

THE APOCATASTASIS WILL SAVE US ALL.  
THE TRANSITION TOWARDS A SHARED ETHICAL APPROACH FROM  
CHRISTIAN PATRISTIC  
TO EARLY ISLAMIC THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

BY  
Marco DEMICHELIS

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### **Abstract**

I intend to deepen through this paper a comparative analysis between Greek cosmology, Christian Patristic and Early Islamic theology.

Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Clement of Alexandria and others, elaborated, for the first time, the apocatastasis as an eschatological theory which concerns the eternity of fire, the purification of souls and the grace of God. The same is deep rooted in Islamic theology and philosophy as religiously anchored within the Koran (3; 28, 102, 155, 176) and Islamic Tradition (Sunna and Ḥadīth): “Those who have merited Paradise will enter it; the damned will go to hell. God says also: Let those leave Hell whose hearts contain even the weight of a mustard seed of faith! Then they will be released, although they have already been burned to ashes and plunged into the river of rain-water or into the river of life; and immediately they will be revived.”

It could be possible that the main sources for the apocatastasis, inside early Christian and Islamic theology, adapted terminology and common ideas to both religions (When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all, 1 Corinthians 15; 28). Ambrose of Milan and Gregory of Nazianzus discussed this concept without reaching a common pronouncement, while Basil the Great, who opposed this doctrine, supported that the view of apocatastasis is in contrast with the Justice of God (theodicy).

On the other side some Mu'tazilite theologians, as Abū al-Hudhayl al- 'Allāf (d. 849) is considered as a supporter of Paradise and Hell's lethargical life (probably inspired by Ḍirār Ibn 'Amr, d. 815) , and al-Māturīdī, in *Radd wa'īd al-fussāq*, “The Refutation of the Doctrine of Eternal Damnation of Grave Sinners’ (this essay's content is in contrast with the views of the majority of Mu'tazilite theologians), argued that there are different *aḥādīth* of the Prophet in which God's justice is expressed as fundamental within Islām, but still relegated to the infinite mercy of Allāh: “ ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb asks him (‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib) what the Prophet said, and when ‘Alī discloses the Prophet's words, ‘Umar says that no one must know this because then no one would strive for Paradise”.

The metaphysical perception of apocatastasis resolves the issue, because in its light, creation is eternal whether manifest or not: the absoluteness of God as creator is preserved because there is, in a manner of speaking, a moment, a time when the possibility of creation is only inherent and not manifest. There is nothing beside the Absolute and when creation begins anew, it begins *ex nihilo*, out of nothing.

## INTRODUCTION

A rational theological framework may include an internal issue that threatens its structure, risking the invalidation of its basic assumptions. Essential facets of Islamic theology, such as the righteousness of God, can be invalidated by the autonomous behaviour of the deity itself, and human rationalism can question the topics on which al-'Aṣ'arī manifested his *bi-lā kayfa*: God's voluntarism and man's incapacity to predict or rationally interpret his conduct. To summarize in a few words, this is the main dilemma concerning the theory of universal salvation within Semitic monotheism.

A rationalist investigation of apocatastasis might encounter specific difficulties, seeing it as an incoherent doctrine directly inspired by a cosmological and ethical creed that evolved in a process which began long before the rise of Islām. As an introduction to this article, it will be necessary to examine the emergence of the concept of apocatastasis<sup>1</sup> within Greek philosophical cosmology, the works of Christian Patristic authors, and within the Middle Eastern religions and philosophies during the centuries that preceded the advent of Islām.

Pythagoras, Origen, Mani (the prophet of Manichaeism), Theodore of Mopsuestia, Clement of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor, al-Māturīdī, Al-Kindī, Ibn al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Sīnā and others, elaborated the apocatastasis as an eschatological theory concerning the non-eternity of fire, the purification of souls and the grace of God. However, it is necessary to draw an initial distinction between the cosmological theory conceptualized by Pythagoras, within early Stoic and neo-platonic thought, particularly by Chrysippus<sup>2</sup> (279-206 B.C.), or within a pre-Islamic Irano-Semitic monotheism<sup>3</sup>, and that thought which emerges in the Patristic or *Kalām*

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1) Tibor HORVATH, *Eternity and eternal life. Speculative theology and science in discourse*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, 1993, pp. 135-137; Jonathan J.A. POTTER, *The Historical Development of Origen's Universalism*, Western Washington University Press, Washington, 1993; Jean-Yves LACOSTE, *Encyclopaedia of Christian Theology*, Vol. 1, Routledge, London, 2005, p. 88. Brian E. DALEY, *The Hope of the Early Church: A handbook of Patristic Eschatology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991.

2) Josiah B. GOULD, *The Philosophy of Chrysippus*, Suny press, Albany, 1970, p. 92.

3) This term is used by Marshall Goodwin Simms HODGSON, *Venture of Islam*. Vol. 1 - *the Classical Age of Islam*, 1974, p. 366, and also by the same author in Hamid DABASHI, Sayyed Hossein NASR, Vali S. R. NASR (Eds.), *Shi'ism: Doctrines, Thought and Spirituality*, Suny Press, Albany, 1988, p. 92, when describing and giving a paternity to the Ismā'īli exoteric and cyclic interpretation of the relationship between the divine pattern and its corruption.

interpretation, which went on to acquire a greater theological significance.

Having considered the emergence of apocatastasis, the subsequent goal of this article is to investigate the connection between theodicy and eschatology, God's uniqueness and his mercy within Islamic rational theology, in order to evaluate the possible rational inconsistencies surrounding the concepts of God's justice and his forgiveness.

Of course, the first step towards a proper understanding of the real theological-philosophical meaning of apocatastasis, is to reflect on its definition: "apocatastasis, is a name given in the history of theology to the doctrine which teaches that a time will come when all free creatures will share in the grace of salvation; in a special way, the devils and lost souls (Pierre Batiffol)"<sup>4</sup>.

Examination of the state of research on this topic reveals that the amount and scope of published work on the plausible influence of pre-Islamic philosophical and theological thought on an Islamic apocatastasis and the possible incidence of a shared ethical approach between Christian Patristic and Early Islamic Theology is quite limited.

There is very little in the way of detailed studies concerning the concept of universal salvation in Islām. Some notable general comparative studies on explicit aspects of Christian and Islamic theology have been published in the past: Prof. David Thomas edited *Christian doctrines in Islamic theology*<sup>5</sup>, which is an impressive work containing several relevant essays on this topic.

Morris Seale, in 1964, edited *Muslim theology: a study of origins with reference to the church fathers*<sup>6</sup> which remains a relevant work, able to identify the possible theological relationships between late Patristic and early Islamic Theology, whilst Harry A. Wolfson, in *The Philosophy of Kalām*<sup>7</sup>, wrote a relevant analysis on the connection between Kalām, Greek Philosophy and Patristic thought in early Islām.

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4) Pierre BATIFFOL, *Apocatastasis*, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, Robert Appleton Company, New York, 1907.

5) David THOMAS, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*, Brill, Leiden, 2008. Emmanouela GRYPEOU, Mark N. SWANSON and David THOMAS, *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, Brill, Leiden, 2006; Barbara ROGGEMA and David THOMAS, *Christian – Muslim relations. A bibliographical History*, Vol. 1, Brill, Leiden, 2009.

6) Morris SEALE, *Muslim theology: a study of origins with reference to the church fathers*, Luzac & Co, London, 1964.

7) Harry Austryn WOLFSON, *The Philosophy of Kalām*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1976.

Finally, a fresh, prominent essay on Christian- Islamic theological comparative work is John Renard's study entitled: *Islam and Christianity. Theological themes in comparative perspective*<sup>8</sup>. However, when considering the likely influence of faiths and philosophies before the advent of Islām on the concept of apocatastasis, we encounter the Semitic- Gnostic sensitivity towards a topic which focused the irrational and seemingly unfair ethical attitude of all these religions; the lack of specific works on the theories of apocatastasis within Islamic rational theology and philosophy remains evident.

Victor Danner in *The Islamic Tradition: an Introduction*<sup>9</sup> mentions the apocatastasis without introducing references from any primary sources; Mohammed Ali Amir Moezzi, in *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: beliefs and practises*<sup>10</sup> translates the term apocatastasis with *isti'nāf* (restoration, renewal, resumption). However, in the Encyclopaedia of Islam (2 ed.) this is considered as a uniquely juridical term. Nevertheless, the messianic Twelver eschatology and the Ismā'īlites played a prominent role in irrationally interpreting what was previously detailed by *Kalām*<sup>11</sup>.

To deepen our knowledge of the doctrine of apocatastasis in Islām, it is necessary to improve our awareness of some specific primary sources: the *Radd Kitāb wa'īd al-fussāq lī al-Ka'bī* of al-Māturīdī and the antithetic Mu'tazilite author of *Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka'bī al-Balkhī* (the University of California Assistant prof. El-Omari Racha, is currently working on this source), would all be excellent sources on which to work. Unfortunately, the Maturidite's refutation seems lost in history, but al-Kindī's theory of the soul, the metaphysics of Avicenna, and in particular the Book of Healing and the *Risāla fī sirr al-qadar*, the essay on the secret of destiny and, finally, the *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* of the Ḥanafite *mutakallim* may be able to provide some relevant answers<sup>12</sup>.

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8) John RENARD, *Islam and Christianity. Theological themes in comparative perspective*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2011.

9) Victor DANNER, *The Islamic Tradition: an Introduction*, Sophia Perennis, Hillsdale NY, 2005.

