askarī, as cited by Yarbrough, writes that al-Mutawakkil ordered the change of the uniforms of the *dhimmīs*.⁶² Unlike the two previous theories, which do not come with formal documents, al-Mutawakkil’s edict has its resource, which was his letter to his district government, recorded by al-Ṭabarī.⁶³ There were different subjects whom this letter addressed. A classic solo scholar using the term ‘al-Naṣārā’ for whom it directed is al-Dhahabī.⁶⁴ In the meantime, others who use the term ‘ahl al-dhimma’ in their books are al-‘Askarī,⁶⁵ ibn Athīr,⁶⁶ ibn Kathīr,⁶⁷

⁵⁸ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 44.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶⁰ Keating, *Defending the “People of Truth” in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā’iṭah*, 12.

⁶¹ Luke Yarbrough, “Origins of the Ghiyār.”

⁶² “Awwal man ‘amara bi taghyīr ‘ahl al-dhimma ziyyahum al-Mutawakkil.” See Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, *Kitāb al-Anwā’il*, ed. Muḥammad al-Miṣrī and Walid Qaṣṣāb, Vol. 1 (Riyāḍ: Dār al-‘Ulūm, 1975), 375.

⁶³ Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, ed. Ihsan Abbas et al., trans. Franz Rosenthal, vol. I: General Introduction and from the Creation to the Flood (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 89–95; Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Second Edition, Vol. 9 (Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘ārif, 1967), 171-175.

⁶⁴ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Wafayāt al-Mashāhīr wa al-A‘lām*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī, Vol. 17 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabī, 1991), 16; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnu‘uṭ, 11th Edition, Vol. 11 (Beirut: Mu’assasah al-Risālah, 1996), 34.

⁶⁵ Al-‘Askarī, *Kitāb al-Anwā’il*, 1: 375.

⁶⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Abī al-Karam Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm b. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Shaybānī Ibn Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, ed. Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Daḡāq, Vol. 6 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 1987), 106.

and Abū Ya‘qūb,⁶⁸ while another group of classical writers uses the term “al-Naṣārā wa ahl al-dhimma,” are al-Ṭabarī⁶⁹ and Miskawayh.⁷⁰ The way these scholars label the subject of al-Mutawakkil’s edict indicates their view of non-Muslims. Al-Dhahabī, who uses the term ‘al-Naṣārā’ (the Christian), presumably generalizes the *dhimmīs* into the Christian group because they outnumbered all *dhimmīs*. On the other hand, writers who express the subjected group into ‘ahl al-dhimma’ argue that the edict addressed Christians and all *dhimmīs*. In the meantime, al-Ṭabarī and al-Miskawayh, combining the two words, emphasize the presence of Christians over the *dhimmīs* as the edict target. Therefore, this article addresses the Christians as a group subjected to al-Mutawakkil’s order because it views Christians as a significant minority group in the *dhimmīs*.

Given the definitive document of al-Mutawakkil’s edict on Christians, contemporary scholars focus on the policies leading to the creation of the decree. Kraemer, for instance, in his commentary on al-Mutawakkil’s edict on Christianity in his translation of *the History of al-Ṭabarī*, writes that ‘Umar II firstly formulated the code of non-Muslim and then improved and standardized by Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 168-193/786-809).⁷¹ Then, the discussion returns to theories 1 and 2. Lewis, however, views the debate about the origin of the code on non-Muslims in moderation. Responding to a limited resource on an actual document to support the regulation of non-Muslims during the ‘Umar I and ‘Umar II reigns, Lewis argues that the “Pact of ‘Umar II reflects that of ‘Umar I.”⁷² Furthermore, the Pact of

⁶⁷ Abū Fidā’ al-Hāfiẓ ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nibāyah*, Vol. 10 (Beirut: Maktabah al-Ma‘ārif, 1990), 313.

⁶⁸ Aḥmad b. Abī Ya‘qūb b. Ja‘far b. Wahab al-Kātib, *Tārīkh al-Ya‘qūbī*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-‘Ulūm, Vol. 3 (Najf: al-Maktabah al-Ḥayduriyah, 1964), 219.

⁶⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, 9: 171.

⁷⁰ Abū ‘Alī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-Umam wa Ta‘āqub al-Himam*, ed. Sayyid Kasrūwī Ḥasān, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 2003), 118.

⁷¹ Footnote no. 303 in *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, I: General Introduction and from the Creation to the Flood: 89.

⁷² Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 25.

‘Umar II should develop into solid al-Mutawakkil’s edict. It can be inferred that al-Mutawakkil’s edict was the first Muslim ruler who “issued an organized set of restrictions to be applied to the *dhimmīs*,”⁷³ but it was rooted in the Pacts of ‘Umar II then ‘Umar I.

