CHAPTER 54

Eschatology between Reason and Revelation: Death and Resurrection in Modern Islamic Theology

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By the end of the nineteenth century, a great number of Muslim scholars tried to revitalize a new *kalām* (or Islamic theology) to address modern philosophical and scientific issues. Facing a multitude of religious and intellectual challenges under the Western colonial dominion, these new theologians were forced to reevaluate classical theological and philosophical ideas related to the existence of God, creation, good and evil, prophecy, and the afterlife. Most of them became convinced that classical *kalām* concepts had lost the logical basis of argumentation in the face of newer experimental and empirical methods of science.[1] As eschatology is the main domain of metaphysical postulations, modern Muslim theologians analyzed various classical eschatological subjects in response to these intellectual challenges.

In their 1981 work, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Jane I. Smith and Y.Y. Haddad succinctly studied and presented examples of ideas by modern Islamic thinkers and theologians on such subjects.[2] The authors correctly observe that unlike classical theologians, who were generally interested in using particular references in the religious sources to the *barzakh* state after death to illustrate specific points about the nature of God and His justice,[3] modern Muslim writers rather tend to address the heavy Western emphasis on rationalism. In fact, the great majority of contemporary Muslim writers have chosen not to discuss the afterlife at all, since they are satisfied with simply affirming the reality of the day of judgment and human accountability and see no need to provide details or interpretive discussion. According to Smith and Haddad, this is, in large part, because Muslim thinkers face a kind of "embarrassment with the elaborate traditional detail concerning life in the grave and in the abodes of recompense, called into question by modern

1 *Ozervarli*, Attempts to revitalize.

2 Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding*.

3 Ibid., 33.

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rationalists."[4] In their view, modern Muslim thinkers conceive their main task as emphasizing in particular the work ethic that will help achieve material and technological parity with the West.[5] Unfortunately Smith and Haddad did not select their case studies from the above-mentioned revitalization trend of the new Islamic theology. They therefore ignore an important aspect of modern theological thought as reflected by those thinkers and their attempts to reinterpret the traditional viewpoints concerning eschatological subjects.

Smith and Haddad analyze modern Muslim thinkers under three categories, namely traditionalists, modernists, and spiritualists; this is plausible but not comprehensive or representative. It is true that contemporary traditionalist Muslim writers produce new material in modern Arabic about the traditional view of Islam on the afterlife with no additional interpretation. Modernists, by contrast, are much more concerned with interpretive analyses of life, the conciliation between science and the immediate life after death, the possibility of continuing human development, and the Quran's affirmation of ethical responsibility.[6] Representatives of the trend of Islamic spirituality, who flourished during the colonial period, were interested in popular European and American spiritual writings; they looked to these writings especially in their responses to Orientalist and missionary accusations that Islam's conception of the afterlife is sensual and material.[7]

Despite the fact that the two authors agree that the three categories are fluid and certainly not always mutually exclusive, they sometimes tend to quote obscure writers to reach specific general conclusions on what they categorize as "modernist thinkers and theologians." In the present chapter, I argue that any attempt to renew the discipline of *kalām* in modern times (including in discussions of eschatological issues) should not be regarded as entirely liberal, modernist or reformist. This is not an organized movement, but rather sporadic attempts – representatives of this trend inevitably tried to harmonize traditional Islamic tenets with the positivistic modern attitude toward nature and science. Thus theirs was an attempt to combine religious values with scientific discoveries and interpret revelation (sometimes) according to the scientific theories of the age.[8]

The present chapter investigates the interpretations of significant modern Muslim theologians and scholars on eschatological issues. I have not

4 Ibid., 99–100.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 100.

7 Ibid., 101.

8 *Ozervarli,* Attempts to revitalize *104*.

undertaken an exhaustive study, nor do I provide a comprehensive overview of their thoughts on the subject. Rather, this exploration seeks to clarify their multifaceted views about eschatological issues within this new trend of modern theology by examining a few key texts. The present paper explores their methods of including, analyzing, criticizing or circumventing the classical theological treatment of death and the life hereafter. What are the contributions of these modern theologians to the concept of resurrection and divine judgment, the portents prior to or accompanying these events, and the nature of the hereafter? To what extent did they agree or differ with traditional Islamic views on death and the afterlife? How did they relate their understanding of modern scientific findings to the religious truth about eschatological subjects? To what extent did they make use of natural phenomena and rational clarifications in this modern theological discourse?

1 A Bridge between Medieval and Modern Theology: Shāh Walī Allāh's Eschatology

Smith and Haddad note that Indo-Pakistani Muslim scholars emphasize a kind of Darwinian evolutionism as a vindication of Islamic ideas.[9] Their study however was limited to a scant analysis of the ideas of people like Abū l-Aʿlā al-Mawdūdī (d. 1399/1979) and the Aḥmadiyya modernist Mawlānā Muḥammad ʿAlī (d. 1371/1951). They did not dwell upon the ideas of other significant Indo-Pakistani theologians who seriously reinvestigated classical eschatological themes in the modern context.

Take, for example, the role of the great theologian Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762) in renewing religious concepts. His ideas serve as a bridge between medieval and modern developments.[10] As part of his philosophy of religion in general, Walī Allāh deemed eschatological issues in the Quran and *ḥadīth* as belonging to the realm of a metaphysical-psychological system, but he was not inclined to explain relevant statements allegorically.[11] Rather he argued that all topics related to the afterlife (such as the questioning in the grave, the weighing of one's deeds, the crossing of the Bridge, and the vision of God) can be understood by the human intellect.[12] His explanations were

9 Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding* 101.

10 Rafiabadi, *Saints and saviours* 134; for more about him, see Hermansen, Shāh Walī Allāh's theory; Baljon, *A mystical interpretation*; Baljon, *Religion and thought*.

11 Halepota, *Philosophy* 258.

12 Jalbani, *Teachings* 193.

mostly based on his psychological views of psychic states and their representations in mental images.[13]

Walī Allāh interpreted the day of judgment as a matter related to the nonmaterial life, which should be shaped according to the nature of the *ʿālam al-mithāl* (World of Similitudes).[14] Walī Allāh developed this doctrine, also known as the Realm of Images, which was in fact a product of medieval Muslim mysticism, as an attempt to rationalize certain dogmatic beliefs, particularly those of an eschatological nature. As an example of such rationalization, and to demonstrate that it did not begin in the eighteenth century, he cited al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). For example, al-Ghazālī explained the tradition about the "punishment in the grave" of a disbeliever being stung by ninety-nine serpents, each with seven heads, by stating that this number refers to the chief vices and their numerous subdivisions that destroy human happiness.[15] Through later Muslim theologians and mystics, such as Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shirāzī (d. 710/1311), and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640), this doctrine became an integral part of Sufi spiritual culture.[16]

Walī Allāh was of the view that there existed a "subtle vapor" in the human body, known as *nasma*. By employing the humoral theory (which was used by Greek, Roman, and Islamic physicians in treating the human body, and which was still used by European physicians until the nineteenth century), he argued that this subtle vapor was the cause of the essence of the four humors of the human body, i.e., blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. It was like a white fog that prevailed over the whole body and was responsible for its functioning.[17] In Walī Allāh's view, physicians agreed that as soon as this vapor was in the body, man was alive; but as soon as it was separated from it, he was dead. According to him this subtle vapor was the spirit. One of its qualities was that it could taste without a tongue and hear without the use of ears. When a man died, his *nasma* became very weak because the four humors did not exist anymore, but it did not completely disappear. Providence helped the vapor to gain strength until it was able to see, hear, and speak. The *nasma* would therefore serve as a steed for the real soul in the world to come.[18]

Walī Allāh maintained that the separation of the *nasma* from the body was the cause of death, but its connection with the soul remained intact. As the

13 Halepota, *Philosophy* 259.
14 Cf. Lawson, Ahmad Ahsa'i.
15 Rahman, Dream 168–9.
16 Ibid., 168–80.
17 Jalbani, *Teachings* 194.
18 Ibid., 194–5.

body was a vehicle for the *nasma* in this world, similarly the *nasma* would be the vehicle for the soul in the hereafter. Walī Allāh compared the condition of the *nasma* in this world to that of an expert writer with his fingers cut off, who could retain the faculty of writing. The *nasma* after man's death retained, with its airy essence, almost all the faculties of the head and heart.[19]

In Walī Allāh's view, in that world of symbols and images individual qualities would vanish and only the specific form would remain, as reflected by man's intellectual and imaginative faculties surviving through and in the *nasma*. The World of Similitude was a world full of knowledge, and a clear exposition of *ʿālam al-arwāḥ* (the World of Spirits). Also, sciences of the World of Similitude would be revealed to man and he himself would become a representative of the World of Similitudes. In this world, the re-gathering of bodies and the infusion of souls in them was not the creation of a new life, but rather the completion of worldly life; and the relation between them was like that of cause and effect. However, due to its great transformation, the body that would be given to the human being on the day of judgment would not be exactly the same as it was before. The state of the human being would appear as something between the material and the non-material.[20]

