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Withholding Judgment on Islamic Universalism

Ibn al-Wazīr (d. 840/1436) on the Duration and Purpose of Hell-Fire

Jon Hoover

In the late 740s/1340s, the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) and the Shāfiʿī chief judge of Damascus Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355) came into conflict over Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 728/1328) arguments for limited chastisement of unbelievers and the annihilation of hell-fire. Ibn al-Qayyim supported Ibn Taymiyya's arguments: Hell is therapeutic and reformative, and God's wise purpose in chastising unbelievers is to make them fit to leave the Fire. Al-Subkī for his part issued a sharp refutation of Ibn Taymiyya, declared assent to the annihilation of the Fire unbelief and reasserted the mainstream Sunni doctrine of eternal hell-fire for unbelievers. Controversy over Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim's arguments continues to the present day with some Muslims such as contemporary scholar Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī (b. 1926) following them through to a doctrine of universal salvation and others rejecting that doctrine as erroneous or heretical.¹

This study introduces the uniquely conciliatory and ecumenically-minded voice of Ibn al-Wazīr (d. 840/1436) into this controversy. Ibn al-Wazīr was a Yemeni traditionalist theologian who shifted away from the Mu'tazilī *kalām* theology espoused by his Zaydi community of origin early in his career. In order to mitigate the conflict over hell-fire, Ibn al-Wazīr withholds judgment on its duration, and he includes both its annihilation and its eternity within the realm of acceptable belief. However, the theological cost to Ibn al-Wazīr in taking this tolerant position is sacrificing explanation why God ultimately punishes unbelievers in Hell.

The following discussion will survey the key arguments of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim and al-Subkī, explain the character and sources of Ibn al-Wazīr's ecumenical and conciliatory spirit, and elaborate his agnosticism on the duration and purpose of chastisement in the Fire. I will argue that Ibn al-Wazīr's conciliatory posture in the controversy over universal salvation probably

1 For discussion of the arguments and notes on the history of the controversy, see Khalil, *Islam and the fate of others* 80–109, 126–31; Hoover, *Islamic universalism*; Hoover, *Against Islamic universalism*.

derived from the fact that he lived within Zaydi social and political spaces even after abandoning Zaydi doctrine for Sunni theological views. A more contentious and unyielding stance would have made him *persona non grata* among the Zaydis and probably among the Sunni scholars whom he sought out as teachers as well.

1 Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and al-Subkī on Hell-Fire

Ibn Taymiyya reflects on the duration of hell-fire in the last treatise that he wrote before his death in 728/1328, and he seems not to have addressed the question directly before this. The treatise, which I have called *Fanā' al-nār*, makes several arguments for limited chastisement of unbelievers in the Fire.² I will highlight five that constitute the core of Ibn Taymiyya's case.

The first two arguments are textual. One is Ibn Taymiyya's citation of a tradition attributed to the second Sunni caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–44), "Even if the People of the Fire stayed in the Fire like the amount of sand of 'Ālij, they would have, despite that, a day in which they would come out." 'Ālij was a large tract of sand outside Mecca, and the sense of the tradition is that those in the Fire will eventually leave, even if only after a very long time. According to Ibn Taymiyya, this clarifies that the statement in the Qur'an affirming that unbelievers will stay in Hell "for long stretches of time" (*lābithīna fīha aḥqāban*) (Q 78:23) need not mean forever.

A second textual argument is based on the Quranic verses, "As for those who are unhappy, they will be in the Fire, sighing and groaning, abiding (*khālidīn*) therein, as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord wills" (Q 11:106–7). The mainstream Sunni tradition took the key term *khālidīn* to mean "everlasting" or "eternal" in an absolute sense, especially as it appears frequently in the Qur'an without being qualified by the duration of the heavens and the earth or by God's will. For Ibn Taymiyya, however, the presence of these qualifications or exceptions indicates that *khālidīn* need not mean "forever" absolutely, and the Qur'an does not therefore preclude universal salvation.³

In a third argument in *Fanā' al-nār*, perhaps the most pivotal, Ibn Taymiyya rejects all claims that the Muslim community has reached a consensus (*ijmā'*) on the eternity of hell-fire for unbelievers. The early Muslims, the Salaf, were not of one mind on this issue, and any alleged consensus of later scholars is of

2 For a discussion of the origins of this treatise, see Hoover, *Islamic universalism* 182–5.

3 Ibn Taymiyya, *Fanā' al-nār* 52–70. Cf. Hoover, *Islamic universalism* 186.

no account in principle because it is always too difficult to verify. The operating principle here is Ibn Taymiyya's Salafi reformism, which sidesteps the consensus-based authority structure of the Sunnism of his time and allows him to critique the received doctrine of everlasting punishment for unbelievers.⁴