10) Mohammed A. M. MOEZZI, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: beliefs and practises*, I.B. Tauris Publishers, London, 2011.

11) Wilferd MADELUNG, *Aspects of Ismaili Theology: the Prophetic Chain and the God Beyond Being*, in *Ismaili Contributions in Islamic Culture*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Imperial Iranian, Academy of Philosophy, Teheran, 1977, pp. 53-65.

12) Abū Mansūr al-MĀTURĪDĪ, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. Faṭḥallah KHOLEIF (Eds.), Beirut, 1970; *Al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, in *Christian doctrines in Islamic Theology*, Brill, Leiden, 2008; Ulrich RUDOLPH, *al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand*, Brill,

An investigation of the doctrine of Apocatastasis in Šīʿa thought, as H. Corbin<sup>13</sup> has shown through his research activities to be rational and eschatological theories within Šīʿa, would significantly increase the sources available for analysis and complicate our study. Nevertheless, it will be necessary for us to consider some important Šīʿite sources when studying this topic in greater depth than this article requires. For this reason, relevant authors like Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, ‘Allāma al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī and Ṣaykh al-Mufīd, as rationalist experts on the field of Islamic eschatology cannot be omitted from consideration when studying this field<sup>14</sup>.

A. ISLAMIC COSMOLOGY, FROM AL-KINDĪ TO  
FAKHR AL-DĪN AL-RĀZĪ, BETWEEN REASON AND GNOSIS

Geneviève Gobillot, in “*Quelques stéréotypes cosmologiques d’origine pythagoricienne chez les penseurs musulmans au Moyen Âge*”<sup>15</sup>, emphasizes the influence of Pythagorean stereotypes on Muslim thinkers, underlining in particular the presence of two topics: the first has to do with the subtle nature of the celestial bodies and their intelligence, the second with the postulate of the pre-existence of souls and a number of the direct consequences arising from this, such as the fall, metempsychosis, the return to celestial origin, and Apocatastasis.

In this article, our interest will of course be more focused on the second of these topics. The questions arising from the area covered by this subject occur in the writings of philosophers such as al-Kindī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and al-Farābī, as well as in the works of the mystics, as Ibn al-Tirmidhī (d. 279 A.H.), on whom the French academic is particularly expert. Whereas the

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Leiden, 1997. Al-Balkhī, al-KAʿBĪ, *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*, Teheran, 1976; Ibn SĪNĀ, *Al-maqāla al-ʿāshira*. Ibrāhīm MADKŪR (Eds.), Cairo, 1960, tr. by Michael E. MARMURA, *Healing: Metaphysics X* in Ralph LERNER and Muhsin MAHDI, *Medieval Political Philosophy: a Sourcebook*, New York, 1972, ch. 6; *Al-Īsarāt waʾl-tanbūhāt*. Teheran, 2000; *Kitāb al-Najāt*, tr. by Fazlur RAHMAN, *Avicenna’s Psychology: An English Translation of Kitāb al-Najat*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1952; *Risālah fī sirr al-qadar*, tr. by George HOURANI, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985.

13) Henry CORBIN, *Histoire de la Philosophie islamique*, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1964.

14) Naṣīr al-Dīn ṬŪSĪ, *Kaṣḥf al-murād: tarjūmah va sharḥ-i Tajrīd al-iʿtiqād*, Intishārāt-i Hirmis, Teheran, 1999; *The Rawḍatu t-Taslīm. Commonly called Taṣawwurat*. tr. by Wladimir IVANOW, Ismaili Society Series 4, Leiden Brill, 1950; Qāsim ibn QUTLŪBUGHĀ, *Taj al-Tarājim*. Leipzig, 1862.

15) Geneviève GOBILLOT, « Quelques stéréotypes cosmologiques d’origine pythagoricienne chez les penseurs musulmans au Moyen Âge », in *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, tome 219, n. 1 (2002), pp. 55-87.

philosophers had access to translations of the Greek texts, however, the mystics encountered these thought processes through intermediary teachings, inspired mainly by the works of Origen and Evagrius Ponticus.

### 1. *Falsafa and cosmology in al-Kindī*

Al-Kindī proposes a thesis that is neither Aristotelian nor neo-platonic; as the *Iḥwān al-Ṣafā*, the Arab philosopher admits the existence of the five constitutive elements of the universe, but in contrast with J. Philoponus and his Aristotelian approach<sup>16</sup>, he underlines that these elements are the basics on which creation is made possible.

To support, as Aristotle did, the proposition that among these five elements: air, fire, water, earth and aether, the last of these has a different essence because it is related to the celestial spheres, is like an admission that these spheres are not susceptible to corruption and transformation, and are therefore a product of something created by nothing: an untenable assumption for al-Kindī.

While criticizing the lack of rational logic concerning the immanence of the celestial spheres supported by Pythagoras (as a first axiom), this Arab philosopher argued, as the Greek philosopher, that these spheres are populated by life and intelligence and able also to elaborate a *proairesis*, a selective will.

Al-Kindī's thought concerning the prostration of the celestial corps and their submission to God implies a direct inspiration from within the Quranic passage (LV/1-6): "(Allah) Most Gracious! It is He Who has taught the Qur'ān, He has created man: He has taught him speech (and intelligence). The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed; and the herbs and the trees - both (alike) prostrate in adoration." Al-Kindī argued that the word *sujūd*, used in the last verse, should not be translated using the verb *prostrate*, but rather with *obey* as it was in pre-Islamic poetry.

So, all the entities of the celestial sphere, which acts in relation with the sublunary world, must be gifted by the most sublime reason. In spite of this, Pythagoras' subsequent axiom: that the celestial entities are the main causes of the "being rational" of humans, is able to demonstrate that these essences are at the origin of all the animated forms belonging to the world below and are at the origin of reason, the peculiar feature of human nature.

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16) Herbert DAVIDSON, "John Philoponus as a source of medieval Islamic and Jewish proofs of creation", in *Journal of American Oriental Studies*, 89 (1969), pp. 357-391.

Majid Fakhry highlighted that: “Al-Kindī supported that the celestial spheres which transmitted life to the sublunary entities, must be, as directly, as indirectly, for the same reason, animated in the same way. Being higher than the earth entities, and liable to corruption and generation, they must be exempted from generation and corruption, and for the same reason they must own life in their essence as eternal, in order that vital essence can belong accidentally and in a transitory way to the creatures below”<sup>17</sup>.

The Arab philosopher supported the idea that the superiority of celestial entities is directly linked to their eternal life. This final hypothesis needs to be considered again in relationship with a Pythagorean- platonian axiom concerning the affiliation of souls to the celestial spheres. The soul in origin is combined to the incorruptible spheres, in affiliation of being an incorporeal substance that for Plato’s philosophy is rooted on the temporary union of soul and corps within the human body.

Like Plato, al-Kindī subscribes to the tripartite theory of the soul, or the view that the soul consists of the rational, the irascible and the concupiscent parts. Upon this theory he develops, in the manner of almost all the ethical philosophers of Islām, an ethical doctrine according to which wisdom is the virtue or excellence of the rational part, courage the virtue of the irascible part, and temperance that of the concupiscent part.

Upon the separation of the soul from the body at death, the soul will dwell in the world of the spheres for a while, and then ascend to the higher intelligible world. However, not all the souls will be allowed to join that higher world at once. Some will linger in the different spheres on account of their impurities and when they are cleansed of this dirtiness will be allowed to ascend to higher spheres. When it has become thoroughly purified, the soul will be allowed to join the intelligible world, enjoy divine favour and grasp all manners of cognition of which it was oblivious during its earthly career<sup>18</sup>. It is evident that even if we could not define this view as the theory of apocatastasis, some relevant elements of apocatastasis are already well rooted in al-Kindī’s thought, not theologically but cosmologically.

## 2. *Al-Rāzī’s platonian debt*

Al-Rāzī, as al-Kindī, suggested that the empowerment and the

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17) Majid FAKHRY, *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique*, Cerf, Paris, 1989, p. 105.

18) AL-KINDĪ, *Rasā’il al-Kindī al-Falsafīyya*, Vol. 1, M. ABŪ RIDĀ (Eds.), Cairo, p. 265s; *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique*, p. 107.

progression of the souls towards the superior world or the celestial spheres is directly linked to the true knowledge of philosophy. According to this Persian philosopher, the achieving of truth could not be uniquely attributed to the immortal soul of an individual man.

Al-Rāzī supported the view that God has created men, giving them the rational knowledge of the intellect and the essence of his divinity, with the objective of reawakening the soul from the terrestrial drowsiness of the physical body and reminding it of its true destiny of citizenship of a superior and intelligible world; the soul pushes human beings to be aware of the need to search for this superior world through the elaboration of philosophy.

As supported by Pythagoras, if the soul is unable to properly understand this need for passage, it will continue to wander in the terrestrial world, after the body's death, trying to understand the therapeutic vision of philosophy. At the beginning, all souls are equals and expect the same path, as all men are equals as regards intelligence when they born, and only their education will promote the evidence of differences.

This specific vision, rooted on equality in relation to a common fate, is able to integrate al-Kindī and al-Rāzī's thought within a creationist context.

However, for the Arab philosopher, the visible world has been created *ex-nihilo*, while for the Persian theorist, God, the soul, time, space and matter coexisted from the beginning. Al-Rāzī forced the axiom that God was forced to create the physical world to permit the gratification of the soul's union with matter; this vision combines Platonic and possible Harrānean or Manichean elements<sup>19</sup>, and concludes that the world was created in time, out of pre-existing matter, as Plato had already taught.