Al-Mutawakkil’s edict on Christianity

In 235/850, al-Mutawakkil issued a regulation on Christians and the *dhimmīs*. Al-Ṭabarī,⁷⁴ Miskawayh,⁷⁵ Ibn Athīr,⁷⁶ al-Kātib,⁷⁷ and Ibn Kathīr⁷⁸ notes that al-Mutawakkil’s edict consisted of five main subjects: clothing, riding, housing, worship building, and employment. First, Al-Mutawakkil ordered male Christians and the *dhimmīs* to wear yellow hoods, turbans, and a particular type of belts and to clothe caps, if they wore them, with a specific color differing from that used by Muslims. He also obliged female *dhimmīs* to wear a yellow cloak if they went out in public. The *dhimmi* enslaved people had to wear specific belts and marks on the front and back of their clothes. While clothing, they were not allowed to use ornaments on their uniforms. Second, the caliph commanded a unique sign such as saddles with wooden straps and two rounded parts at the rear of the seats. Third, the *dhimmīs* must put a wood devil sign on the doors of their houses so that everyone could recognize the difference between the homes of Muslims and those of the *dhimmīs*. Besides, the caliph instructed to reduce ten percent of their properties for building masjids, if applicable, or for public areas, if not. Fourth, the caliph ordered the destruction of newly renovated worship buildings. In addition, he prohibited the open use of crosses and banned the public celebration of non-Islamic holidays. They were even not allowed to study in Islamic schools or be taught by Muslim teachers.

⁷³ Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, 103.

⁷⁴ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, 9: 171-172; *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, I: General Introduction and from the Creation to the Flood: 89-91.

⁷⁵ Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-Umam wa Ta’āqub al-Himam*, 4: 118.

⁷⁶ Ibn Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, 6: 106-107.

⁷⁷ Al-Kātib, *Tārīkh al-Ya’qūbi*, 3: 219.

⁷⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, 10: 313-314.

Moreover, fifth, the caliph excluded the *dhimmīs* from the government offices.

Moreover, al-Ṭabarī explains al-Mutawakkil's letter to his governors regarding implementing his edict on Christians and the *dhimmīs*.⁷⁹ Written by Ibrāhīm b. al-ʿAbbās, on behalf of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil, in Shawwal 235, al-Mutawakkil opened his letter by exploring the virtues of Islam. As He has chosen Islam for the religion of humankind, God graces it with a victory over other religions. Through Islam, He honored Muslims so that they could win the world. In return, they must follow God's order. Accordingly, Muslims must follow the law when God prohibits consuming certain foods or drinks, marrying someone impure, or doing something sinful. To obey God's command, al-Mutawakkil gave specific rules for non-Muslims, such as how they should cloth or ride a horse. He also mandated all his officials to oversee the *dhimmīs*' behaviors and punish them if they broke the rule.

Why did al-Mutawakkil issue an edict on Christians?

Classical records explain why al-Mutawakkil issued the edict on Christians and the *dhimmīs*. The first theory is that al-Mutawakkil enjoys making everything easier for his people. Al-Dhahabī writes, quoting Yazīd b. Muḥammad al-Muhallabī, "The caliphs were hard on people to obey, while I am softening them up to love me and obey me."⁸⁰ Accordingly, like his other policies on religion (ending the Inquisition and lifting the tomb of Imām Ḥusayn), the edict on Christians and the *dhimmīs* was intended to win the support of Muslim subjects.⁸¹ It was worth trying because, in the end, people admired him and associated him with Caliphs Abū Bakr and ʿUmar b. Khaṭṭāb eventually forgot his sins.⁸² Moreover, al-Dhahabī notices that about sixty thousand individuals gathered in two places, the Grand Mosque of al-Raṣāfah and the city of al-Manṣūr, led by Abū Bakr b. Abī Shaybah and ʿUthmān b. Abī

⁷⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, 9:172–174; *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, I: General Introduction and from the Creation to the Flood:91–94.

⁸⁰ "Inna al-khulafā' kānat tataṣa' 'abu 'alā al-nās liyuṭī'ūhum, wa anā ulīn lahum liyuḥibbūnī wa yuṭī'ūnī." See al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubalā'*, 11: 32.

⁸¹ Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 47.

⁸² Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Waḥayāt al-Mashāhīr wa al-A'lam*, 17: 13; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubalā'*, 11: 34.