Two further arguments in *Fanā' al-nār* are theological. First, Ibn Taymiyya draws on hadith reports in which God says, "My mercy overcomes My anger,"⁵ and "My mercy precedes My anger,"⁶ to reason that God's mercy precludes chastising unbelievers forever. Second, as a firm defender of rationality and wise purpose in God's actions, Ibn Taymiyya argues that God could have no good reason for chastising anyone forever. Rather, the purpose of chastisement is therapeutic. It is to purify and cleanse from sins.⁷

Ibn Taymiyya's arguments seem not to have generated much interest until his student Ibn al-Qayyim copied and discussed portions of *Fanā' al-nār* in his book *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ*. So far as we can tell, Ibn al-Qayyim wrote this book in 745/1344–45. Ibn al-Qayyim also treated the duration of hell-fire soon thereafter in two further tomes: *Shifā' al-'alīl* and *Al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*.⁸ In all three of these works, Ibn al-Qayyim develops the therapeutic rationale for chastising unbelievers much more fully than did his teacher: God is a physician for whom the Fire is the great remedy to treat the worst of human maladies. In the first two works, Ibn al-Qayyim backs away from the thrust of his argument and leaves the final destiny of unbelievers to God's will. In the third, however, he follows his argument through to its logical conclusion and affirms that chastisement of unbelievers in the Fire will come to an end. Ultimately, no creature can resist God's therapeutic power, and the chastisement of hell-fire will no longer be necessary after it has served its reformatory purpose.

In 748/1348, Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355) wrote a refutation of Ibn Taymiyya's *Fanā' al-nār*.⁹ Al-Subkī had come into conflict with Ibn al-Qayyim on a number of other matters at the same time, and it seems obvious enough that al-Subkī's real aim in refuting Ibn Taymiyya was to stop Ibn al-Qayyim from arguing against eternal fire for unbelievers. Al-Subkī's strategy appears

4 Ibn Taymiyya, *Fanā' al-nār* 71–2. Cf. Hoover, *Islamic universalism* 186–7.

5 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-tawba* 14, 16 (*fī sa'at raḥmat Allāh*).

6 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-tawḥīd* 55 (*qaw! Allāh ta'ālā bal huwa Qur'ān majīd fī lawḥ mahfūz*); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-tawba* 15 (*fī sa'at raḥmat Allāh*).

7 Ibn Taymiyya, *Fanā' al-nār* 82–3. Cf. Hoover, *Islamic universalism* 188–9.

8 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ* 307–41, in ch. 67; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Shifā' al-'alīl* 540–65, in ch. 22. The discussion in *Al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala* is only available in an abridged form. See Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Mukhtaṣar al-ṣawā'iq* 544–690. For analysis of these three texts, see Hoover, *Islamic universalism*.

9 Subkī, *I'tibār*.

to have worked, as we have no evidence that Ibn al-Qayyim speculated further about the matter. Instead, he briefly affirms in his last work *Zād al-ma'ād* that unbelievers will suffer eternal punishment.¹⁰

Al-Subkī's refutation does not engage Ibn Taymiyya's therapeutic rationale for chastisement, and his decisive appeal is to scholarly consensus. He asserts that a consensus has been reached that unbelievers will spend eternity in the Fire; denying this is unbelief (*kuf̄r*). Al-Subkī is careful to say that he is not accusing anyone in particular of being an unbeliever, and Ibn Taymiyya is never mentioned explicitly in the treatise. Nonetheless, it is clear that deviation from belief in eternal punishment for unbelievers lies beyond the pale of Islamic orthodoxy. Al-Subkī also does not accept Ibn Taymiyya's interpretations of the key Qur'ānic texts, and he marshals a large body of Quranic evidence to show that unbelievers will abide in hell-fire eternally.¹¹ Ibn al-Wazīr took a mediating approach to this controversy, and we first look at his life and thought more generally to assess why he may have taken such a position.