Like Plato, Al-Rāzī posits the reincarnation of the soul as a condition of its ultimate release, through the study of philosophy, from the wheel of birth and rebirth<sup>20</sup>. The reincarnation of souls, illustrated by Rāzī, is described as a cyclic process linked to a rising soul activity which prompts and awakes it from the lethargy of the physical body; a vision which is clearly in debt to Plato's analysis<sup>21</sup>.

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19) Michelangelo GUIDI, *La lotta tra l'Islam e il Manicheismo*, Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Roma, 1927, p. III.

20) Majid FAKHRI, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism: A short introduction*, Oneworld, Oxford, 1997, p. 39.

21) Dominique URVOY, *Les Penseurs libres de l'Islam classique*, éditions Albin Michel, Paris, 1996, p. 151.

### 3. *Avicenna's Oriental Philosophy and Zoroastrian's influences*

This short introduction seeks to throw light on the way in which Greek philosophy and Islamic *Falsafa* were able to imagine and to rationally describe a cyclic process of life in which the protagonist was not God, as creator, but the active intelligence of the soul, the only entity capable of putting the physical world into relation with the celestial spheres.

Ibn Sīnā, re-interpreting Aristotelian cosmology through a monotheistic Islamic key, reconsidered the divinity through the presence of a first Intelligence which is a direct emanation of God; the role of the Qur'ān and Islamic religious tradition is also evident in the need of Ibn Sīnā to baptize the intelligences and the celestial souls with the angels and to conform more closely to the religious beliefs.

Even if the nature of these celestial actors remained close to the image given by al-Fārābī, the ultimate fate of the soul consists in achieving "conjunction" with this active celestial intelligence, whereby it perceives the beauty and goodness of the intelligible world. Therein, Ibn Sīnā had to recognize that this sublimated fate of understanding of the superiority of celestial spheres was reserved for a privileged few, the philosophers or the prophets.

Ibn Sīnā, in antithesis with al-Kindī and al-Rāzī, accords a certain measure of credibility to religious truth, but clearly regards it as lying outside the scope of philosophical discourse. It is presumably an inferior type of truth, accessible to the masses at large, and is received on faith in prophetic reports and instructions<sup>22</sup>.

However, the existence of an active intelligence (*Aql fa'āl*) from which human souls are a direct emanation, projecting *gnosis* on those which are able to acquire it, is also an expression of the specific qualities concerning the human intellect which has the potential for an Angel's nature, with a dual structure, a practice-oriented and a contemplative intellect, and with an active and agent intelligence which has usually been designed as a blessed power of thought (*'Aql Qudsī*).

These characteristics seem to have been directly inspired by a Persian pre-Islamic religious sensibility, but in spite of this, H. Corbin described Ibn

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22) Ibn SĪNĀ, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*. tr. by Michael E. MARMURA, Brigham Young University Press, Provo, 2004. Dimitri GUTAS, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works*, Brill, Leiden, 1988; Jean-R. MICHOT, *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne*, Peeters, Louvain, 1986.

Sīnā's analysis as instilled within a project of "Oriental philosophy"<sup>23</sup>. However, in S. Pines: *La Philosophie Orientale d'Avicenna et sa polémique contre les Bagdadiens*<sup>24</sup>, consideration is given to inspiration from the *Theology* of Aristotle, and attention is drawn to the *post-mortem* status of the human soul.

The doctrine of the soul's subsistence is a central topic of Oriental philosophy, which is rooted in Zoroastrian Gnostic syncretism and in the Islamic debt towards this Eastern sensibility. Avicenna, considering the influences on Suhrawardī (1155-1191) in his *Opera metaphisica et mystica*, argued that: "[...] the theosophist who really holds a mystic experience is the one for which the physical body has become as a tunic that he is sometimes wearing and sometime takes away. After that he ascends towards the light to remain in admiration of the last knowledge"<sup>25</sup>.

This latter quotation focuses the attention on a soul's reunion that is a sign of the urgent expectation of liberation from the physical body, to remain in admiration to a higher gnosis. Greek philosophy and cosmology, and also Zoroastrian dualism, or better Irano-Semitic monotheism as defined by Marshall G.S. Hodgson<sup>26</sup>, directly influenced Muslim *Falsafa*, and in the specific Ismā'īlī cyclicism which brings Islām versus exotericism, the Ismā'īlīs, in the manner of the Gnostics, interpreted the rebellion of Iblīs, as described in the Qur'ān, as a cosmic turning point, necessitating an elaborate procedure of restoration which involves human history, the soul's resurrection, and a cyclic path of spiritual and physical life.

However, this complex elaboration is symptomatic of a philosophical approach which, whilst putting religious tradition in a corner, does not draw attention to the ethical background which puts human free will, God's justice and the apocatastasis into relationship as a theological doctrine rooted in Islamic Kalām. The Greek and Persian cosmological perception of the need of humans souls for rejoining the celestial spheres or the first intelligence is relevant if we are to be aware of the presence of a Gnostic and philosophical background, and it is necessary that we support our deliberations with a close

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23) Henry CORBIN, *Storia della Filosofia Islamica*, Adelphi, Milano, 1989, p. 181.

24) Shlomo PINES, « La Philosophie Orientale d'Avicenne et sa polémique contre le Bagdadiens », in *Archives d'Histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, Vrin, Paris, 1952.

25) Henry CORBIN, *En Islam Iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, Vol. II, Gallimard, Paris, p. 22; Henry CORBIN, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, Kegan Paul International, London, 1957, p.30s.

26) Marshall G. S. HODGSON, *Venture of Islam*. Vol. 1 - *The Classical Age of Islam*, p. 381.

examination which acknowledges Islamic theology as being deeply influenced by Greek philosophy, Zoroastrianism and also Christian Patristic thought. Only in relation with a moral and ethical framework, rooted in religious theology, is it possible to properly understand the rationality of Islamic apocatastasis.

#### B. PATRISTIC AND APOCATASTASIS. ORIGEN'S RELEVANCE, BEYOND ORIGENISM

Consideration of the philosophical and the theological doctrine of apocatastasis highlights a dissimilarity between an interpretation of this dogma that does not refer to ethics and religion, and a moral elaboration, as deconstructed and reconsidered by Origen (185-254 A. D.), and also by Theodore of Mopsuestia and Gregory of Nyssa, and others up until the time of Maximus the Confessor<sup>27</sup> (580- 662 A.D.). The second part of this article seeks to examine the theological theories on apocatastasis which came before the advent of Islām and which perhaps inspired the theologian Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (238-333 A. H.) in the X century.

Vito Mancuso<sup>28</sup>, considering the New Testament statement that the only human sin which deserves eternal damnation is blasphemy against the Spirit, includes this quotation: “And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” (Matthew 12; 31-32 or in parallel, Mark 3, 29 and Luke 12, 10).

This sin against the Spirit, the most intimate personification of human sensibility, constitutes the greatest abuse and perversion of human freedom, which admits to man the possibility for action for the pleasure of doing wrong.

The Christian Catholic Church, in its teaching against this kind of offence, emphasises that the eternity of damnation is the only solution for this state, because a crime against the Holy Spirit is a misdemeanour against both the body and the soul which, together, become unable to receive the light of Goodness as a result.

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27) Edward MOORE, *Origen of Alexandria and St. Maximus the Confessor. An analysis and critical evaluation of their eschatological doctrines*, Diss., Boca Raton, 2005.

28) Vito MANCUSO, *L'Anima e il suo Destino*, Raffello Cortina Editore, Milano, 2007, p. 232.

It was specifically in opposition to the theory of apocatastasis that in 543 A.D., after the Synod of Constantinople, the anathema against Origenists and Evagrius Ponticus, the main supporters of this theological axiom, was pronounced.

However, before Origen was Clement of Alexandria, who in the VII book of his *Stromata*<sup>29</sup>, started to elaborate the doctrine of apocatastasis in strict relationship with his knowledge of the Stoic and neo-Platonic cultural background. Although Clement was born in Athens from pagan parents, he lived in Alexandria, converting to Christianity only in adulthood. He set himself to use philosophy as a tool to transform faith in science, and revelation in theology. Clement believed that matter and thought are eternal, and thus did not originate from God, contradicting the doctrine of *Creatio ex nihilo* and his belief in cosmic cycles predating the creation of the World, a cosmological doctrine of Heraclius of Ephesus, which has a non-Biblical origin.

### *1. Origen's mastership of Apocatastasis*

Origen's idea of apocatastasis came probably from the Stoic philosophy of Chrysippus, who believed that the accomplishment of being, started in the logos-fire, needs to return, to re-start a new vital cycle. This vision, derived from a cosmological and theological need, expresses a concept of the perfect fulfilment of God's plan in Christ for human spiritual being. All will be reconstituted exactly as it was at the beginning, it is the logic of the cosmos which imposes this.

The concept of apocatastasis occurs only once in the New Testament, as Peter addresses the populace outside the Temple in Jerusalem (Acts, 3; 21): "Christ will remain in Heaven until the time of the reintegration of all which God has declared through the mouth of the saints since the age of his prophets". Here the precise implications of that universal reintegration are not made clear. On the other hand, there are a number of passages in St. Paul's Epistles which indicate that Paul believed it, implying the salvation of the whole of humanity and its complete reconciliation with and in God<sup>30</sup>.

"As all die in Adam, so all will live again in Christ [...] The last enemy to be destroyed is Death [...] When all things have been subjected to the Son

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29) Clemente ALESSANDRINO, *Stromati. Note di verità filosofica*, Giovanni Pini (Eds.), Edizioni Paoline, Torino, 1985, p. 788.