The stage following man's death was the *ʿālam al-barzakh* (World of the Grave). It resembled, in Walī Allāh's view, dreams during sleep, which were the reflection of man's thoughts and knowledge during the day. In sleep, man's sense faculties cease functioning and freely make their appearance. His feeling of pain in his dreams emanate from his thoughts, which appear to him in a particular form. The only difference between the world of dreams and that of the grave was that from the former one wakes up, while from the latter one will not rise until the day of judgment. Walī Allāh concluded, "a man overcome by fierceness and cruelty in this world will see in his grave a wild beast like a lion or a wolf scratching him with its claws. The miser will see a serpent or a scorpion biting or stinging him."[21] However, if his actions were good, he would see angels with beautiful faces, carrying silken clothes and musk in their hands.[22] Walī Allāh did not accept any metaphorical interpretations of these facts and stated that man would have twofold pain or pleasure in his grave. One part of this was his apprehension of his good or bad actions, and the other was that angels would be inspired to appear to him in some beautiful or ugly and awful form. All man's actions that were undertaken with full presence of mind were

19 Ibid., 196–7.
20 Ibid., 201–3.
21 Ibid., 197–8.
22 Ibid., 198.

preserved in his *nasma* and when his body decays after death, they will appear to him in their true colors.[23]

This explanation reminds us of the views of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) who affirmed the existence of a new realm between the spiritual and the physical after death, which he called *al-muthul al-muʿallaqa* (the Realm of "Suspended Images") or of *al-ashbāḥ al-mujarrada* ("Pure Figures"). In his view, the fully developed spiritual souls become pure lights, but those that have not fully developed through "illumination" and those pious souls who have faithfully followed the credal and practical prescriptions of religions will not rise to the status of pure spirits, but will ascend to the Realm of Suspended Images wherein they enjoy the quasi-physical delights of paradise. The vicious people, who are damned, will be assigned to the Realm of Pure Figures, but the figures they shall live with will be obnoxious and torturous.[24]

As for the divine *mīzān* (lit., the Balance) and the *ṣirāṭ* (the Bridge to paradise), Walī Allāh pointed out that all actions of man will be weighed in the Balance, and he will be made to pass over the Bridge. He described the Bridge as the straight path of the *sharīʿa* that will appear there in its material form. It was the sample of the rule or way of life placed in the nature of men; their differences in crossing this path will reflect their differences in following the rules of the *sharīʿa* in their lives. Those who followed the path of *sharīʿa* will pass the Bridge as fast as lightning. The Balance will appear in a form, which is not purely material, nor is it immaterial, but is a shape in between.[25]

Walī Allāh explained metaphorically some essential material concepts related to the hereafter. For instance, according to him the issue of *ḥisāb* (reckoning) refers to one of the manifestations of God's attribute of discernment, while the river of Kawthar (a fountain) given to the Prophet Muḥammad points to a manifestation of his guidance. Every prophet has his fountain, but that of the Prophet Muḥammad is the source of all of them. The reward of paradise is a manifestation of God's *jamālī* (amiable) attributes, while punishment in hell is a manifestation of His *jalālī* (majestic) attributes.[26]

Another important aspect was Walī Allāh's clarification of the mountain of *al-aʿrāf* (the heights), which he portrays as the in-between destination of persons who did not do any good, nor did they commit any evil acts. In Walī Allāh's thinking, the "inmates of al-Aʿrāf" will include those who did not receive

23 Ibid., 199–200.

24 Rahman, Dream 169–70. For more about Suhrawardī, see for example, Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes* 175–7; Cf. Walbridge, *The leaven*; Ohlander, *Sufism*.

25 Jalbani, *Teachings* 203–5.

26 Ibid., 205–6.

the message of God, and those living on the mountain-tops, who, because of their ignorance could not derive any benefit from the message of Islam, nor could they understand the Quran and its arguments. It also includes people who were deficient in reason, such as children, lunatics, imbeciles, fools, and "rustics." Walī Allāh gave the example of a black slave-woman, who when asked by the Prophet about God, had pointed to up to heaven; the Prophet had said explicitly that she was a believer. Those to whom the message of Islam had not been conveyed or explained properly, those whose doubts had not been removed, would be lodged in al-Aʿrāf as well.[27]

According to Walī Allāh's eschatological interpretations, man's progress did not end with his life in paradise; there was still a higher and nobler stage. After his long stay there, his *nasma* would become weak, and would continue to shape itself in various forms according to the requirements of the soul, until it attained its ultimate aim by eventually changing into the divine or the angelic soul.[28] Walī Allāh stressed that belief in the hereafter provided human beings with a clear-cut purpose in life and enabled them to endeavor to improve their present life and look forward to a pleasant state in the life hereafter.[29]

2 Indo-Pakistani Modernist Theology

2.1 *Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's Naturalism*

Walī Allāh paved the way for many subsequent Indo-Pakistani Muslim theologians. One of the most significant contributions to modern theological thinking was made by Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1306/1898), whose new interpretation of Islamic tenets was based on his understanding of the laws of nature. In his naturalist approach, Khān considered the soul immortal, stressing that it would not perish with the death of the body. In support of his theory, he used the materialistic doctrine that nothing perishes in the world. The quantity of matter remains unchanged, it is only its form that is subject to change.[30]

Khān did not present a systematic analysis of eschatological concepts. However, he stressed that man's happiness was dependent on his ability to ensure that his human faculty of "godliness" gained the upper hand over his faculty of "iniquity." In his view, in the hereafter the punishment for sins consists of the misery of the soul on the day of judgment. Due to his sins, the

27 Ibid., 206–8.

28 Ibid., 208–11.

29 Halepota, *Philosophy* 261.

30 Dar, *Religious thought* 221.

sinner will inflict wretchedness upon his soul, especially at the moment of death. Only the sin of *shirk* ("associationism," viz. the worship of other gods besides God) leads to everlasting misery that the soul can never be freed from.[31] Khān maintained that the human soul will live on after death as immaterial and separate from its original body. According to him, scientific observations had proven that the soul exists, even though we cannot grasp its inner reality. The human soul, unlike that of animals, was privileged to be "put under obligation." It was "unlimited" and "undetermined" in its actions; man could cause his soul to develop and be happy or decline and be miserable.[32]

Khān explained the Quranic references to *qiyāma* (resurrection) as a sign of the radical change of the individual human soul at the time of death, when it will be separated from its body and enter a new form. In this regard, Khān reinterpreted Quranic teachings on evolution against the background of the absence of belief in the existence of an immortal soul among the Arabs during the time of the revelation.[33] In other words, the Quran did not teach that the earthly body will rise again in the literal sense. But in order to impress the reality of reward and punishment upon the minds of "those Arabs," it had to appeal to their imagination by stressing the idea of such a bodily resurrection.[34]

In Khān's view, all eschatological events were beyond man's comprehension. The major objective of the relevant Quranic texts was only to urge men to good deeds and discourage them from evil acts by showing them the long-term consequences of their deeds. The verses on paradise and hell were formulated in figurative language so that human beings would imagine the highest form of eternal bliss and repose. Such language was designed to awaken man's desire to obey commands and respect divine prohibition. Khān understood all the physical descriptions of the hereafter as metaphor. For example, the "blowing of the trumpet" referred to the radical change of everything at the end of time, and the "book of deeds" or the "weighing of the deeds on the scales" was a metonym for God's justice.[35]

Khān argued that as the body was only the instrument of the soul, the subject of reward and punishment was the soul, not the body. At the time of death, the soul would acquire a certain kind of physical medium, which would be distinct from the present body, and at resurrection there would be no new life but a continuation of one's old life. The real purpose of the Quran's reference to

31 Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan* 209–10.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid 211.