2 Ibn al-Wazīr and His Shift to Ecumenical Traditionalism

Ibn al-Wazīr has received only passing notice in European language scholarship,¹² but he was the subject of a few sizable studies in Arabic in the 1980s. The most thorough and analytical of these is Rizq al-Ḥajar's 1984 book on Ibn al-Wazīr's life and theological thought.¹³ A 1985 dissertation by 'Alī al-Ḥarbī covers much the same ground but in less penetrating fashion.¹⁴ Al-Ḥarbī is aware of al-Ḥajar's work, but it appeared too late for him to make use of it. Both authors bemoan that the biography by the early nineteenth-century Yemeni reformer Muḥammad al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834) was the only source of what little was known previously about Ibn al-Wazīr.¹⁵ There is however an earlier discussion

10 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Zād al-ma'ād* i, 68. On Ibn al-Qayyim's silencing, see Hoover, *Against Islamic universalism*, and Hoover, *A medieval Muslim argument*. Khalil interprets Ibn al-Qayyim not to have retracted his belief in universal salvation in *Zād al-ma'ād*. See Khalil, *Islam and the fate of others* 100–1.

11 Hoover, *Islamic universalism* 187–8.

12 See, for example, Madelung, *Zaydī attitudes* 143; Haykel, *Reforming Islam* 338; Brown, *Canonization* 214, 314.

13 Ḥajar, *Ibn al-Wazīr*.

14 Ḥarbī, *Ibn al-Wazīr*.

15 Ḥajar, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 13; Ḥarbī, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 3–4. For the biography, see Shawkānī, *Badr* ii, 80–93.

of Ibn al-Wazīr's thought in a 1980 survey of Zaydi theology by Aḥmad Ṣubḥī.¹⁶ A further modern work, a biography of Ibn al-Wazīr and a survey of his vast theological treatise *Al-ʿAwāšim wa-l-qawāšim* ('The protectors and destroyers') by the Yemeni historian Ismāʿīl al-Akwaʿ (d. 1429/2008), was first written in 1984 as part of the introduction to *ʿAwāšim*¹⁷ and then published independently with additions in 1988.¹⁸ I have not found substantial research on Ibn al-Wazīr that is more recent, and I rely on the above sources for much of what follows.

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Wazīr was born in 775/1373–4 into a family of scholars in the Zaydi Shiʿi enclave of al-Ḍahrawayn, which lay about 100 kilometers to the northwest of Ṣanʿāʾ in the Zaydi dominated Yemeni highlands. First in his hometown and then in Saʿda, Ibn al-Wazīr learned the Qurʾan, Zaydi legal works and the Muʿtazilī *kalām* theology prevalent among the Zaydis. He then abandoned traditional Zaydi teachings early in his career to accept the full authority of the canonical Sunni hadith collections, especially Bukhārī and Muslim. His elder brother al-Hādī b. Ibrāhīm (d. 822/1419–20), who had been one of his early teachers, tried to persuade him to return to Zaydi views but to no avail. Despite their differences, al-Hādī sometimes defended his brother, and the two remained in contact throughout their lives exchanging letters and verses of poetry. At an unknown date, Ibn al-Wazīr moved to Taʿizz, capital of the Sunni Rasūlid rulers of southern Yemen and the western coastal lowlands, to study with the Ḥanafī hadith scholar Nafīs al-Dīn al-ʿAlawī and then in 807/1404–5 travelled to Mecca to study under a number of Mālīkī and Shāfiʿī scholars. Ibn al-Wazīr remained in the Yemeni highlands during his later years teaching and writing. He suffered Zaydi opposition to his ideas and sometimes withdrew into seclusion to write and worship. He died of the plague in 840/1436.¹⁹

Ibn al-Wazīr wrote more than 40 works; many are extant, and several have been published.²⁰ His two major theological works relevant to the present

16 Ṣubḥī, *Fī ʿilm al-kalām* iii, 347–95. The introduction to this book is dated 1400/1980.

17 Ibn al-Wazīr, *ʿAwāšim* i, 7–100.

18 All references to Akwaʿ, *Imām*, are to the 1988 edition.

19 Akwaʿ, *Imām* 10–19, 33–40, 52–61, 64–9, 78; Ḥajar, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 23–57. Ḥajar suggests that Ibn al-Wazīr began his life of asceticism and frequent seclusion in the early 820s/late 1410s. See *ibid.*, 44–5. Cf. Ḥarbī, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 36–49. For an example of poetic exchange between Ibn al-Wazīr and his brother Hādī, see vom Bruck, *Regimes of piety* 206–8, in which Ibn al-Wazīr urges his brother to keep his distance from political affairs, a counsel which is cited by modern Zaydi quietists against Zaydi activists.