30) Caroline MUESSIG & Ad PUTTER, *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 44.

of God, then the Son himself will subject himself to the One who has subjected all things to him, so that God may be all things in all". (1 Corinthians 15: 22-28) but also "For God wanted the whole fullness to inhabit him, and through Christ to reconcile all things into him" (Colossians 1: 19-20).

There are other verses which refer to the reintegration in God of this whole fullness (Ephesians 1: 10 and Romans 5:18 and 11:32), moreover Origen (185-254 B.C.), in the Latin version of his famous *De Principiis*, analyzing St. Paul's key sentence "God will be all things in all", takes this to mean that all things, animate and inanimate, will be perceived as divine by individual, rational human minds whose understanding has become fully purified.

This purification is something that will come upon human souls not suddenly but gradually, through immense ages, some reaching this goal swiftly, others following them, and still others remaining far behind.

"According to Origen there are punishments for wicked souls during many ages, yet this is a process of repairing through emendation, and of being restored, first through the teachings of angels, then through the powers of higher orders of angels, so that, step by step, advancing the wicked to reach what is invisible and eternal"<sup>31</sup>.

Origen was the first to use the term God-Man. In striking out this bold expression he sought to indicate the value of Christ's person, not only as the revelation in bodily form of the fullness of the Godhead, but also as showing the possibility of the human spirit becoming wholly divine. "In the incarnation of the Logos we see the restoration of the original unity between the divine and the human, and the earnest of the re-deification of the entire spiritual world. He did not, like the Latin theologians, propound a doctrine of two natures, but set himself to show that the man Christ Jesus became gradually one in will and in feeling with the Deity [...]"<sup>32</sup>.

The problem that clearly emerges in Origen's theory on apocatastasis is the excessive closeness to Stoic cosmology and neo-Platonic theories: Chrysippus envisages an indefinite number of world-cycles, and for him the apocatastasis will not happen once but often; the Christian Father Origen, on the contrary, argued that there could not be world-cycles identical with one

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31) Caroline MUESSIG & Ad PUTTER, *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, p. 45.

32) William FAIRWEATHER, *Origen and Greek Patristic Theology*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1901, p. 184.

another. He does believe that there will be more than one world-cycle, but he has to admit that he does not know the number of these, or whether this sequence will be infinite.

It is probably because of its partial Christian emphasis that Origen's teaching on the apocatastasis, tinged as it was with the Platonic myth that souls pre-existed in a status to which they will at last return, was condemned by the Synod of Constantinople in 543.

However, the precise wording of the first anathema deserves to be carefully noted. It does not speak only about apocatastasis but links together two aspects of Origen's theology: first, his speculation about the beginning, that is to say, about the pre-existence of souls and the pre-cosmic fall; the second, his teachings about the end, about universal salvation and the ultimate reconciliation of all things. Origen's eschatology is seen as following directly from his protology, and both are rejected together<sup>33</sup>.

Suppose, however, that we separate Origen's eschatology from his protology; suppose that we abandon all rational speculations about the realm of eternal; suppose that we simply adhere to the standard Christian view upholding that there is not pre-existence of the soul, but each new person comes into being as an integral unity of soul and body, at or shortly after the moment of the conception of the embryo within the mother's womb. In this way we could advance a doctrine of universal salvation affirming this, not as a logical certainty (indeed, Origen, never did that), but as a heartfelt aspiration, a visionary hope, which would avoid the circularity of Origen's view and so would escape the condemnation of the anti-Origenist anathemas.

## *2. The survival of Apocatastasis in Patristic and Origenism's revival*

In fact, the two greatest Byzantine Christian Neo-Platonic authors, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, who believed and expounded the same theory, were never condemned and conversely were also canonized as saints. Admittedly, Origen's doctrine of apocatastasis was closely related to his doctrine of metempsychosis, but the church unquestionably condemned his doctrine of universal reconciliation as well. The Anathema was expressed against the Origenists, who taught that the punishment of evil spirits and the ungodly was only temporary, and after a certain time would come to an end, and there would be complete apocatastasis.

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33) Bishop Diokleia KALLISTOS, *Collected works: The Inner Kingdom*, Vol. 1., St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Yonkers, 2001, pp. 199-200s.

For the Christian Neo-Platonic authors, as for the pagan Plotinus, the universe which proceeds from God must ultimately return into God. These Fathers also gave a special significance to Christ's incarnation and resurrection; this is the *peripety* in the cosmic drama, the turning point at which, the procession being complete, the universal return begins.

This is integral to the way that St. Gregory of Nyssa understood and affirmed the final return to God. For the Byzantine Father, as for Plotinus, this reintegration is a return, and also a redemption. The bishop of Nyssa identified the punishment for the wicked as a purgatory and not a hell: "in the same way, when nature's evil is done away with, over a long period of time [...] then the apocatastasis, into the primordial condition, of those who now lie in evil will come about and thanksgiving with one voice by the whole of creation, both by those who were punished in purgation and by those who did not even need purgation"<sup>34</sup>.

In the treatise on *The Life of Moses*, Gregory of Nyssa, interpreting Exodus 10:23, plunged the Egyptians into the darkness, while he elevated the Israelites in the light. Moreover, in the same text, he also asserted that the Egyptians will remain in the dark for only three days, to be then brought into the light of God<sup>35</sup>.

By contrast, Gregory of Nazianzus (329- 390 A.D.), a friend and contemporary of Gregory of Nyssa, established his interpretation of apocatastasis in the ontological finitude of evil and in the natural dynamism that impels all creatures endowed with reason toward God. Beginning with the resurrection of the body, final salvation will not be "restoration" in the sense of the regaining of a pre-corporeal state of the soul, but the realization of God's eternal design for his angelic and human creatures, which finally attain his image and likeness<sup>36</sup>.

The revival of the Origenist tradition, in particular with the Palestinian

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34) Gregory of NYSSA, *Oratio Catechetica*, Muhlenberg (Eds.), III 4, Brill, Leiden, 1996, p. 67.

35) Gregory of NYSSA, *La vie de Moïse*, Jean DANÉLOU (Eds.), II 82, coll. "Sources Chrétiennes" 3, Cerf. Paris, 1968, p. 154. This interpretation is so similar of that which emerged in the article of Eric ORMSBY, "The Faith of the Pharaoh: A disputed question in Islamic Theology", in *Studia Islamica*, No. 98/99, 2004, pp. 5-28. At the end of time, the Pharaoh, the symbolic figure of a man who makes himself God, recognizing the superiority of the unique God, will be forgiven.

36) Brian E. DALEY, "Apocatastasis" in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, J. Y. Lacoste (Eds.), Vol. I, 2004, pp. 67-69.

monks Evagrius Ponticus (345-399 A.D.) and Didymus the Blind (313-398 A.D.) focussed a renewed attention on an acceptable idea of apocatastasis as directly related with exoteric speculations regarding the pre-existence of human souls and the rather unclear picture provided by Origen concerning the final state of believers. In particular, the member of the Coptic Church Didymus the Blind argued that: “Being the source of goodness, God, even after our failures, calls us anew, not effacing entirely from our mind the knowledge of good, even if we have turned away from virtue through sin”<sup>37</sup>.

After the condemnation of Origenist apocatastasis in the first and second Synod of Constantinople, the evolution on this dogma would be interpreted in a less philosophical and exoteric manner. Maximus the Confessor (580-662 A.D.), while supporting the view that all rational souls will eventually be redeemed, pointed to a need for the interpretation of God’s will to be made compatible with the Christian’s understanding of man’s ultimate destiny, which implies a radical curtailment of human freedom.

If Maximus the Confessor is right in defining freedom and self-determination as the very sign of the image of God in man, it is obvious that this freedom is ultimate, and that man cannot be forced into a spiritual union with God, even in virtue of such philosophical necessity as God’s goodness.

At the ultimate confrontation with the Logos, on the last day, man will still have the option of rejecting Him and thus will go to Hell. In the *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, Maximus (the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople 638-641 A.D.), argued that: “Since man was created according to the image of the blessed and supra-essential deity, and since, on the other hand, the divine nature is free, it is obvious that man is free by nature, being the image of the deity”<sup>38</sup>.

Man’s freedom is not destroyed even by physical death; thus, there is the possibility of continuous change and mutual intercession. But it is precisely this freedom which implies responsibility and, therefore, the ultimate test of the last judgement, when alone in the entire cosmic system, which will then experience its final transfiguration; man will still have the privilege of facing the eternal consequence of either his yes or his no to God<sup>39</sup>.

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37) Richard A. LAYTON, *Didymus the Blind and his circle in late-antique Alexandria* University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 2004, p. 45.

38) Maximus the CONFESSOR, *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, Biblioteca Angelica, Roma, cc. 189<sup>f</sup>-200<sup>f</sup>, CPG 7698.

39) John MEYENDORFF, *Byzantine theology, Historical trends and Doctrinal themes*,

Finally, we consider the interpretation of apocatastasis by Isaac of Nineveh (d. 700 A.D.), which remained deeply anchored to the word of the Gospels. His perspective on eternal salvation is not based on the return of the original state, as Greek cosmology had suggested, but is rather oriented towards the future. Furthermore, Isaac's thought on apocatastasis remains within the realm of hope rather than that of dogmatic pronouncement, and he speaks out of his own experience of God's mercy.

### 3. *An Islamic similar debate*

At the conclusion of this second part, it is necessary to underline that the cosmological and philosophical assumptions concerning eternal salvation assumed, within Christian Patristic, a more ethical and moral importance without abandoning a soteriological<sup>40</sup> interpretation which remained entrenched in the Greek philosophical assumption of the soul's immortality.