35 Ibid.

the reality of resurrection was merely to refute the beliefs of those who denied the existence of the soul and identified life with life on this earth only. The relevant verses of the Quran specifically address those who disbelieve in a life after death; the Quran does not describe the resurrection as a fact, but rather as the kind of life that will come to be.[36]

Khān considered anyone who believes in the one God, even if he does not believe in Muḥammad, as not actually a *kāfir* (unbeliever), but a *muwaḥḥid* (unitarian believer). As for the status of non-Muslims in the hereafter, Khān quoted al-Ghazālī's view, that there would be three categories of unbelieving people: 1) those who never heard about Muḥammad and his message; 2) those who met Muslims and have a perfect knowledge of Islam; and 3) those who heard about Muḥammad and his message but insufficiently. People belonging to the first and third categories will find salvation in the hereafter.[37]

Regarding the nature of paradise, Khān refused to believe that the words "garden," "streams," "houses made of gold," "silver and pearl bricks," "rivulets of milk," "honey," "wine," "delicious fruit," "beautiful damsels," and so on, were to be taken literally; for in this case they would contradict the Quran and *ḥadīth*. Man can only understand the nature of things that he experiences through his senses; even the things he can conceive in his imagination must be based, ultimately, on what he has already seen. Khān maintained that it was impossible to express the reality of super-sensuous things in language, even in divine language. The words used in the Quran are all metaphorical, referring to the physiological states of happiness and unhappiness that man will experience in the life after death. Khān quoted one *ḥadīth* in which a man asked the Prophet Muḥammad whether there would be horses in paradise. He replied, "You will have a red turquoise horse and you will be free to ride anywhere you like." Another asked, "Will there be camels also?" He replied, "Yes, and everything else which you will desire to have." This *ḥadīth* does not mean that there will be horses and camels; the Prophet wanted to point out that it would be a place of perfect happiness, however a man might interpret the shape of that happiness.[38] *Ru'yat Allāh* (vision of God) in the hereafter has to be seen as the fundamental and highest blessing of paradise. Paradise should be understood metaphorically as referring to the ability to see the Holy Essence openly, without a veil; and such a "spiritual disclosure" transcends mere rational affirmation.[39]

36 Dar, *Religious thought* 222–3.

37 Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan* 212–3.

38 Dar, *Religious thought* 222–6.

39 Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan* 211.

2.2 *Afterlife between Science and Religion: Shiblī l-Nuʿmānī's Rationalist Theology*

The Indian revivalist historian Shiblī l-Nuʿmānī (d. 1332/1914) contributed to the discussions about the need for a modern theology as well. In his view, there is no conflict between science and religion, since they have nothing to do with each other as their subject matter and scope are different. All matters related to the creation, whether dealing with the components of water or the speed of light, belong to science and are of no concern to religion. Questions concerning the existence of God, life after death, or punishment and reward, however, should only be discussed in the domain of religion and are not to be touched by science. In his new theology, al-Nuʿmānī championed rational interpretations by the Muʿtazilīs and Muslim philosophers, and was later influenced by the mystical rationalism of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī.[40] He had been a close friend of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, but later set aside his ideas. He even harshly criticized Khān and his group as "third-rate" and "short-sighted" materialists.[41]

Al-Nuʿmānī was of the view that modern materialistic and naturalistic theories must be countered by mystical and philosophical contemplation of theological matters. For this reason, he argued that the issues of *kalām* had not really changed, and that any "part of the old *kalām* which is useless today was insufficient before also and will so remain always."[42] All theological issues concerning the affirmation of God, His unity, prophecy, and the Quran as the word of God, and the hereafter, were legitimate concerns; the rest was irrelevant.[43]

Al-Nuʿmānī was a severe critic of Ashʿarī theology which he described as "childish argumentations and unbounded speculations which have people believe in magic."[44] However, he excluded al-Ghazālī's theological thought by arguing that al-Ghazālī believed that "Ashʿarism is good for the common people."[45] Al-Nuʿmānī further argued that Islam is unique in its confirmation of the usual concept of reward and punishment in the hereafter as good for the common people. He strongly supported al-Ghazālī's view that reward and punishment are inalienable effects of good and bad deeds by saying that "hell is right inside you." Al-Nuʿmānī concluded "if you did not understand the meanings in this manner, then you did not get from the Quran anything except the

40 Murad, *Intellectual modernism* 5.
41 Ibid., 6.
42 Ibid., 14.
43 Ibid., 15.
44 Ibid., 21.
45 Ibid., 27.

crust, as the cattle get only the husk from the wheat."[46] In his mind, reward and punishment after death are in fact material expressions of spiritual things.[47]

Al-Nuʿmānī found in Rūmī's views a better and more convincing way of interpretation, and a clearer and more appealing presentation of faith. He preferred Rūmī's positive arguments on the question of resurrection and the imperishability of the soul. He was attracted by Rūmī's mystical interpretation of the plausibility of resurrection on the basis of the process of evolution in life, which al-Nuʿmānī saw as a Darwinian as well as a Quranic concept. According to this view, there is likely to come yet another, and better stage of life, in accordance with modern science that holds that matter and energy are indestructible. Body and soul will therefore only assume other forms.[48]

2.3 *Muḥammad Iqbāl's Reconstruction of Faith*

In his *Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam*, the well-known poet and thinker Muḥammad Iqbāl (d. 1357/1938) analyzed these ideas further. In his comment on the verse "and everyone of them will come to Him singly on the Day of Judgment" (Q 19:95),[49] Iqbāl argued that the passage must be understood as a clear insight into the Islamic theory of salvation. Whatever the final fate of man, it does not mean the loss of individuality. He maintained that man's "unceasing reward" is his gradual growth in self-possession, in uniqueness, and intensity of activity as an ego. Iqbāl interprets the *barzakh* stage in the Quranic terminology as some kind of suspense between death and resurrection. Resurrection is not based, as in Christianity, on the evidence of the actual resurrection of a historic person. Islam, in Iqbāl's mind, seems to take resurrection as a universal phenomenon of life.[50]

In Iqbāl's philosophy, even the scene of "universal destruction" preceding the day of judgment cannot affect the perfect calmness of a full-grown human ego.[51] Life offers a scope for ego-activity, while death is the first test of the synthetic activity of the ego. There are no pleasurable and painful acts after death; there are only acts that sustain and dissolve the ego.[52]

46 Ibid., 45–6.

47 Ibid., 48–9.

48 Ibid., 52–3.

49 Quranic verses quoted from the translation of Yusuf Ali are available at http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/index.htm.

50 Iqbāl, *The reconstruction* 92.

51 Ibid., 93.

52 Ibid., 95.

Iqbāl defined the state of *barzakh* as not merely a passive state of expectation, but as one in which the ego catches a glimpse of fresh aspects of reality, and prepares to adjust itself to these aspects. The ego must continue to struggle until it is able to gather itself, and win resurrection. The resurrection is not an external event, but a continuation of a life process within the ego and nothing but a kind of stock-taking of the ego's past achievements and its future possibilities.[53] Iqbāl was aware of the difference of opinions among Muslim philosophers and theologians on the re-emergence of man's former physical state in the afterlife. He was impressed by the views of Shāh Walī Allāh, whom he considered the last great theologian of Islam. Iqbāl liked about Walī Allāh's interpretations the sense that resurrection involves at least some kind of physical medium suitable to the ego's new environment (discussed above).[54]

Iqbāl claimed that Quranic teachings confirm that the ego's re-emergence will bring him "sharp sight" (Q 50:22) whereby it will clearly see the self it built as "fate fastened around his neck." He clearly stated that paradise and hell were states, not localities. According to him, the descriptions of the hereafter in the Quran were visual representations of an inner fact, i.e., of a human character. Hell, in the words of the Quran, is "God's kindled fire which mounts above the hearts" "(It is) the Fire of (the Wrath of) Allah kindled (to a blaze). The which doth mount (Right) to the Hearts:" (Q 104:6–7) – the painful realization of one's failure as a man. Heaven is the joy of triumph over the forces of disintegration. There is no such thing as eternal damnation in Islam. Iqbāl's view about the "eternity" of hell resembles the view of Ibn al-Qayyim (see below). In his view, the word *khulūd* (eternity), is explained by the Quran itself as only referring to a period of time (Q 78:23). Time cannot be wholly irrelevant to the development of personality. Hell as conceived in the Quran is not a pit of everlasting torture inflicted by a vengeful God; it is a corrective experience, which makes a hardened ego once more sensitive to the living breeze of Divine Grace. In Iqbāl's definition heaven is no holiday, as life is one and continuous:

> [M]an marches always onward to receive ever fresh illuminations from an Infinite Reality, which every moment appears in a new glory. And the recipient of Divine illumination is not merely a passive recipient. Every act of a free ego creates a new situation, and thus offers further opportunities of creative unfolding.[55]

53 Ibid., 96.
54 Ibid., 97.
55 Ibid., 98.

3 Death and Resurrection in Islamic Reformist Theology

3.1 *Al-Afghānī's Critique of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān*

Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1314/1897) was still living in India when the ideas of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān became widespread among highly-educated Muslims in that country. As a sharp reaction to Khān and his followers, he wrote a treatise in Persian under the title: *The Truth about the Neicheri* (*or Naturalists*) *Sect and an Explanation of the Neicheris*, which was later translated by his Egyptian student Muḥammad ʿAbduh under the name *An Answer to the Dahriyyīn* (*or Materialists*). Whatever the political concerns behind al-Afghānī's treatise, in the present study we are mainly interested in his religious evaluation of Khān's eschatological interpretations.[56]

Al-Afghānī did not present a systematic theological or philosophical interpretation of eschatological concepts in Islam, but deemed that Khān's ideas demolished the "pillars of the castle of man's happiness." Al-Afghānī considered belief in the day of judgment as one of the motivating forces driving human beings to become trustworthy and truthful in life. In al-Afghānī's view, Khān and his Neicheri group propagated the belief that there is no life after death and that