20 Lists of Ibn al-Wazīr's works are given in Ḥarbī, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 88–101; Ḥajar, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 103–14; Akwaʿ, *Imām* 74–8; Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* ii, 188, *Supplementbände* ii, 249; Kaḥḥāla, *Muʿjam al-muʿallifīn* viii, 210–11.

study are the aforementioned *Al-'Awāšim wa-l-qawāšim*, which extends to nine volumes in the printed edition, and *Īthār al-ḥaqq 'alā al-khalq* ('Preferring the Real over the creation'), which exceeds 450 pages in the 1318/1900 edition.²¹ Ibn al-Wazīr wrote *'Awāšim* in 808/1405–6 to respond to a treatise by his Zaydi teacher 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Abī al-Qāsim attacking him for deviation from Zaydism. Early in *'Awāšim*, Ibn al-Wazīr outlines his methodology of creative jurisprudence (*ijtihād*), undermines the Sunni legal regime of four recognized law schools by refuting those who deny *ijtihād* after al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), and clarifies his traditionalist theological method. Ibn al-Wazīr reports that he had believed in accord with *kalām* theology that the first human obligation was speculation (*nazar*) to prove the existence of God but that he then turned to the Qur'an and the Sunna convinced that they must contain all necessary proofs and guidance. Ibn al-Wazīr's shift away from traditional Zaydi doctrines is readily apparent in *'Awāšim* in the doctrinal positions that he defends. For example, he rejects the Zaydi-Mu'tazilī view that humans create their own acts in favor of the Sunni traditionalist belief that God creates all acts. He denies that the unrepentant Muslim grave sinner (*fāsiq*) will spend eternity in the Fire, and, along with the Sunni mainstream, he maintains that monotheists with the least grain of belief in their hearts will eventually enter paradise, even if they must first spend time in the Fire as punishment for their sins. The book also absolves Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) of corporealism in the question of God's attributes, and it contains treatments of the beatific vision of God and the imamate.²² Ibn al-Wazīr completed an abridged version of *'Awāšim* several years later in 817/1411 called *Al-Rawḍ al-bāsim* ('The smiling garden').

Īthār al-ḥaqq was written toward the end of Ibn al-Wazīr's life in 837/1433–4. The stated purpose of the book is to set out the essential beliefs of all Muslims, not just the views of a particular sect, and leave aside the many secondary issues that divide, confuse and distract. Ibn al-Wazīr observes that some things are best left unexplored, as life is short, and that ignorance is sometimes beneficial.²³ The book touches on the full range of Islamic theological issues from the foundations of knowledge and the existence of God to prophecy, eschatology and the imamate, and it includes lengthy discussions of

21 The edition used for this study is the 1318/1901 edition Ibn al-Wazīr, *Īthār al-ḥaqq*, which is reviewed briefly by Rashīd Riḍā in *Majallat al-manār* 4,1 (1318/1901), 16. A more recent but no better edition was published in Beirut at Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya in 1403/1983.

22 Akwa', *Imām* 102–14, provides a full overview of Ibn al-Wazīr's *'Awāšim*. Ibn al-Wazīr, *'Awāšim* i, 202, relates his conversion from *nazar* to the Qur'an and the Sunna.

23 Ibn al-Wazīr, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 3–7, 30.

God's creation of the human act and God's wise purpose in creating all things, including evils.

The exact cause of Ibn al-Wazīr's turn to traditionalist Sunni doctrines is not readily apparent, but the increasing influence of Sunnism in Yemen and Mecca in the late eighth/fourteenth century probably played an important role.²⁴ The Ayyūbids had conquered a politically fractured southern Yemen and the western Yemeni coastal area of Tihāma in 569/1173, and they strongly supported the Shāfi'ī law school. In 626/1228 the Ayyūbids gave way to the Rasūlids who ruled through 858/1454 over southern Yemen, Tihāma, and, at times, Ṣan'ā' and parts of the Yemeni highlands. The Rasūlids nurtured a thriving civilization that attracted renowned scholars such as the hadith expert Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) and the Sufi 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428) to Yemen. The Shāfi'īs became dominant under the Rasūlids through defections from the Ḥanafis, and Ash'arism gained ground against theological traditionalism among Shāfi'īs beginning in the eighth/fourteenth century.²⁵ In Mecca the ruling Sharifs had been largely Zaydi from the late fourth/tenth century onwards. However, their allegiance gradually shifted to Sunnism in the latter half of the eighth/fourteenth century under pressure from the Mamluk rulers of Egypt and Syria. The Sharifs turned to the study of hadith to solidify their Sunni identity and contributed to the growing number of endowed Sunni *madrasas* in Mecca. They completely disassociated from Zaydism in the first half of the ninth/fifteenth century.²⁶