“If the human being is called to life to attend the divine's truth, it is necessary that his nature could be updated to this specific involvement [...] It was necessary that a specific affinity with the divine was amalgamated with the human nature [...] For this purpose, mankind has been endowed of life, reason, wisdom and of all qualities worthy of God, so each of them could desire what is akin. And as eternity is inherent in the divinity, our nature should not be totally devoid, but to have in itself the immortality available. For this specific reason and for this innate ability, it could thus tend toward what is above it and retain the desire of eternity”<sup>41</sup>.

In strict relation with this sentence, Gregory of Nyssa and Irenaeus in *Adversus Haereses*, both see the most relevant and precious of the attributes given by God to mankind as the capacity to determine itself, or, in fewer words, freedom. The contraposition between St. Augustine and Pelagius (354- 440 A.D.) on the relationship between human freedom and God's Grace sparked the debate as to whether it is man's free will that is the cause of his salvation, as supported by Pelagius, or whether it is only God's Grace, as argued by St. Augustine.

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Fordham University Press, New York, 1987, p. 222.

40) Soteriology reflects the study of religious doctrine concerning salvation: *soteria* is complex word, from Greek, *soter*, means *savior*, *preserver*, while *logos*, means *study*, *word*. Through salvation, man can know the truth, and as John writes (8, 32), the truth will set you free. JOHN MCINTYRE, *The Shape of Soteriology*. Continuum International Publishing Group, Edinburgh, 1992.

41) Gregory of NYSSA, *La Grande Catechesi*, M. Naldini (Eds.), Città Nuova, Roma, 1990, pp. 164-166.

The debate on St. Augustine's double predestination and Pelagius' Free Will, involved opposing systems of analysis very similar to those that would subsequently arise within Islamic theology (*Mu'tazilite* against *Jahamite*). However, embarking on an analysis of human free will theory within *Kalām* will bring us too far from a precise study on Apocatastasis. In the following part of this article, we will pay attention to the interpretation of the rational Free Will theory in Islām as it had been expressed within Qadarism and the Mu'tazilite theological schools in the VIII and IX centuries<sup>42</sup>.

### C. THEODICY AND ESCHATOLOGY WITHIN EARLY KALĀM: THE INFLUENCE ON MU'TAZILITE ETHICS

#### 1. *Umayyad and Christianity*

In the last fifty years, academics have often been divided over their assessments of the possible influence played by the Christian Fathers on the establishment of the first Islamic theology. The emergence of theories concerning the predestination of God, human free will, the nature of God etc. have stimulated the recognition of connections and influences among contemporary Melkite intellectuals, in particular John of Damascus (676-749 A.D.) and some of the previous Muslim theologians such as Ma'bad al-Ġuhanī (d. 84 A.H.), Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (21-109 A.H.), Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (d. 125 A.H.), Ġahm ibn Ṣawfān (d. 127 A. H.) and Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā (d.130 A.H.).

During the reign of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (65-85 A.H.) and of his inheritors, a dual process of Arabization and Islamization began in the region of Levantine, the geographical area on the eastern Mediterranean coast conquered and occupied by the Arab Muslims at the time of the generation who were influential prior to the emergence of John of Damascus.

The Umayyad, during the Marwānid phase, mounted a concerted campaign to reclaim the occupied territories for Islām, and it was during a shift in strategic and geopolitical conditions that the local Christian

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42) Morris S. SEALE, *Muslim Theology: a study of origins with reference to the Church Fathers*, Luzac & Co., London, 1964; Harry A. WOLFSON, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1976; Cheykh BOUAMRANE, *Le problème de la liberté humaine dans la pensée musulmane*, L. Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 1978; Albert NADER, *Le système philosophique des mu'tazila : Premiers penseurs de l'Islam*, Dar al-Mashreq, Beirut, 1984.

communities had a consciousness for the first time that the Arab occupants had established a new religious hegemony in the region.

The construction of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik, and the conversion of the ancient Church of Saint Johannes into the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus, under the caliph al-Walīd (85-96 A. H.), are both examples which clearly testify that the new ruler sought to co-opt the public space of Syria and Palestine in favour of Islām.

However, as Sydney H. Griffith<sup>43</sup> pointed out, it is also relevant to underline that, at the beginning of the VIII century, Muslims and Melkite intellectuals had, some doctrinal opponents in common, and many scholars of both communities concentrated all their efforts on refuting them. These antagonists were the Manicheans, also defined as *zindīq* (pl. *zanādiqah*) through an Arabized- Persian word<sup>44</sup>.

During the VIII and IX centuries, in Syria and Palestine, the Manichean doctrines attracted many intellectuals of both religious communities, the Christian and the Islamic; for this reason, a great number of polemicists, including John of Damascus<sup>45</sup>, elaborated specific works to refute these doctrines and composed many texts against them. Furthermore, several modern scholars have endeavored to identify connections and influences among contemporary Melkite intellectuals, in particular John of Damascus and some of the previous Muslim theologians named above.

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43) Sydney H. GRIFFITH, *Giovanni Damasceno e la Chiesa in Siria all'epoca degli Omayyadi*, in *Giovanni Damasceno un Padre al sorgere dell'Islam*, conference proceedings of XIII Ecumenic International Conference on Orthodox spirituality, Bose, 11-13 September 2005.

44) Michelangelo GUIDI, *La lotta tra l'Islam e il Manicheismo*; Alessandro BAUSANI, *Persia religiosa: da Zarattustra a Bahā'u'llāh*, Il Saggiatore ed., Milano, 1959.

45) John of Damascus lived during this historical period, residing all his life among Muslims, and Arabic was the language of his early employment, even if his surviving writings are in Greek: the theological and liturgical language of the Melkite Christian intelligentsia. John's family had been responsible for the taxes of the region within the bureaucratic administration of the Emperor Heraclius (575- 641), and his grandfather still worked under the Byzantine regime. After the Arab conquest, he continued to work for the new leading authorities within the Umayyad court; both his father Sergius (Sarjūn) and probably John, before leaving to become a monk, worked as an official in the caliph court. Daniel J. SAHAS, *John of Damascus on Islam. The Heresy of Ishmaelites*. Brill, Leiden, 1972.

## 2. *Eternal debate regarding Patristic's influence on early Islām*

A specific line of research has been directed towards the debate that emerged on the Islamic side during the VIII century among the supporters of human free will, the *qadarite* and the defenders of divine predestination, the *jabrite*: the former sustained the idea of the human capacity to act regardless of the divine will, the latter that the determination of human action was directly related to God's decisions. The academics Morris Seale (Seale; 1964, 74ss) and Harry Austryn Wolfson (Wolfson; 1976, 613- 624) have argued that the *qadarite* were influenced by the Christian terminology on the freedom of human will, as it emerged within the thought of John of Damascus.

In the meantime, Michael Cook<sup>46</sup> supported that in the same historical period, the Umayyad dynasty sustained a deterministic point of view, which was quite common in Christian circles and especially among Syriac-speaking intellectuals such as James of Edessa. Finally, Shlomo Pines<sup>47</sup> disputed that it is possible to observe a similar methodological approach within the apologetic works of the first rational Muslim theologians in relationship with John of Damascus' *An exact exposition of the Orthodox faith*<sup>48</sup>.

Although none of these assumptions can be accepted with full confidence, they do however warrant our attention due to the fact that some issues of these intellectual questions both on John of Damascus' side and on the side of the Muslim actors, emerged in the contemporary period, and even if John and the Muslims did not directly converse, the geographical area involved and the historical period clearly coincided.

Eminent authors such as M. Watt supported the view that the possible influence of Christian Patristic on early Islamic theology could be only partial, and in fact in *Islamic Alternatives to the Concept of Free will*, the Scottish academic argued: "The concept of free will adopted by the Qadarites and others almost certainly came into Islam from Christian sources, presumably through Muslims from a Christian background. [...] The adoption of Greek and Christian concepts in this way, moreover, does not mean that Islamic thought is no more than a patchwork quilt of ideas

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46) Michael COOK, *Early Muslim Dogma: a source of critical study*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, p. 151.

47) Shlomo PINES, "Some Traits of Christian Theological Writing in relation to Moslem Kalām and to Jewish Thought", in *Studies of the History of Arabic Philosophy*. Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1996, pp. 79-99.

48) John of DAMASCUS, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, in *The Worksof St. John Damascene*, Martins' Publishing House, Moscow, 1997.

from foreign sources”<sup>49</sup>.

It is also important to recognize that until the ‘Abbāsīd historical period (the second half of the VIII century), the knowledge of Greek philosophy through Hellenism and the Irano-Semitic monotheistic interpretation remained quite limited. In effect, although the axiom of free will was known, but nothing was known about the roots of this idea.

However, the influence of Patristic on early Islamic theology is not the topic of this study; on the contrary, the understanding of the apocatastasis in *Kalām* can only be explained and analyzed in relationship through a specific excursus within Islamic thought.

### *3. Islamic ethic in Creation and Justice, a debate within Kalām*

The first topic to examine in order to deepen our understanding of apocatastasis in *Islām* is the relationship between theodicy and eschatology in *Kalām*, as a manifestation of the coherent liaison/covenant between God and the believers, as signed by the Prophet Muḥammad and the first converts of Mecca.

Theodicy and eschatology are, in relation with this analysis on apocatastasis, the primary doctrines to consider in order to properly understand the human interpretative difficulties concerning universal salvation and God’s justice.