> man is like a plant that grows in the spring and dries up in the summer, returning to the soil. The happy man is [one] who attains in this world animal appetites and pleasures. Because of this false opinion they gave currency to misfortunes of perfidy, treachery, deception, and embezzlement; they exhorted men to mean and vicious acts.[57]

In al-Afghānī's mind, because of their denial of these facts the Neicheris had believed communism, and held that all desirable things should be shared among people.[58]

Al-Afghānī maintained that the appearance of materialists and naturalists had undermined the great nations of the past. Former Greek and Persian civilizations vanished when those doctrines spread among their people, and their greatness and glory completely disappeared.[59] Al-Afghānī claimed that the superiority and greatness of the Muslim community remained until the fourth

56 About al-Afghānī's philosophy, see Keddie, *An Islamic response*. Cf. Ali, Sayyid Jamaluddin Afghani.

57 Keddie, *An Islamic response* 148.

58 Ibid., 149.

59 Ibid., 154–7.

century when the Neicheris, or materialists, appeared among them. According to al-Afghānī, in Egypt, for instance, they appeared under the name of Bāṭiniyya or those who know the hidden. He refers here to the Muslim groups throughout Islamic history that advocated the esoteric meaning in the scriptures and the law. The term *bāṭinī* served as a pejorative name for the Ismaʿilis, especially by their opponents.[60] For al-Afghānī, they first created doubt in the Muslims about their beliefs. For a period of time, they strove, secretly, to corrupt the manners of Muslims till one of the followers of the well-known Bāṭiniyya sect publicly declared that

> at the time of the Resurrection there will be no duties incumbent upon mankind, neither external nor internal ones. The Resurrection consists of the rising of the True Redeemer, and I am the True Redeemer. After this let everyone do whatever he wants since obligations have been removed.[61]

Throughout his response, al-Afghānī did not mention Khān and his group directly by name. He despised them for "collaborating" with the British who were teaching their people slavery instead of freedom and putting obstacles before their progress. When living in Paris, in 1884, he started to mention them directly by name. He believed that the British had planted them in the country in order to destroy religious belief among Muslims. Aḥmad Khān hovered around the English in order to obtain some advantage for himself and his group. He called himself a Neicheri and naturalist and began to seduce the "frivolous young men" in India. By crying "Nature, Nature," he attempted to convince people that Europe had progressed in civilization, power, and strength by rejecting religion and explaining things in terms of nature. Oriental materialists, such as Khān, were not like materialists of Europe; for whoever abandons religion in Western countries retains the zeal to guard his people from the attacks of foreigners. Khān and his followers invited their people not only to reject religion, but also to disparage their fatherland and made their people consider foreign domination insignificant.[62] They drew their swords to cut the throats of Muslims, while weeping for them and crying: "we kill you only out of compassion and pity for you, and seeking to improve you and make your lives comfortable."[63]

60 See, for example, Walker, Bāṭiniyya; Halm, *Kosmologie*.

61 Keddie, *An Islamic response* 157. On this event see the discussion by Velji, Apocalyptic rhetoric, in the present publication.

62 Keddie, *An Islamic response* 175–8.

63 Ibid., 179.

3.2 *Muḥammad Abduh's Renewed Theology*

The Egyptian Mufti Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1323/1905) discussed eschatological issues in different places. In his formative years, he referred to four main Islamic interpretations of the state of the soul after death in his *Risālat al-wāridāt* (Treatise on thoughts that come to one's mind):[64] 1) the first group argued that the soul does not exist outside of the body, and will cease to exist after the body's death. 2) Another group believed that it will continue to exist and will remain in full possession of its faculties after its separation from the body. 3) The third group, the *ḥukamāʾ*, or philosophers, agreed with the previous group about the independent existence of the soul from the body, but they argued that the separation between the two is permanent. The soul remains dependent on God and finds its existence in *ʿālam al-taʿalluq wa-l-takhalluq*,[65] an Islamic theological term that refers to two aspects of the divine names: active and passive attributes of God. *Takhalluq* shows the multiplicity of the divine attributes as manifested in the phenomenal world, whereas the relationship between the active side and the passive one is called *taʿalluq*.[66] The relationship between God and the soul is "like the son of a king who desires to reach the rank (*martaba*) of his father but because of his inability he withdraws to some aspects in which his power becomes manifest."[67] Therefore, the more the soul progresses intellectually and morally, the more it will be rewarded. Its failure to fulfill its role leads to punishment and pain.[68] 4) The Sufis, as the fourth group, understand the fate of the soul after death in a way similar to that of the philosophers, but they couched their understanding in Sufi terminology. The philosophers believed that the status of the soul is determined by its rational and moral abilities, but in the Sufi terms, the status of the soul depends on its progress on the mystical path that leads toward mystical union with its creator.[69]

According to Scharbrodt, although ʿAbduh does not explicitly identify himself with any of these groups and their respective beliefs, he certainly follows a metaphorical understanding of individual eschatology as developed by philosophers and mystics. He understood Quranic descriptions of the afterlife

64 There are various discussions about the ascription of the treatise to Muḥammad ʿAbduh. Some authors argue that it was not his work because it covered very complex theological issues that ʿAbduh would not have been familiar with at the time (he was very young and had not yet received his diploma from al-Azhar). See Scharbrodt, The Salafiyya and Sufism 95–7.

65 Ibid., 108.

66 Sawai, *The divine names* 15–6.

67 Scharbrodt, The Salafiyya and Sufism 108.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

symbolically – whether in rational terms like those used by the philosophers or in spiritual terms used by the mystics. In his view, the fate of the soul in the afterlife depends on its spiritual and intellectual progress. Reward and punishment are characterized as the consequence of the degree of perfection the soul achieves.[70]

In fact, ʿAbduh was cautious about raising these earlier discussions in his Quranic exegesis entitled *al-Manār* or in his theological writings. In his *Risālat al-tawḥīd* (Treatise of unity), ʿAbduh repeated the same typology, but did not give preference to any of them. Instead, he developed other views on the belief in the afterlife as part of man's need of a prophetic mission. In addition, he stressed that among the nations, both ancient and modern, there are many competing ideas about the return of the soul. These schools of thought differ with regard to the nature of future bliss and torment, the delight of the life beyond, and how to achieve happiness or avert eternal punishment. For him, the human soul is immortal and lives on after its separation from the body; and the final death is a kind of womb of hiddenness.[71] ʿAbduh went beyond the old theological "disputatious" territory "where many thoughts and ideas jostle together."[72] According to him, human minds are not always able to know God or the life to come by themselves. Though they share a common sense of submission to a power higher than their own and most people feel that there is another realm beyond this one, heathenism has disordered their thoughts and diverted them from the path of blessedness. A few people, those to whom God has given perfect reason and the light of perception despite their not having the boon of prophetic guidance and example, will reach a proper understanding of the nature of the life to come.[73]

Moreover, ʿAbduh claimed that the human universal sense of the other world was not a mental aberration. In his view, intelligence and intuition ensure that this life-span is not the sum total of man's existence, since "man takes off this body of flesh, as he does his clothes, and is alive still in another guise, though its nature be beyond our ken."[74]

ʿAbduh maintained that there are

> intuitive feelings [that] stimulate the spirits of men to search into this eternal world and to anticipate how it will be when it is reached, and

70 Ibid., 110.

71 ʿAbduh, *Theology of unity* 81–2. Cf. Vatikiotis, Muḥammad ʿAbduh 65.

72 ʿAbduh, *Theology of unity* 81.