Shaybah, respectively, and prayed for the fortune of al-Mutawakkil.⁸³

Another reason is that al-Mutawakkil aimed to raise a booty from Christians and other *dhimmīs*. Al-Ṭabarī highlights ‘Alī b. al-Jahm’s response to al-Mutawakkil’s edict was that the caliph’s concern about his policy was merely about a booty. He notes, “The yellow things divide between the righteous and the errant. What cares the wise if the errant increase? All the more for the booty!”⁸⁴ This comment probably comes from his persecution of some prominent individuals of his predecessor’s officials whom al-Mutawakkil aimed their wealth. Al-Dhahabī records one precise instance to support this view. It was when al-Mutawakkil was angry at Aḥmad b. Abī Duād, the previous-current grand qāḍī, one of six council members who elected him a caliph, and the think tank of the Inquisition. He then put his son and brothers in jail—Aḥmad b. Abī Duād had to pay bribe money of 16 million dirhams for the caliph to free his son and brothers. Al-Dhahabī reports that Aḥmad b. Abī Duād and his family became poor because of this problem.⁸⁵ Regarding the edict on Christians and the *dhimmīs*, Lewis sees that it was common for Muslim rulers to impose the economic penalty on Christians and the *dhimmīs*. Although the rule said that the tax (*jizyah*) price follows the gold rate, non-Muslims still had to pay higher taxes than Muslims. Some regimes even add tolls and customs duties to the tax price tag.⁸⁶ Tritton also records several practices of bribery involving Christian Patriarchs and Catholicus and the caliphs or local Muslim rulers for several purposes like permitting bribes for building churches or asking for support in the Patriarch/Catholicus election. Besides, the churches also had to prepare some money for a ‘safety tax’ for local militia or soldiers.⁸⁷

⁸³ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Wafayāt al-Mashābir wa al-A‘lām*, 17: 13.

⁸⁴ *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, I: General Introduction and from the Creation to the Flood: 94–95; “al-‘asaliyyāt al-latī farraqat bayn dhawī al-rashdah wa al-ghay, wa mā ‘alā al-‘āqil in takthurū fainnahu akthar li-l-fay.” al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, 9: 175.

⁸⁵ al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Wafayāt al-Mashābir wa al-A‘lām*, 17: 23; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*, 11: 36.

⁸⁶ Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 26.

⁸⁷ Tritton, “Islam and the Protected Religions.”

The third rationale is the disrespectfulness of Christians and other *dhimmi* groups.⁸⁸ As mentioned in the opening letter of al-Mutawakkil to his governors, he mentioned the superiority of Islam above other religions. It was because of God's grace that Muslims reached their success. In contrast, other religious adherents, because of their religion, failed.⁸⁹ This viewpoint might inherit 'Umar II's assimilation/equality program promoting the equality of all Muslims regardless of their origins. By this policy, someone's honor was regarded by religious identity rather than ethnicity or tribal background.⁹⁰ Thus, this policy led to negative attributes labeled non-Muslim expressed in religious terms. For example, the attribute may appear in the formulation of greetings for non-Muslims or in the banning of using names as the ones belonging to Muslims.⁹¹

The fourth explanation is that al-Mutawakkil's edict was part of his attempt to gain control over influential officials working with his brother, Caliph al-Wāthiq. Like his policy to end the Inquisition, al-Mutawakkil's edict might have a similar intention to eliminate "kingmakers" around him.⁹² In the case of the *dhimmīs*, the edict had a power dynamic by which he attempted to repress the leading official *dhimmīs* around him. There was no solid evidence supporting this view. However, the fact that the *dhimmīs* dominated the government officials and the most survival *dhimmīs* amid the Arab Muslim conquest could not be ignored. This matter leads to the fifth explanation. Some caliphs of the 'Umayyads and 'Abbāsids tried to eliminate them in the administration office but never succeeded.⁹³ Al-Jāhīz' *Risālah fī al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā* notes that Christians sit in the high ranks in government offices and the excellent jobs such as physicians or bankers.⁹⁴ Such positions had envied Muslims, especially the retired Arab-Muslim armies who

⁸⁸ Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 33.

⁸⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, 9:172–174; *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, I: General Introduction and the Creation to the Flood:91–94.

⁹⁰ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 43.

⁹¹ Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 33.

⁹² Turner, "The End of the Miḥna"; Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 274.

⁹³ Sirry, "The Public Role of Dhimmīs during 'Abbāsīd Times."

⁹⁴ Al-Jāhīz, *Rasā'il al-Jāhīz*, 3: 303-351.

had to surrender their positions to the Turks,⁹⁵ who viewed their inferior position towards Christian officers. They often complained to the caliph that “they were being ruled, in their empire, by non-Muslims.”⁹⁶ Therefore, as Lewis notes, an aim of al-Mutawakkil’s letter promoting his edict to his governors was to “reduce the encroachment of non-Muslims on the Muslim state.”⁹⁷

How successful was the implementation of al-Mutawakkil’s edict?