A righteous God is the author of a judgement to which the observant can give credence, not in a fideistic sense, but through emphasizing the relationship of trust that must exist between the Muslim and the deity.

God’s theodicy within monotheism is usually the expression of a process of liberation from a status of ignorance, from someone else’s rule, from the lack of interior drive towards moral conduct, or simply from considering ourselves unable to act properly as the main instigator of our own actions.

However, this approach reflects a human way of thinking which could indicate a rational attempt at understanding, in antithesis with a completely different metaphysical approach.

In spite of this, if we consider Islamic theology as that investigated and

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49) Montgomery WATT, *Islamic Alternatives to the Concept of Free will*, in *La Notion de Liberté au Moyen Âge: Islam, Byzance, Occident*, Société d’Edition, Paris, 1985, pp. 15-24.

described by M. Watt in *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*<sup>50</sup>, we could conclude that the concept of justice has been widely used within Mu‘tazilism, a rationalist school of theologians active within the 8<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, as a concept inherited directly from the Ḥārījite sect<sup>51</sup>. The Ḥārījites had already expressed support for this *Credo*, sustaining the notion of a human’s responsibility for their actions and the total freedom of man, even when set against the precepts of divine will. According to the Mu‘tazilite school:

- God must act for a precise purpose. There are two important strands to the explanation of this concept of justice: the concepts of a Good and a Bad, as aspects of the objective world, which are prior to the determination made by the religious and divine law, and God’s inclination to make every day better (*al-aṣṣlah*, a heterodox theory, partially accepted by the Mu‘tazila too) for humans, because God cannot wish other than good.
- God cannot desire Evil, and then order it, since his will (*irāda*) and his command (*‘amr*) are identical and not inconsistent. Evil is, then, an exclusive human creation, like Good: man is the creator of all his actions, both positive and negative. In fact, man has received from God a power (*qudra*) that allows him to act with total freedom, and it is precisely because of this freedom granted to him, that at the end of time, mankind will receive a reward for his good deeds or eternal suffering as the result of his evil actions.

The concept of justice in Islamic rational theology is rooted in these dual concepts:

- The link between God and the Good, which makes it impossible for God to be the cause of Evil.
- The power of man to act freely (in the absence of divine determinism, that is quite problematic in ‘Aṣ‘arism, less in Mu‘tazilism and Maturidism).

However, this is in contrast with the concept of God’s omnipotence (*Ḥāṣṣ bi-llāh*). Aṣ‘arite<sup>52</sup> and Maturidite<sup>53</sup> theologians, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century,

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50) Montgomery WATT, *Islamic philosophy and theology*, Transaction publishers, Piscataway, 2008, pp. 58-72.

51) Patricia CRONE, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2004, p. 54.

52) Robert BRUNSCHVIG, Mu‘tazilisme et Ash‘arisme, in *Arabica*, 9, 1962, pp. 345-356; Binyamin ABRAHAMOV, A Re-Examination of al-Ash‘arī’s theory of “Kasb” According to Kitāb al-Luma, in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2, 1989, pp.

had put forward the following question: how could God's power be something inseparable from its essence and then not be able even to consider evil? The ongoing debate within Islamic theology puts into opposition the supporters of God's power and those who argue that God himself could reduce his power. On the doctrine of *qadar*, al-Māturīdī approaches to some extent the Mu'tazilite position, whereas al-Aš'arī is strongly opposed to it:

In his creeds al-Aš'arī asserts that human acts are created by God and that man has no power to act before he in fact does so – a technical way of stating that the power is along with the act (*al-istiṭā'a*<sup>54</sup>: capacity), in contrast to the Mu'tazilite view that the power is before the act. Al-Māturīdī, on the contrary, emphasizes man's choice (*iḥtiyār*), and agrees with the Mu'tazila in holding that man's power is for two opposite acts; [...] God has written all that will happen, but this writing is descriptive, not determinative. The related conception of *kasb* or acquisition, of this power (capacity), plays a curious part. It was accepted by al-Aš'arī's though which he does not mention it in the creeds [...] al-Māturīdī, however, regards *kasb* as a Mu'tazilite doctrine (which is untrue)<sup>55</sup>.

God's theodicy, regardless of the specific theological interpretation introduced above, continues to reflect on the specific human needs and requirements which are concerned with God's judgment on each individual's behavior at the end of time. This analysis, fundamental to comprehend the relationship between God's theodicy and apocatastasis, seeks to deepen a rational understanding focused on the axiom that: without the righteousness of God, and specifically a fair God, human nature would be in the hands of an ethical and moral anarchism, unable to judge and distinguish men according to the individual's actions throughout their life.

The opposition between the idea of a God as theologically described by the Mu'tazilites and that portrayed by the Aš'arites or Māturīdites concerning human acts and Theodicy, underlines that apocatastasis is a doctrine that is rooted in the concept of the Justice of God<sup>56</sup>.

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53) Mustapha CERIC, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abu Mansur al-Maturidi*, Kuala International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, Lumpur, 1995.

54) Louis GARDET, "al-Istiṭā'a", in E.I., 2 ed., IV, pp. 271-272.

55) Montgomery WATT, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, Oneworld, Oxford, 1998, p. 315.

56) Jon HOOVER, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, Brill, Leiden, 2007, p. 177s.

#### 4. The Mu‘tazila’s rejection of Apocatastasis

The second area to examine, as previously indicated, is Islamic eschatology. In the Qur‘ān (sūra 3: 28, 102, 155, 176) and within Islamic Tradition (*Sumna* and *Hadīṭ*) it is indeed stated that: “Those who have merited Paradise will enter it; the damned will go to hell”. However, God says also: “Let those leave Hell whose hearts contain even the weight of a mustard seed of faith! Then they will be released, although they have already been burned to ashes and plunged into the river of rain-water or into the river of life; and immediately they will be revived.” But also: “Let not the believers take disbelievers for their friends in preference to believers. Whoso doeth that hath no connection with Allah unless (it be) that ye but guard yourselves against them, taking (as it were) security. Allah biddeth you beware (only) of Himself. Unto Allah is the journeying”. This last sentence in particular seems to indicate the need for a progress leading towards a real return to God.

The Mu‘tazila maintain a clear position on the creation of Heaven and Hell. The Mu‘tazilite Hišām al-Fuwāṭī argued that these two metaphysical places will be created at the end of time, during the day of Judgment, while al-Ġāḥiẓ underlined that God does not send anyone to Hell, but rather that it is Hell that attracts the damned by its nature and keeps them perpetually, whilst for Heaven the process is similar, as it is paradise that attracts the elect to itself.

The majority of Mu‘tazilite school *mutakallimūn* rationally support the view that the damned will indefinitely remain within Hell and none of them will quit; they can no longer act for themselves, and the end of this status is possible only if God were to decide to destroy this double system rooted on the presence of Paradise and Hell.

Abū al-Hudhayl, a Mu‘tazilite author of the IX century, emphasizes that the annihilation of this eschatological arrangement becomes inexplicable within a rational theological understanding which admits an absolute divine justice, and to rescue a human being from a status that he or she has earned is an injustice. It is therefore right that Heaven and Hell are eternal.

Ja‘far ibn Mubashshir held that the permanent existence of Paradise and Hell is the result of rational evidence and not a revealed truth, arguing that in this specific case, the rational human intellect is sufficient to show that the opposite of this hypothesis would raise substantial moral problems<sup>57</sup>.

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57) AL-BAGHDĀDĪ, *Al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*, M. ‘Uthmān AL-KHISHT (Eds.). Maktabat

It is clear that the Mu‘tazila hardly considered the apocatastasis as a doctrine compatible with their ethical background. George F. Houranī in *Islamic and non-Islamic origins of Mu‘tazilite ethical rationalism*<sup>58</sup>, highlights the influence of Christian ethics<sup>59</sup> on Mu‘tazilite ethics, specifically referring to Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, both supporters of apocatastasis.

“His thought on ethics can be gathered from his *Oratio Catechetica Magna*, and is set out briefly under the five headings used before.

- Objective values. The Logos is good and chooses well in everything. It made the world good.
- God, source of good alone. He had to share his light and pour out His love so he made man able to participate in the divine goodness. He cannot be the creator of evil, which is not him.
- Rational knowledge of values. Man had to be provided with reason and wisdom, so that he might desire to know the divine and have a relation with it.
- Man’s power, source of evil. Man must also have been given freedom, so that he could practise virtue and be rewarded for it. But this implies the possibility of choosing evil, which is vice. This is lack of good, without actuality. Its causes lie in man, with professional help from the Devil.
- Everlasting rewards and purgative punishments (apocatastasis).

All five headings of Gregory’s ethics coincide with those of the Mu‘tazila, except for Gregory’s belief in a purgatory which will be temporary for all sinners until the final purification of souls at the time of Judgement<sup>60</sup>.

This last sentence probably underlines a mistake made by the author, but also pursued by the Mu‘tazila. The apocatastasis as elaborated within Patristic thinking did not temporarily precede the final Judgement, but rather was to follow it, albeit at an imprecise time.

It is rationally evident that the link between Theodicy and apocatastasis will affect human souls only after God’s final judgment, when the human

ibn Sīnā, Cairo, 1988, pp. 150-157, in Albert N. NADER, *Le système philosophique des Mu‘tazila*, pp. 311-317.

58) George F. HOURANI, “Islamic and non-Islamic origins of Mu‘tazilite ethical rationalism” in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 7 (1976), pp. 59-87.

59) But also Zoroastrian, as emerged in the the same article, at page 66.