73 Ibid., 74.

74 Ibid., 82.

> how too they are to come to it. The answer, both as to what and wither, is obscure and illusive. We are conscious of inadequacy in the development of our minds in face of the issues of this brief existence here. They do not suffice to give us the right directions or make good of our need for teaching and guidance. We must appeal to the gathered judgment of ages in assessing our thoughts and correcting our views. . . . We are still in unresolved certainty about this earthly life, yearning for a quiet assurance still far to seek.[75]

Human beings have no power whereby they are able to understand the hidden store of fate. Rational study or intuition could hardly determine the link between the two worlds, in ʿAbduh's view. The two worlds mingle within us alone. More investigation of "temporal sciences cannot attain to assurance about the realities of the future realm."[76]

In ʿAbduh's thinking, prophets were sent by God to tell people about their fate and what they should do in order to reach a good fate. Some people might ask why God did not place this knowledge or "supernatural mercy" in men as an instinctive capacity to guide them to action and to the path leading to the goal in the life beyond. In answer, ʿAbduh stated that such questions come from "intellectual pretension" and the "ignorance" of human nature. He argued that,

> not everybody is ready and able to cope naturally with every condition, but needs study and evidence as a basis on which he can deal with existence. Were man to operate in this instinctive way in respect of his needs, he would be like animals not like himself. Indeed, he would become a sort of animal, or even like the ant and the bee, or one of the angels who are not of this world of ours.[77]

3.3 *Rashīd Riḍā's Puritan Interpretation of Eschatology*

In various places in his reformist journal *al-Manār*, the Syrio-Egyptian reformist Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1354/1935) touched upon different issues related to the afterlife. Many readers of his journal raised questions in this regard, which he published in his *fatwā* section. One of the early examples was a question from Cairo concerning al-Ghazālī's section on the afterlife in his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (*The Revitalization of the Religious Sciences*). Were issues like the questioning and punishment by two angels in the grave, the bridge (*al-ṣirāṭ*)

75 Ibid., 83.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid., 85.

spanning hell, and intercession (*shafāʿa*) in the hereafter, considered proven by authentic traditions? If a Muslim does not believe in these things, would he be considered an unbeliever? In his answer, Riḍā noted that al-Ghazālī mentioned these concepts from an Ashʿarī point of view, but he did not declare that those who disagreed with this doctrine were unbelievers. In other works, al-Ghazālī was of the opinion that the faith of a believer would not be affected, even if he lived and died without knowing about such controversial issues in theology. Riḍā urged Muslims not to investigate the contents of these hidden matters deeply, but to believe only in what had been proven by definitive or decisive (*qaṭʿī*) texts.[78] Riḍā also discouraged his readers from seeking theological clarifications about far-fetched questions, such as the abode of souls after death. The same held true for the location of paradise and hell, which Riḍā evaluated as real things, whose locations were not known.[79]

Despite his faith in the issue of *ʿadhāb al-qabr* (the torments of the grave), Riḍā did not give it any priority from a theological point of view. Man should leave these issues to God's knowledge.[80] One should believe in the authentic traditions reported in this regard, but the reality of the questioning by the angels was not known. Those who interpret these traditions metaphorically or even deny them, were not to be regarded as unbelievers.[81] Riḍā maintained that one should follow the *salafī* path by believing in the conditions of the hereafter without delving into philosophical issues: "there is nothing more despicable than disputations about the conditions of the hereafter which cannot be supported by reason or sense."[82] It sufficed Riḍā to cite al-Ghazālī's comparison of those experiencing the punishments of the grave with the state of a sleeper who feels pain or a snake's bite in his dream, while other people around him do not see any effect of pain on him.[83]

Another interesting point arose with regard to the process of the human body decaying. When its constituent parts become mixed with other elements, and plants and trees absorb its substances, then other people come and eat such trees and plants, how will all of these elements be resurrected? In Riḍā's view, religion proves that there shall be life after death. People, composed of body and soul, will also be people in their second life, which is an advanced form of life for good people but a worse form of life for bad people. The bodily

78 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 5 (1903), 911–2. See also 13 (1910), 104; 28 (1927), 504–7; 32 (1932), 268–89.

79 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 10 (1907), 442–3. See also 19 (1916), 282; 30 (1929), 185–92.

80 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 5 (1903), 945–6.

81 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 6 (1903), 671.

82 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 8/7 (1905), 256–7.

83 See ʿAbduh and Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār* xi, 191–3.

and biological substances of man change regularly during his lifetime, while he remains the same in his morals and behavior. In that sense, the substance of a body during its second life in the hereafter will be the same as it was in its first life. To say that all substances that enter the human body will be resurrected as they were during the first life was, according to Riḍā, a form of futile and impossible philosophical reasoning or speculation. If it were true, the shape of each resurrected human body would appear on the day of resurrection in gigantic measures. In his view, the next life would not be on earth, because it was indicated in the Quran that "One day the earth will be changed to a different earth, and so will be the heavens" (Q 14:48). The world will be destroyed when the earth hits another cosmic body and all planets are dispersed and return to nebula form (Q 56:4–6; 82:1–2). The last resurrection will take place on another, larger planet or world; and from there the eternal souls will take their new substances.[84]

In his journal, Riḍā adopted Ibn al-Qayyim's view regarding the duration of the hellfire. Ibn al-Qayyim was of the view that the fire does not function as retribution, according to the classical doctrine; rather it serves a therapeutic function, to cleanse people of their sins, even the sins of unbelief (*kufr*) and associationism (*shirk*). According to him, hell would be of no profit to God because He would not gain anything from punishing human beings. Therefore, the eternal punishment of the wretched would not increase the blessedness of God's beloved, and certainly would be of no benefit to those who suffered it.[85]

When a group of Riḍā's readers blamed him for his defense of Ibn al-Qayyim's views, he strongly argued that there was no consensus among Muslim theologians regarding the perpetuity of hellfire. Riḍā stated that Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned all theological opinions without holding any of them as definite, rather he ascribed all knowledge of this issue to God Himself. Riḍā maintained that he did not discuss anything secret and all books presenting the different views on this issue were available to everyone. As for the verse "Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else" (Q 4:48, 116), Riḍā stated that this confirms that the punishment of unbelievers is self-evident and inevitable, but it does not indicate its endlessness.

84 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 7 (1904), 54–6. For more about *al-Manār*'s analysis of this issue, see *al-Manār* 11 (1908), 448–51.

85 Ibn al-Qayyim depended on reports that cast doubt on the eternity of punishment in the hellfire. One example was a report from the Prophet's Companion Abū Hurayra conveying a message similar to that of 'Umar: "There will come to Hell a day when no one will remain in it," Hoover, Islamic universalism 183. See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ*. Cf. Abrahamov, The creation and duration 87–102; Perlmann, Ibn Qayyim 330–7.

He argued that profound research or investigation into these issues was not a threat to the belief of Muslims. Riḍā criticized Muslim preachers and traditional scholars who disseminated weak and inauthentic traditions related to the hereafter among common Muslims, such as one indicating that God would save six thousand persons from hellfire every night during the month of Ramadan. Those preachers usually presented such issues as fundamentals of the faith. Some would even go further by claiming that the number of saved people during Ramadan was larger than the number of Muslim inhabitants on earth, especially during the time of the Prophet. By means of such discussions, Riḍā did not intend to address "atheists," but his aim was to clarify such issues in the minds "Muslim doubters" who still believed that the world had an almighty, forgiving and compassionate God.[86]

An Englishman once asked Riḍā: "Will it be suitable for God, the Greatest, to punish the weak human being for committing sins which are actually the essence of his fragility?" In his answer, Riḍā made it clear that unbelief and the rejection of God's bounty on humans by committing sins was contrary to His laws and would damage one's inherent consciousness and contaminate his soul. Punishment in the afterlife would therefore be a natural effect of man's corruption on earth, just as any disease is a natural result of man's disobedience of the doctor's advice and health instructions. In that sense, the reason for punishment is an interior matter emanating from man's own acts.[87]

Riḍā did not reject entirely the signs preceding the day of judgment that were reported in authentic prophetic traditions. However, he interpreted some of these events according to the spirit of his age. He explained the appearance of *dajjālūn* (or imposters) by claiming prophecy as one of these signs that had already happened, as in the cases of the Bahā'iyya and Aḥmadiyya. The Prophet's foretelling about the shrinking of time (*taqārub al-zamān*) was another sign that was observed in his time in the form of modern means of transport, such as trains, cars, and planes. Likewise, the prophetic report about the increase in killing might refer to the Turkish aggression on the Arabs and the military machinery that killed more than ten million people during World War I. Regarding the sign of some people boasting about their ability to construct tall buildings, Riḍā asserted that this had already occurred in the shape of modern skyscrapers during the early twentieth century.[88] The same held true for the conversation between the dwellers of paradise and hellfire

86 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 22 (1921), 315–20. See also 22 (1921), 379–89 and 553–60. Riḍā re-evaluated the same issue in his Quran exegesis, see 'Abduh and Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār* viii, 58–86.

87 'Abduh and Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār* xi, 262–3.

88 Ibid., ix, 401–3.

(Q 7:44), which was supported by modern knowledge in Riḍā's view. He argued that the meaning of the verse might have been strange for early Muslims, but in the early twentieth century telecommunications prove that people from remote distances can communicate by telephone and telegraph. At the time of writing his Quranic exegesis Riḍā had also been told that people in the West were about to invent audio-visual instruments for the same purpose.[89]

Nevertheless, Riḍā maintained that the majority of traditions pointing to the signs of the hereafter were reports of meaning only; there was no agreement among the narrators on their literal wording. In his evaluation, throughout Islamic history many people, such as the *zanādiqa* (atheists or heretics) and the Umayyad and ʿAbbasid supporters of racial and social solidarity (*ahl al-ʿaṣabiyya*), had fabricated many of these traditions.[90] However, Riḍā did not doubt the core of authenticity of such traditions regarding the coming of the Dajjāl (or Antichrist), but he was skeptical about the details mentioned in these traditions. He believed that these details were nothing but interpolations of Israelite origin.[91]

In 1904 and in 1924 Riḍā received questions from two readers in Egypt concerning an anonymous nineteenth-century eschatological document (which is still circulating among some Muslims on the Internet nowadays) reported to have been the dream of a certain *shaykh* Aḥmad, a caretaker of the Prophet Muḥammad's tomb in Medina.[92] This *shaykh* Aḥmad claimed to have been told by the Prophet that "the Day of Judgment was at hand; it was his interlocutor's duty to spread the word. Various blessings would accrue to those who copied the message; damnation would befall all who chose to ignore it."[93] Riḍā saw the document for the first time among his father's papers, in Syria, when he was a child learning to read and write. Initially he was interested in it and believed in its authenticity. Later, Riḍā described this "will" of *shaykh* Aḥmad as a foolish lie, which naive common people would easily believe. The inventor of

89 Ibid., viii, 374–5.

90 Ibid., viii, 418–20.

91 Ibid., viii, 403–13. About the *isrāʾīliyāt*, see for example, Schützinger, *Ursprung*; Albayrak, *Qur'anic narrative*; Albayrak, Isrāʾīliyyāt 39–65; Nettler, Early Islam 1–14.