It is said that excluding the *dhimmīs* in government offices was “the most difficult to enforce.”⁹⁸ It is not only because of their administration skills but also their loyalty to the caliphates.⁹⁹ However, the resistance to the existence of Christian and *dhimmī* officers in the government administration became a classic problem for Muslim rulers. Although al-Mutawakkil’s edict found a dead road, his successors attempted to recommence the order. Levy-Rubin and Sirry survey some caliphs who tried to regulate the *dhimmīs* in government office: al-Muqtadir (r. 908–32), al-Ikhshīd (r. 934), al-Mu‘izz (r. 953–75), al-Ḥākīm (996–1020), al-Mustansīr (r. 1086) in Egypt, and al-Muqtadī (r. 1091).¹⁰⁰ Moreover, Sirry argues that some caliphs succeeding al-Mutawakkil indicate that such edict failed to dismiss Christians and the *dhimmīs* from their offices in the government.¹⁰¹ Another piece of evidence shows that the persistence of Christians and the *dhimmīs* amid the restrictions of Muslim rulers was the decision of some caliphs to appoint Christians and the *dhimmīs* to the highest rank of government bureaucracy. The first caliph in the ‘Abbāsīd and even in the Islamic empire was the Caliph al-Mu‘taṣim (r. 833–842), who appointed a Christian vizier, Faḍl b. Marwān b. Māsarjis (d. 865), secretary of state, Salmuyah, and the public treasury, Ibrāhīm.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Pellat, “Al-Jahiz: The Peculiarities of the Turks”; Crone, “The ‘Abbāsīd Abnā’ and Sāsānīd Cavalrymen.”

⁹⁶ Sirry, “The Public Role of Dhimmīs during ‘Abbāsīd Times.”

⁹⁷ Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 48.

⁹⁸ Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, 100, 108.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 110; Sirry, “The Public Role of Dhimmīs during ‘Abbāsīd Times.”

¹⁰¹ Sirry, “The Public Role of Dhimmīs during ‘Abbāsīd Times.”

¹⁰² *Ibid.*; For more information about the viziers and secretaries of the state, see Louis Cheikhu, *Wuzarā’ al-Naṣrānīyah wa Kuttābuhā fī al-Islām*, ed. Kamīl

Conclusion

The cross-examination of classical and modern sources on al-Mutawakkil's edict on Christianity reflects the theological, social, and political tensions between Christians and Muslims in the 'Abbāsid era. First, the theological debate between Christian and Muslim theologians allowed them to share their views of each other's faith and criticism of it. On the one hand, Muslims at the time saw Christians as infidels because they believed in the Trinity and believed that Christian books as corrupted. They also urged them to follow the Qur'ān because it had completed the previous revelation, including the one belonging to 'Īsā/Jesus. On the other hand, Christians accused Muslims as heretics because of four reasons: Muhammad's revelation, the belief that Jesus was not crucified, the black stone, and marriage issues. Secondly, the everyday relations between Christians and Muslims were dynamic and vibrant. Regulations that forced Christians to wear clothes and hats, and even the saddle of their horses with a particular color, created social segregation between Christians and Muslims: they did not share the greetings, engage in interreligious marriage, or divide the inheritance. Alternately, Muslims acknowledged Christian's professional capacity in the 'Abbāsid administration: vizier, physicians, and clerks. However, third, the domination of the Christian group within the administration also created tensions between Christians and Muslims in the political arena. As *dhimmīs*, supposedly second-class subjects that had to pay a poll tax (*jizyah*) and even security tax, Christians occupied many positions in the empire's administration as if they were the absolute rulers. Christians made Muslims anxious to learn that they were equals politically.

Furthermore, this article finds that al-Mutawakkil benefited from the rivalry between his Christian and Muslim subjects. Like his other policies on religion, including the ending of *mihna* (Inquisition) and lifting of the tomb of Imām Ḥusayn, al-Mutawakkil issued the edict on Christianity to subdue the heart of his Muslim subjects while controlling his Christian natives and officials. This policy allowed him to remove disloyal officials and

Hashīmah al-Yasū'ī (Zawq Mikael, Lebanon: al-Turāth al-'Arabī al-Masīhī, 1987).

put his loyal servants in important positions. In addition, this policy also inspired him to get involved in the election of the patriarchs, control the building of churches, raise the *jizyah* and implement the higher tax. In this case, al-Mutawakkil's edict on Christianity had met its objectives, even though it could not be implemented fully. Therefore, the means are more important than the goals.

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