60) George F. HOURANI, “Islamic and non-Islamic origins of Mu‘tazilite ethical rationalism”, p. 77.

concept of God's justice will have already been amply expressed in the *Yawm al-Dīn* (the Day of Judgment). This distinction, made by al-Māturīdī (258-333 A. H.), is particularly relevant for our analysis, and it will be necessary to return to it in the last part of this article.

The connection between theodicy and eschatology within apocatastasis is crucial to an understanding of the ethical structure of the main theological rational school in early Islamic history, but in itself it is not enough; God's justice and the eschatological theorization of life after death can only humanly identify the relationship between the actions of humankind and God's promise and threat (*al-wa'd wa-al-wa'id*) as rationally explained by Mu'tazilism and Ash'arism. In addition, the comprehension of apocatastasis is also theologically and philosophically associated with *Tawhīd*, God's unity and the characteristics of the essence of the deity itself.

#### D. UNIQUENESS AND GOD'S APOCATASTASIS IN ISLĀM. THE MATURIDITE'S RATIONALIZATION OF THE IRRATIONAL

Disquisitions on the uniqueness of God have deeply affected Islamic theology, philosophy and proto-Sufism from the beginning of the 8th century, emphasizing the importance of Muslims' understanding about the nature of God, in a manner not dissimilar to the interest within Christian Patristic thought concerning the natures of Christ.

In this latter context it is useful to emphasize the focus on the uniqueness of God as "recovery and reintegration" (*apocatastasis*) of a life cycle within the eternal return of everything: "[...] at the end of the World, when God will be everything to everyone". (1 Corinthians 15: 28) to which one might add: "Then they will be released, although they have already been burned to ashes and plunged into the river of rain-water or into the river of life; and immediately they will be revived"<sup>61</sup>.

It is not my intention in this article to summarize all theological points of view on the *tawhīd* 'Allāh. On the contrary, it is useful to concentrate on

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61) I need to thank prof. Claude GILLIOT for his suggestions concerning this refutation, on which there is information within the *Kitāb Tabṣīrat al-adilla*, Claude SALAMÉ (Eds.), Damascus, of the Maturidite Abū al-Mu'in Maymūn al-Nasafī (d. 508 A.H.), in the *Tāj al-tarājīm fī al-ṭabaqāt al-ḥanaḥīyya*, Baghdād, 1962, p. 59 of Ibn Quṭlūbugha and in Ulrich RUDOLPH, *Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand*, Brill, Leiden, 1997, p. 199. The Italian IPO (Institute for Oriental Studies) has over the last ten years published a *Series Catalogorum* on the Oriental Manuscripts of the Musée Régional de Qarshi and that of Nukus, both in Uzbekistan, and these include relevant Maturidite primary sources and manuscripts.

the distinction between a more literalist and a more metaphoric interpretation of the Qur'ān in order to better categorize the logical passages which permit the evaluation of a specific doctrine on the apocatastasis. As reported by Nader el-Bizri:

“The essence attributes question reflected the variant dimensions of scriptural interpretation and its grounding theories of meaning. According to heresiographic accounts, it was the distinction claimed between the exoteric, apparent (*zāhir*) meaning of scripture, and its esoteric, hidden (*bāṭin*) sense which generated extremist doctrinal positions, most emblematically the anthropomorphists (*mushabbiha*) and corporealists (*mujassima*) at one extreme, ranged against various esotericists (*bāṭiniyya*) on the other”<sup>62</sup>.

*Kalām* investigates the unity of God, referring to the distinction between God's attributes and God's essence (mu'tazilite, maturidite, hanbalite and others - scholars have different opinions on these sources), and arguing more philosophically, that, everything which is not God or does not come directly from Him could be considered as separated from God's unity.

Mu'tazilite theologians supported an un-deterministic point of view without denying God's omnipotence and unity. From this viewpoint, human actions need to be eschatologically judged by God's justice, and for that reason they must be completely independent from God's power. The attributes of God do not properly exist because they are the expression of the same essence of God and his sovereignty, and *tawḥīd* is preserved because at the end of time, God will still judge human actions, keeping his power and his unity.

Aš'arites, on the contrary, supported God as the harmonic main actor and creator, and in line with this view it must be kept in mind that God alone is the agent (*fā'il*) determining through a created power (*qudra*), the individual existence of each act in all its particular detail; any created action takes place through a power created in the human person, by God, who actually performs the act.

However, this theory did not properly resolve the problem concerning the connection between God's power and the sinfulness of humans, supporting the idea that personal actions are ambiguously bound to God's

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62) Nader EL-BIZRI, *God: essence and attributes*, in Tim WITER, *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 121.

creation, consistent with the doctrine of *kasb*.

Al-Māturīdī took an intermediate position, supporting the idea that human beings are the truly agents of their actions, while these actions are at the same time created by God. Human responsibility for the quality of the act is attributable to the singular believer while the creation is still ascribed to God<sup>63</sup>.

In relation with this point of view, relevant questions must be asked: If God is not one of the things which God creates, what sort of thing is God? But also, if Creation is an act of God, can the involution (annihilation) of the same, as described by any eschatological-religious theory, be a voluntary action of God itself?

### *1. Apocatastasis as God's Mercy*

Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, in *The Islamic understanding of death and resurrection*<sup>64</sup>, supported that the nature of Heaven and Hell has been subjected to a range of interpretations stretching from the purely literal to the utterly allegorical. Hell is a place of just chastisement for sin, which forms a temporary purgatory for sinning believers; whether any punishment there would be truly eternal was a matter of considerable dispute.

The theory of apocatastasis might put a rational ethic background into contrast with a detailed interpretation of God's specific qualities: in which way could the justice of God be reconciled with his mercy and clemency? In which way can Theodicy be accommodated with the *Basmala's* meaning?

The Qur'ān underlines a couple of passages which could be helpful in our disquisition. In VII, 156, it has affirmed: "And ordain for us that which is good, in this life and in the Hereafter: for we have turned unto Thee". He said: "With My punishment I visit whom I will; but My mercy extended to all things. That (mercy) I shall ordain for those who do right, and practise regular charity, and those who believe in Our signs", while in XI, 119, it is reported: "Except those on whom thy Lord hath bestowed His Mercy: and for this did He create them: and the Word of thy Lord shall be fulfilled: I will fill Hell with Jinns and men all together".

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63) Georges VAJDA, Le témoignage d'al-Māturīdī sur la doctrine des Manichéens, dea Dayṣānites et des Marcionites, in *Arabica*, 13, 1, 1966, pp. 1-38 ; Jerome Meric PESSAGNO, The Uses of Evil in the Maturidian Thought, in *Studia Islamica*, 60, 1984, pp. 59-82.

64) Jane I. SMITH, Yvonne Yazbeck HADDAD, *The Islamic understanding of death and resurrection*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002.

According to this understanding, the purgation of the Fire is not so much a punishment or chastisement as it is curative, putting man into a proper state to be able to enjoy the bliss of the happier abode. According to the same verses, God's mercy is contemplated as the main characteristic, remote from a possible rational human control, but in possession of a power rooted in the oneness of God, which may go beyond the human capacity for understanding of the moral aspect as dictated by the divine.

The Basmala: *bi-smi llāhi r-rahmāni r-rahīmi*, is the most repeated verse by almost every *sūra* in the Qur'ān; the meaning: *praise be to God, the merciful and the compassionate*, identifies the most intimate features of God's essence; a famous *Hadīth* says: every important matter which is not begun with the *Basmala* will be cut off. Louis Gardet reports, in the Encyclopaedia of Islām, that the term *Rahmān* was used prior to Islām in southern and central Arabia as a personal name of God, meaning the single and merciful God, whilst in the Qur'ān, *rahīm* alone appears in the list of the most beautiful names, and it is to be found in the body of the text. "The tripartite formula which opens each Qur'ānic *sūra* and each consecrated act of Muslim life evokes the mystery of the one God who is the Lord of the Mercies. It is to this mystery that the basmala owes, in the eyes of the Muslim who pronounces it, its power of benediction"<sup>65</sup>.

Is it possible to identify this quality as the main credential of God, as the main characteristic of the essence of God, an essential quality impacting on any attribute of his essence? Could God's justice be immensely merciful, just after a period of suffering and damnation?

## 2. A common ethical background

It is relevant that the main sources for the apocatastasis, within early Christian and Islamic theology, used terminology and ideas common to both religions (When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him, who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all, 1 Corinthians 15:28).

The Christian thinkers Ambrose of Milan and Gregory of Nazianzus discussed this concept without reaching a common pronouncement, while Basil the Great, who opposed this doctrine, supported the view that apocatastasis is in contrast with the Justice of God (theodicy), the position advanced by the Mu'tazila.

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65) Louis GARDET, Bernard Carra DE VAUX, "*Basmala*", in Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2 ed., Vol. 1, p. 1085.

On the other side, a minority of Mu'tazilite theologians held the view expressed by al-Māturīdī, in his *Raḍḍ Kitāb wa'īd al-fussaq lī-al-Ka'bī*, "The Refutation of the Doctrine of Eternal Damnation of Grave Sinners" (this essay was a refutation of the thought of the Mu'tazilite al-Ka'bī al-Balḥī) which probably sets out a doctrine closed to apocatastasis, arguing in a similar way to the thinking which would be promoted by Ibn Sīnā for the Absoluteness of God as immersed within a new Creation that will eventually lead to the existence of conceptual and material Paradise and Hell, together with their content of human souls.