92 See, for example, http://www.bdr130.net/vb/t792318.html; http://www.muslmh.com/vb/t148485.html; http://www.jarash-uni.com/vb/forum4/thread1281.html; cf. http://www.qaradawi.net/site/topics/printArticle.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=6158&version=1&template_id=232&parent_id=17; http://www.binbaz.org.sa/mat/17886.

93 Katz, Shaykh Aḥmad's dream 157–80. In his advice to the Dutch government, C.S. Hurgronje mentioned this will, which Indonesian pilgrims carried back home to the archipelago. He published his Dutch translation in *De Indische Gids* (July 1884). C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Adviezen* 3, 1902.

this document was from the common people, as the language was archaic and silly. Those who fabricated this continue to use the name of *shaykh* Aḥmad, as if he were the "eternal" caretaker of the Prophet's tomb without regard to the change of time and governments. Some visitors to Medina ask about this *shaykh*, but do not find anyone by this name.[94]

3.4 *Al-Qaraḍāwī's Popularization of Eschatology for Common Muslims*

In his well-known television program *al-Sharīʿa wa-l-ḥayāt* (Sharīʿa and life) on Al-Jazeera, the Egyptian Muslim reformist Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1345/1926) has popularized the events related to the day of judgment. He agrees that the destruction of the world at the end of life will challenge all technological discoveries in modern time. He accepts minor and major signs of the Hour, and compares the resurrection of the body with the medical achievements of cloning. Medical and biological scientists are now able to clone new bodies from a tiny cell. The *ʿajab al-dhanab* (incorruptible coccyges or a small bone at the end of the spine), mentioned in some traditions, might refer to a cell, like those used in the process of cloning, which is the origin of this new life. In his opinion, the way of resurrection is beyond the perception of human beings; it is like electricity, which nobody sees, though its results are perceptible everywhere. The location of resurrection will be in a new world and under a new sky. Al-Qaraḍāwī does not reject the phenomenon mentioned in the traditions regarding the day of resurrection. For example, he asserts that everyone will read the roll of his deeds recorded by the "divine registration pen" or, also in his words, that taken by the "divine candid camera" that records all acts and sayings in audiovisual form.[95] This is exactly what classical theologians and philosophers meant by their views that man would not find his deeds, which perish, in the afterlife, but he will find their "pictures." The Quranic phrase "Read thine (own) record" (Q 17:14) would mean, in al-Qaraḍāwī's interpretation: Look at the recorded "tape" or the "pictures" of your acts. Therefore, early Muslim theologians claimed that the book would be read by everyone, including illiterate people; all people would thus watch their acts and rehearse their own sayings. Al-Qaraḍāwī described the *mīzān* (Scale) as a thermometer that will measure one's deeds like the temperature of water and air is measured, or as a counter measures electricity or air pressure.[96]

Like Riḍā, al-Qaraḍāwī accepted Ibn al-Qayyim's view on the eternity of hell. In al-Qaraḍāwī's understanding, Ibn al-Qayyim's view could be the most

94 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 7 (1904), 614–5; 25 (1924), 416–20.

95 Al-Qaraḍāwī, Yawm al-ḥisāb.

96 Ibid.

excellent answer to the philosophical "allegations" made by atheists and materialists against God's mercy. In the end, the perishing of hell is something related to God's will.[97]

In al-Qaraḍāwī's mind, people in the modern age might see the minor signs preceding the hereafter in the changing social and economic situation of the world. For example, it was reported in some prophetic traditions that the Hour will approach when markets will draw closer toward each other (*taqārub al-aswāq*). Al-Qaraḍāwī argues that Muslims in the past might not have been aware of such things, but they did not witness what we do nowadays. In the present age, people can see the interrelatedness of markets clearly; London, Hong Kong and New York are not physically close, but are tied through the virtual world of the Internet.[98]

As for the major signs of the Hour, al-Qaraḍāwī accepts the theory of the Indian Muslim scholar Mawlānā Abū l-Kalām Āzād (d. 1377/1958) who suggested that the figure of Dhū l-Qarnayn mentioned in the Quran was Cyrus the Great (d. 530 BCE) and that Gog and Magog were the Mongols who attacked the Persian and Indian civilizations, and then attempted to destroy the Muslim rule of Baghdad and Central Asia.[99] Meanwhile, al-Qaraḍāwī maintains a common Muslim belief that the Dajjāl (Antichrist) will appear in person and be killed by Jesus. Moreover, he rejects the metaphorical interpretation of the Muslim convert Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss) that the Antichrist was actually a reference to Western civilization.[100] Al-Qaraḍāwī was of the view that everyone will be addressed in his grave and on the day of judgment in the language they could understand, and not only in Arabic as some argued.[101] As for those living in remote areas who did not receive the message of Islam or who received it only in a distorted way, they would all be saved in the afterlife.[102]

3.5 *Rational Mysticism: The Case of Said Nursi*

In the tenth word of *Risale-i Nur* (Treatise of light), the outstanding Turkish scholar Said Nursi (d. 1379/1960) elucidated what he considered the "sacred supreme evidences" of the resurrection of the dead as related to the existence and unity of God, the function of prophethood, the importance of man, and

97 Al-Qaraḍāwī, ʿAlāmāt al-sāʿa.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid., Cf. Nadwi, *Faith*.

100 Al-Qaraḍāwī, ʿAlāmāt al-sāʿa, see Asad's chapter on the Dajjāl in *Road* 282–311.

101 Al-Qaraḍāwī, al-Īmān.

102 Ibid.

the necessity of the Eternal Creator of this transitory world.[103] A full analysis of Nursi's ideas in this regard falls outside the scope of the present study, but a few examples of his views will suffice to place him in the context of the new *kalām* movement.

In his lengthy analysis, Nursi used metaphors, comparisons, and stories in simple and common language and a straightforward style in order to facilitate comprehension and to show what he saw as rationality, and the coherence of the truths of Islam: "the meaning of the stories is contained in the truths that conclude them; each story is like an allusion pointing to its concluding truth. Therefore, they are not mere fictitious tales, but veritable truths."[104]

Nursi based his arguments of such proofs on the meaning of certain of the divine beautiful names. In addition, he confirmed that belief in the hereafter is essential for human social life and brings numerous comprehensive spiritual benefits. For example, children, who comprise one fourth of the human race, in his view could endure an awesome and tragic death by ensuring them that their lost beloveds exist in paradise after death. With this idea, they gain spiritual strength in their weak and delicate bodies, and find hope that permits them to live joyfully, despite their vulnerable spiritual disposition. By thinking of paradise, the child might say, for example, "My little brother or friend has died and become a bird in paradise. He is playing there, and leading a life finer than ours." Otherwise, the death of children and adults all around them would negatively affect their inner faculties – spirit, heart, and intellect – and they would either be destroyed or become like wretched animals.[105] The belief in the resurrection also benefits old people, who might find some consolation, tranquility, and comfort while experiencing the painful and awesome despair that arises from the anticipation of death and separation. The same holds true for young men, who can restrain their turbulent feelings and tempestuous souls and passions from committing transgression, oppression, and destruction; otherwise they would bring humanity down to a lowly and bestial state.[106]

Nursi deduced his ultimate faith in the resurrection from the "light" of the prophethood of Muḥammad and the Quran. If they were to depart from the cosmos and vanish, the cosmos would "die" and "lose its sanity, and the globe would lose its sense and its head. Its dizzy, uncomprehending head would collide with a planet, and the end of the world would result."[107]

103 Nursi, *From the Risale-i Nur* i, 59–132.

104 Ibid., i, 59.

105 Ibid., i, 109–10.

106 Ibid., i, 110–1.

107 Ibid., i, 123.

Moreover, Nursi argued that the reality of resurrection emanated from the divine beautiful names. For instance, the hereafter, as a manifestation of the names *al-Ḥakīm* (Wise) and *al-ʿĀdil* (Just) was the gate to God's "wisdom and justice." According to this view, man cannot experience the true essence of His

> justice in this transient world; it is for this reason that matters are postponed for a supreme tribunal. For true justice requires that man, this apparently petty creature, should be rewarded and punished, not in accordance with his pettiness, but in accordance with the magnitude of his crime, the importance of his nature and the greatness of his function. Since this passing and transient world is far from manifesting such wisdom and justice for man, who is created for eternity, of necessity there will be an eternal hell and everlasting Paradise.[108]

In one of his comparisons, Nursi maintains that life resembles a flower, which for a short time smiles and looks at us, and then hides behind the veil of annihilation. It departs like a word leaving your mouth. By entrusting thousands of its fellows to men's ears, the word leaves behind meanings in men's minds. The flower, too, expresses its meaning and thus fulfills its function, and departs. But it departs and leaves its apparent form in the memory of everything that sees it, its inner essence in every seed. It is as if each memory and seed were a camera to record the adornment of the flower, or a means for its perpetuation. If such be the case with an object at the simplest level of life, it can be readily understood that man, the highest form of life and the possessor of an eternal soul, is closely tied to eternity.[109] In Nursi's understanding, there is no truer report, no firmer claim, no more apparent truth in the whole world than the reality of the afterlife: "the world is without doubt a field, and the resurrection a threshing-floor, a harvest. Paradise and hell are each storehouses for the grain."[110]

Nursi made another interesting comparison between the state of affairs in the hereafter and circumstances that have been formed and arranged by way of imitation and representation. Brief gatherings and dispersions are arranged in this life at great expense merely for the sake of taking pictures that can be shown in the cinema in the hereafter. So too, one of the reasons for our passage through individual and social life in this world, for a brief time, is to enable pictures to be taken and images formed, to enable the result of our deeds to be

108 Ibid., i, 87.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid., i, 95.

registered and recorded, to be displayed on a day of accounting, and be shown at a vast gathering, to yield the fruit of supreme happiness. Nursi deduced this image and meaning from the Prophet's saying: "This world is the tillage for the hereafter."[111]

Finally, Nursi concluded that "the hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets" have unanimously reported, partly on the basis of direct vision and partly on the basis of absolute certainty, that the hereafter exists and that all beings will be taken to the hereafter as the Creator has firmly promised. Similarly, "the one hundred and twenty-four million saints" who confirm the reports of the prophets through unveiling and witnessing give testimony to the existence of the hereafter in the form of certain knowledge, and also bear testimony to the existence of the hereafter.[112]

4 Eschatology in Neo-Modernist Thinking

4.1 *Fazlur Rahman and Quranic Ethics*

Fazlur Rahman (d. 1408/1988) adopted a philosophy similar to his Indo-Pakistani predecessors. In his view, the Quran's underlying picture of the joy of paradise and the distress of hell reveals that there will come an hour (*sāʿa*) when every human being will be shaken into a unique self-awareness of his own deeds by starkly facing "his doings, not-doings and misdoings and accept the judgment upon them."[113] Fazlur Rahman noted that the Quranic concept of the end of life provides the vision necessary to drive one to *taqwā* (piety).[114]

Fazlur Rahman argued that the Quran refers to *al-ākhira* (the end) as the moment of truth (Q 79:34–5), when everybody will find his deepest self, fully excavated from the debris of extrinsic and immediate concerns.[115] The Quran's use of the term "weighing" was to be understood as sarcastic, as it addressed Meccan merchants that all deeds in the hereafter shall be "weighed," not in gold, silver or any other trade commodity. Fazlur Rahman blamed the Muʿtazilīs for their literal interpretation of this "weighing" and their development of a strict *quid pro quo* theory of retribution. Instead of accepting God's infinite mercy as

111 Ibid., i, 99.

112 Ibid., i, 131.

113 Rahman, *Major themes* 106.

114 Berry, *Islam and modernity* 64.

115 Rahman, *Major themes* 106.

real, they did grave violence to religion by trying to get around this and explain it away.[116]

Fazlur Rahman pointed out that the Quranic statement about the record of deeds, which will speak [and] will never be denied by their actors (Q 23:62), is an indication that what is in people's minds will be public such that people will not be able to hide their thoughts. The speaking of one's organs (Q 41:19–24) confirms that in a situation where one's mind becomes transparently public one's physical organs even begin to bear witness against oneself. Fazlur Rahman understood that the Quran required man to reach this state of mind and transparency of his heart in the course of this life, if he were to achieve success and not burn in hell.[117]

He pointed to the significance of the fact that the earth shall be given as an inheritance to those dwelling in the garden. The earth will not be destroyed, but transformed with a view to creating new forms of life and new levels of being.[118] Fazlur Rahman believed that the Quran makes it clear that the effect of punishment in hell is dependent upon the sensitivity of the guilty and therefore involves conscience. He argued that punishment is basically moral or spiritual, but the Quran, unlike Muslim philosophers, does not recognize a hereafter that will be peopled by disembodied souls. In philosophy and Sufism the term *nafs* came to mean soul as a substance separate from the body, but in the Quran it mostly means "himself," "herself," "themselves" or "inner person." Although the Quran does not affirm any purely spiritual heaven or hell, and the subject of reward and punishment is a person, its vivid portrayals of a blazing hell and garden are meant to convey these effects as real spiritual-physical feelings.[119] Fazlur Rahman claimed, however, that one has to consider the spiritual aspect of punishment and reward in the hereafter as primary. God's pleasure (*riḍwān*) will be the greatest success, while disbelievers and evildoers will earn His displeasure and alienation (*sakhṭ*) as their greatest punishment.[120] "The central endeavor of the Quran," Rahman wrote, "is for man to develop this keen insight here and now, when there is opportunity for action and progress for at the Hour of Judgment it will be too late to remedy the state of affairs; there one will be reaping, not sowing or nurturing."[121]

116 Ibid., 109.
117 Ibid., 109–10.
118 Berry, *Islam and modernity* 65.
119 Ibid., 112.
120 Ibid., 113.
121 Ibid., 120.

In their definition of reward and punishment in the hereafter as a continuation of the status of the human ego, Iqbāl and Fazlur Rahman indirectly reiterated the views of the famous Sufi Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), who maintained that the hereafter will be created eternally on the pattern of this world. The hereafter requires the creation of a world from this world but it will be sensible (not merely mental). In Ibn ʿArabī's words, by the mere existence of an idea, or imaginative impulse (*hamm*), of a violation, desire or appetite, all this shall become sensible.[122]

4.2 *Ḥasan Ḥanafī's Anthropological Understanding of Theology*

In his voluminous work *Min al-ʿaqīda ilā l-thawra* (From dogma to revolution), the Egyptian philosopher Ḥasan Ḥanafī (b. 1353/1935) described prophecy as the past and the evolution of humanity as part of history, whereas the hereafter represented its future.[123] Ḥanafī's point of departure for his philosophical analysis was that in the past such eschatological issues were dependent on imagination. He was, first of all, skeptical that the concept of *al-mubashsharūn bi-l-janna* (those who were given the glad tiding of entering paradise) might contradict this law.[124] Likewise, Ḥanafī criticized the concept of the *shafāʿa* (intercession). All reports relating that some believers will enter paradise without any judgment were in his view part of the "folklore fantasy" about heroism and were a response to the need of simple folk for a savior. The Prophet appeared in such reports as "a nation leader, a sheikh of a clan or the head of a community."[125] Intercession in that sense would make believers lax, believing they could "gain without effort," and this would therefore eliminate repentance (*tawba*) and man's motivation to save himself by means of own deeds in this life and by learning from trial and error.[126] Ḥanafī compared intercession in the hereafter with the idea of the Jews as the chosen people, and the doctrine of Jesus bearing the sins of believers.[127]

Ḥanafī defined the belief in death on three levels: 1) on the divine level as part of human belief in God's destiny, and an indication of the end of one's age on earth, 2) on the natural level by subjecting death to science, and 3) on the human level it defines death as the opposite of life and is part of the soul

122 Rahman, Dream 171.
123 Ḥanafī, *Min al-ʿaqīda* iv, 321.
124 Ibid., iv, 404–7.
125 Ibid., iv, 313–4.
126 Ibid., iv, 419.
127 Ibid., iv, 420.

abandoning the human body and taking another destination.[128] Ḥanafī criticized the classical theological representations of the angel of death, ʿAzrāʾīl, and his assistants taking the souls of those destined to die. In Ḥanafī's view, its personification is a suitable poetic image expressing man's anxiety about death; this was seen as more effective than merely putting it in a scientific description or a rational theorization of the event of death.[129] He also stated that theological discussions related to the interval of life in one's grave after death before resurrection, such as the return of souls to bodies afterward and the questioning of (dis)believers by the two angels, were beyond the arena of theological sciences and he criticized them as "folklore fantasy." Ḥanafī argued that those elements were probably remnants of ancient beliefs regarding life in the grave, as in the case of the pyramids, which were dwellings for dead bodies waiting for the return of their souls. They may also have resulted from a strong desire to defeat the idea of death and reduce the pain in the grave, while keeping the memory of the dead in the mind of his beloved.[130]