This similar concept is also reported within a famous *Ḥadīth* which states: "By the God in whose hands are my soul, there will be a time when the gates of hell will be closed and watercress will grow therein". Philosophers, such as al-Kindī and Avicenna, argued that the world was eternal, while the rationalist theologians argued that it was created *ex-nihilo* in an event.

The metaphysical perception of apocatastasis resolves the issue, because in its light, creation is eternal whether manifest or not: the absoluteness of God as creator is preserved because there is, in a manner of speaking, a moment, a time when the possibility of creation is only inherent and not manifest. There is nothing beside the Absolute, and when creation begins anew, it begins *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. The import of this doctrine is that Paradise comes to an end and that those who dwell there are restored to a principal state, which includes the possibilities from which all beings issue in the first place. The Hells also come to an end, which, for those who have not already been annihilated, is equivalent to a full pardon. Yet, rather than a universal salvation, as considered by Origen and Christian Patristic thought, it is a reversion of manifestation and a philosophical affirmation of the Absoluteness of the absolute.

However, this analysis concerning apocatastasis in Islām could be rationally and theologically established only if Paradise and Hell are materially understood and interpreted whilst taking into account a literal and a metaphoric interpretation of the scripture.

The presence of earthly pleasures in Heaven and physical suffering in Hell suggests to us that we are still in a physical body phase at that point, something which had been questioned by the Mu'tazilite theology, because it supports the proposition that a final resurrection will uniquely consider a human's soul<sup>66</sup>. The distinction between the Mu'tazilite ethical doctrine and

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66) George Ch. ANAWATI, *Études de philosophie musulmane*, Vrin, Paris, 1974, pp.

the Māturīdite doctrine also needs to be linked to the deepening influence played by the Islamic *falsafa* and anti-atomist theories, in particular during the XI century.

### 3. *Al-Māturīdī's reasonable role on Apocatastasis*

As reported previously, it is not advisable to consider al-Māturīdī or Māturīdite authors such as al-Nasafī, without also including some analysis of al-Māturīdī's *Radd Kitāb wa'id al-fussaq li-al-Ka'bi*, which distinguished the day of judgment and the temporary physical suffering of human bodies in Hell, their process of purification and the rejoining in God's unity during the soul's effective resurrection. This work, which still awaits clarification through more study, could be rooted in al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* and in particular concerning mankind's attempt to understand God's transcendence.

The theological rational understanding of the Qur'ān (II; 25) from which al-Māturīdī shaped his theory of double eternity (*bi-nafsihi / bi-ghayrihi*), explains the distinction which is necessary to understand the differences between an eternal God and his eternal attributes: the former as eternal in himself, the latter through another. Therefore, if al-Māturīdī is able to create a new category of things "eternal through another" identifying it as a new category which "originated in itself" (*muḥdath li-nafsihi*) the *mutakallim's* main intuition is that *qadīm* and *muḥdath* ought to be distinguished on temporal as well as causal grounds<sup>67</sup>.

The *Ḥikma al-'Arūḍiyya*, composed by the philosopher Ibn Sīnā when he was 21 and writing as al-Māturīdī, embraces the distinction between "eternal in itself" and "eternal through another". This distinction would be seen by the Ash'arite al-Bāqillānī as linked to the attributes of God which could become as "originated in themselves" or "eternal through another".

Concerning the doctrine of divine attributes and God's unity, the Transoxanian Hanafite theologian had argued that God did have attributes such as his Knowledge and his might, and that these were independent entities, not identical with God's existence. These attributes differed from those which went by the same name among human beings, but could not be stripped of their meaning through allegorical interpretation, and regardless of whether these attributes pertained to God's entity or to God's acts, they were eternal.

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263- 289.

67) Robert WISNOVSKY, *Avicenna's metaphysics in context*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2003, p. 235.

Comparing this theory with the following one, it is evident that al-Māturīdī believed in an eternal Heaven, which, moreover, could not be as that physically imagined by mankind or literally described in the Qur'ān. The *mutakallim* professes belief in the doctrine of the beatific vision of God (*ru'ya*) in the afterlife, but he does not consider it as a human perception by eyesight (*idrāk*), if eyesight enables the human to apprehend the limits of a thing.

Finally, al-Māturīdī, in complete contrast with the Mu'tazila, supported that theodicy concerns the issue of God's wisdom and is not something understandable by human reason. God alone determined what justice and wisdom might be, and such concepts were not at all to be regarded as objective norms, nor indeed might they be apprehended through reason; al-Māturīdī agrees that God acts freely and does so in a supreme measure.

Celestial heaven is, then, the expression of something that is eternal through another, as an attribute of the eternal God passed to creation, while Hell could not be considered as directly linked with God's essence but is seen as associated with God's creative power. Allāh's theodicy is not an expression of a human rationalism, but of God's wisdom, which cannot be properly understood by human beings.

Finally, the *mutakallim* supports that a believer, even one who has committed a serious sin, remains a believer; he will be punished by God in Hell during the Day of Judgment, but not eternally, and the Prophet may favorably intercede on his behalf<sup>68</sup>. This is a doctrine which is seemingly closed to the possibility of apocatastasis.

However, it is relevant to underline that the information on the non-eternity of Hell, besides being very logical (the theological concept of eternity belongs only to God and hellfire could not be compared with the perpetuity of divine essence), could not be completely elaborated by al-Māturīdī, but was elaborated by his successors such as al-Bazdawī in the *Kitāb Usūl al-Dīn* or in the *Kitāb al-Muyassar fī'l-Kalām* (Elementary handbook for dialectical theology), and al-Nasafī in the *Kitāb Tabṣīrat al-adilla* (Book of Introduction on Cogent Proofs) or within the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd li-qawā'id al-tawḥīd* (Introductory work for the rules concerning unity).

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68) Clifford E. BOSWORTH, Muhammad S. ASIMOV, *History of Civilizations of central Asia*, Vol. IV, Unesco Publishing, Paris, 2000, pp. 126-128.

At the conclusion of this article, it is important to underline that the doctrine on apocatastasis within rational Islamic theology and *falsafa* was to become established in a more complete form within Ismā‘īlī Fāṭimid, as H. Corbin<sup>69</sup> as already demonstrated.

However, the main theories on this topic within Šī‘a emerged as deeply influenced by a philosophical, but also Gnostic and Šūfī exoteric approach, within *Kalām*, al-Māturīdī and Maturidism probably played a significant role in updating the thinking on apocatastasis within Islamic theology. The Brethren of Purity (*Iḥwān aṣ-Ṣafā*) directly inspired proto-Sufism and Ismā‘īlī eschatology, in particular the ideas concerning the soul and its destiny.

### CONCLUSION

A famous *ḥadīṭ* states: He who knows himself (in Arabic, his soul) will know his Lord”. “The soul will strive to regain its original abode in the intelligent world through the profession of spiritual divine creeds and also through discourse of noble philosophical matters, according to the Socratic path, while practicing mysticism, ascetism and monasticism according to the Christian path, and clinging to the Hanafī religion [i.e. Islam]”<sup>70</sup>. “Thereupon the soul will perceive those spiritual forms, glimpse those luminous substances and see those hidden matters and profound mysteries which cannot be apprehended through the bodily senses or corporeal organs. They can only be perceived by him whose soul has been purified by means of the refinement of his character. Otherwise, the soul will not be able to ascend to the higher world of the spheres [...] or receive those blessings which Hermes Trismegistus received through philosophy, and which Aristotle, Pythagoras, Christ and Muḥammad bear witness”<sup>71</sup>.

The conclusion of the epistles draws from the contemplation of humankind’s position in the universe and its inability to grasp the highest realities such as God’s essence or his majesty; the Brethren of purity’s merit had been to make an incredibly complex matter syncretic, enabling the teaching to be directly adopted by Islamic Sufism, as Abū l-Qāsim al-Ġunayd (d. 297 A.H.) shows us: “man becomes a ghost in the presence of

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69) Henry CORBIN, *Storia della filosofia islamica*, p. 97s.

70) Majid FAKHRY, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism: A short introduction*, p. 72.

71) *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*, III, Dar Sadir, Beirut, 1957, p. 137.

the Almighty, upon whom the decrees of his providence are fulfilled in the performance of the ordinances of his power in the labyrinths of the seas of His unity, through the act of self-annihilation (*fanā'*) and oblivion of the call for creation [...] so that the end of man may revert to his beginning, whereby he becomes what he was before he came to be"<sup>72</sup>.

We find this mystic unitary self-annihilation again in al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 264 A.H.), in the writings of the famous al-Ḥallāj (d. 309 A.H.), in the sayings attributed to al-Tustarī (d. 375 A.H.), and in other sources.

The emerging differences between *Kalām*, *Falsafa* and Sufism concerning this doctrine are evidenced by the sources quoted in this paper: Arab and Islamic philosophy shows the influence of Aristotelianism and neo-Platonism, and other Greek philosophy, in conjunction with the application of *Kalām* to the Qur'ān and Tradition, while Sufism relies on religious sources and also some Oriental philosophies. Arab and Islamic philosophy, in limiting the divine role, highlights the function played by Greek and Persian cosmology in a philosophy of nature by which both Christian and then Islamic religions were influenced; Greek philosophy stressed the importance of attention to a word of God, with relatively few references to the lack of eternal damnation, but this thought was itself in turn influenced by Patristic and other philosophy. The third and final stream, Sufism, includes and exalts a divine pantheism comprising a set of sources which are philosophic and theological at the same time.

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72) 'Abd al-Karīm AL-QUSHAYRI, *Al-Risālah al-Qushayriyah*, Cairo, 1912, p. 584.

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