In Ḥanafī's understanding such beliefs were based on "weak traditions" which were not included in the earliest theological works. They were inserted in later theological books under a separate subject during times of social and cultural decay. The afterlife emerged as compensation for this life; and the focus came to be on the victory of soul after the defeat of the body and on a happy future instead of an agonizing present. Ḥanafī claimed that these reports were not *mutawātir* and did not offer any rational or theoretical certainty.[131] He understood that the logic behind such doctrines was the strength of self-censorship and fear of God, but "folklore fantasy" reduced the angels to a kind of police interrogation and torture like that of an intelligence service. Ḥanafī noted that the two angels, who will appear in the grave after death, are references to particular meanings and these were later personified in the figures of Munkar and Nakīr.[132] Pain in the grave after death was part of the "folklore imagination of darkness, silent and stagnant air, rotten smell, loneliness, isolation and cheerlessness. It expresses a real human experience in the present life which he overthrows upon the unseen world."[133]

Ḥanafī's tone is at times sarcastic about the narratives reported about the state of the dead in the grave. For example, in his discussion of the tradition

128 Ibid., iv, 428.
129 Ibid., iv, 437–40.
130 Ibid., iv, 440–61.
131 Ibid., iv, 461–2.
132 Ibid., iv, 463–5.
133 Ibid., iv, 477.

that the ground sympathized with Fāṭima, the mother of ʿAlī, because the Prophet was reported to have put his shirt on her body after her burial in order that the hellfire not touch her, Ḥanafī ironically inquired:

> Would this shirt remain till the Day of Resurrection? What is the intercession of such a shirt? [This is] like a policeman who put his badge on the wall and went away, while his soldiers were standing in front of it with no movement. It [the badge] would appear as an alternative and symbol of him in order to keep the order in his absence. Why Fāṭima, the mother of ʿAlī, and not Fāṭima his wife, or ʿAlī himself or his children?![134]

Ḥanafī described the metaphysical supposition of physical resurrection as based on the identity of the human being and his relation to the world. The human being is the microcosm, while the world appears as the macrocosm. The destruction and revival of this "tiny world," represented in the death of man, is related to the destruction of the larger world. Once the reconstruction of the larger world happens, the second individual state of human resurrection follows.[135] Ḥanafī claimed that the scenes of resurrection in theological works appear to be dynamic in order to reflect a sense of the continuation of life and the accidental nature of death. Therefore, resurrection is an emotional event that represents the moment of awakening as the opposite of the moment of death and silence.[136] He believed that later Muslim theologians depended on "Sufi imaginations" in their divisions and descriptions of the events on the day of resurrection.[137]

As for the idea of a merely spiritual resurrection, Ḥanafī argued that this was based on a dualistic imagination of the world in which the state of the body is devalued while the position of the soul is emphasized. The emphasis on the goodness of the soul over the evil nature of the body reflects a puritan image of the world. This dualism was, in Ḥanafī's mind, a "childish" conception of the world, since it was dependent solely on the concept of good and evil and reward and punishment. A mature and reasonable human being does good and avoids evil for its own sake, without expecting any reward or punishment. This view is also based on hatred and not love because the "other" will never be able to reach the same spiritual resurrection as the "self." Sufis deny the punishment of others because they love all human beings, while others desire to save

134 Ibid., iv, 472.
135 Ibid., iv, 487.
136 Ibid., iv, 508.
137 Ibid., iv, 504.

people by means of their own suffering. In that sense man appears as a hero who would save the world; he is the center of the world and the pivot of history. Bodily suffering then becomes pleasurable, as a means of reaching a greater rejoicing by refining the soul.[138] Ḥanafī maintained that the dualism between body and soul is a pessimistic, capitalist, and racial conception of the hereafter, one that stresses that there is no hope in this world, but man should seek his happiness in the outside world. It expresses the dialectics between victory and defeat and becomes more apparent when society is weak. Competition moves from earth to heaven and from this world to the hereafter.[139]

Ḥanafī analyzed the *ʿalāmāt* (signs) of the hereafter and the events on and after the day of judgment as part of what he continuously categorized as "folklore fantasy." In his view, these signs were inserted into Islamic theology in order to complete the doctrinal array so that Islamic dogma would be as significant as Jewish and Christian theology. Ḥanafī argued that the signs mentioned in the Quran do not tell exactly when the day of judgment will happen; they are merely scenes that combine human facts and cosmological events. He believed that the hour would certainly come, but its precise knowledge is only known to God. The purpose of the Quranic descriptions was not to tell the actual time of the judgment, but rather to urge people to prepare for it and to perceive well that their time will end.[140]

Ḥanafī concluded that the classical theological treatment of the concept of resurrection was nothing but a reflection of the burden of the unknown future of human beings in that time time by stressing a sense of confidence or fear for that future. For that reason classical texts preserve artistic images of it in order to give value judgments. The meanings of these portrayals expose the essence of human experience in the future. According to him these texts do not convey material realities, but reveal emotional realities that express the structure of human existence. It would be wrong to interpret them as quantitative realities. They should be understood as a means of cultivating human behavior and influencing it from the very beginning. In Ḥanafī's own words, eternity is pure human desire expressing man's ambition in bypassing his perishing. In believing in his eternity the human will continue to strive for his perfection.[141]

138 Ibid., iv, 526.
139 Ibid., iv, 527.
140 Ibid., iv, 551.
141 Ibid., iv, 605–7.

5 Conclusion

Modern Muslim scholars of the new renewal movement of theology considered classical Islamic notions about death and eschatology as an arena vulnerable to scientific, materialistic, and positivistic challenges. They therefore attempted to analyze classical eschatological subjects in modern philosophical and scientific terms.

Influenced by mystical and philosophical ideas, Indo-Pakistani modernist theologians agreed that "the physical body plays no role in the immediate life of an individual after death."[142] Shāh Walī Allāh used the idea of the *ʿālam al-mithāl* as developed by medieval Muslim mystics in order to rationalize traditional eschatological images. By employing what Fazlur Rahman called a "philosophy of mediationism," Walī Allāh's eschatological thought is pervaded by the idea of synthesis, wherein contradictions in reality are resolved by establishing proper and binding relationships.[143] Khān followed the same path by harmonizing this doctrine with the idea of naturalism. In addition, the pioneers of this approach were sometimes critical of classical views on eschatology. Shiblī l-Nuʿmānī's critique of Ashʿarī theology came as a result of his argument that mystical ideas should be taken as "useful" parts of authentic theology. In rationalizing these theological parts with modern science, these scholars were not concerned with the consequences of events in the afterlife, but were attempting to reconcile the traditional dogma on eschatology with the findings of modern science and nature.

The reformist approach stressed the ethical values of eschatological tenets for Muslim life. However, there were certainly common points between their writings and those of classical and medieval traditionalists in their understanding of the life after death. Although ʿAbduh, Riḍā, and al-Qaraḍāwī were cautious in interpreting Islamic eschatological narratives, their views were still compatible with the affirmations of traditional Islamic theology. Riḍā and al-Qaraḍāwī in particular made use of their "worldviews" to explain the signs of the hereafter: Riḍā applied *taqārub al-zamān* (closeness of time) to modern means of transport, such as trains, cars, and planes, while Qaradāwī saw *taqārub al-aswāq* (closeness of markets) in the interrelatedness of the international markets in London, Hong Kong and New York and on the Internet. Moreover, their defense of Ibn al-Qayyim's views on hellfire represented their strenuous appeal for a response to modern challenges by returning to "authentic" and "pure" Islam. Nursi's rational mysticism (or what one can call "mystical

142 Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding* 104.

143 Rahman, Dream 179.

reformism") went beyond the description of classical narratives or theological-philosophical analysis by stressing the "reality" of the other world on the basis of his understanding of cosmic symbolism – what he believed to be the "power" of God's beautiful names in the universe.

Neo-modernist Islamic theology is bold, but is only known or influential among elite intellectual groups. In their critiques, neo-modernists were not concerned with the reconciliation between the validity of Islamic traditional eschatological dogmas and the findings of modernity. In his anthropological understanding of theology, for example, Ḥasan Ḥanafī explained eschatology as a projection from "outside" Muslim societies and not as something that emerged from the "inside" real Islamic objectives. He was clearly influenced by Western scientists of religion and philosophers, such as Ludwig Feuerbach, who claimed that the conceptions of "god" are nothing but projections of humans' own values, and the idea of "heaven" or "eternal life" is simply a projection of human longing for immortality.[144]

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144 See, for example, Feuerbach, *The essence* 222f.

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