In addition to the rising prestige of Sunnism in Mecca and the Yemeni lowlands, Ismā'īl al-Akwa' suggests that the robust Zaydi doctrine of *ijtihād* facilitated Ibn al-Wazīr's transition to Sunni doctrines.²⁷ Aḥmad Ṣubḥī claims as well that Ibn al-Wazīr's practice of *ijtihād* did not even lead him beyond the foundations of Zaydism.²⁸ Ibn al-Wazīr did write substantially on *ijtihād*,

24 Similarly, Haykel briefly suggests that "[t]he openness to Sunnism amongst Zaydi-born scholars in this period [of Ibn al-Wazīr] is probably related to the increased contacts Zaydīs now had with Shāfi'ī scholars, in particular those living in Rasūlid Lower Yemen, but also others in Mecca." See Haykel, *Reforming Islam* 338 n. 4.

25 On the Rasūlids, see Smith, *Rasūlids*; Smith, *Political history*. On the religious history of medieval Yemen, see Aziz, *Religion and mysticism* 7–33; Gochenour, *Towards a sociology*; Madelung, *Islam in Yemen*; and Madelung, *Zaydiyya*. Discussions of the religious and political situations in Yemen are also found in Ḥarbī, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 50–5, 70–80; and Ḥajar, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 66–75.

26 Mortel, *Zaydi Shi'ism*; Mortel, *Madrasas in Mecca*.

27 Akwa', *Imām* 8.

28 Ṣubḥī, *Fī 'ilm al-kalām* iii, 348, n. 2.

and he is, moreover, often seen as a precursor to Muḥammad al-Shawkānī,²⁹ probably because al-Shawkānī's biography of Ibn al-Wazīr casts him in that role. Al-Shawkānī calls Ibn al-Wazīr an absolute independent jurist (*mujtahid mutlaq*), and he takes the biography as an opportunity to launch a diatribe against blind imitation (*taqlīd*). Al-Shawkānī also relates an anecdote in which Ibn al-Wazīr rebuffed an invitation from a teacher in Mecca to join the Shāfi'i or Ḥanafī legal school. The invitation so angered Ibn al-Wazīr that he retorted that if he were in need of someone to follow, he would have chosen the Zaydi Imām al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 246/860) and his grandson Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq (d. 298/911), the eponym of the Zaydi-Hādawī legal school in Yemen.³⁰ Yet, despite all of this, Ibn al-Wazīr does occasionally identify with the Shāfi'is by speaking of the Meccan Shāfi'i scholar Sa'd b. 'Alī al-Zanjānī (d. 471/1078–9) as “one of our Shāfi'i colleagues” (*min aṣḥābinā al-shāfi'iyya*).³¹ The significance of this statement is not entirely clear, and perhaps it means only that al-Zanjānī is a scholarly colleague who happens to be Shāfi'i. Nevertheless, the exact nature of Ibn al-Wazīr's *ijtihād* and al-Shawkānī's reasons for characterizing him as an absolute *mujtahid* require further study. What is apparent, however, is that Ibn al-Wazīr's independence of mind, to which his advocacy for some form of *ijtihād* bears evidence, afforded him the capacity to rethink his sources of religious authority and his theology.

While Ibn al-Wazīr firmly adopts traditionalist Sunni theological positions, he does not vilify Zaydi-Mu'tazilī doctrines, and his theology is distinctly conciliatory and accommodating in character. This requires elaboration and explanation, especially as we encounter these same characteristics in Ibn al-Wazīr's reflection on the duration of unbelievers' chastisement in hell-fire. The accommodating tenor of Ibn al-Wazīr's theology is readily apparent in his reticence to practice *takfir*, that is, labelling fellow Muslims unbelievers. Ibn al-Wazīr does exclude from belief those who intentionally deny the Islamic revelation or misinterpret an essential part of the religion—among them the Bāṭinīs (Ismā'īlīs) in his view—but he refuses to call anyone who delves into

29 Madelung briefly remarks on the “neo-Sunnī school” that emerged out of Zaydism from Ibn al-Wazīr to al-Shawkānī, and he states that Ibn al-Wazīr “insisted . . . that he was not joining any Sunnī school and was simply employing sound, independent *ijtihād*.” See Madelung, *Zaydiyya* 480. Haykel mentions Ibn al-Wazīr's anti-Zaydi traditionalism as a forerunner to al-Shawkānī. See Haykel, *Revival and reform* 10–11. Elsewhere, Haykel states that Ibn al-Wazīr did not formally declare “an affiliation to any of the Sunnī schools.” See Haykel, *Reforming Islam* 338.

30 Shawkānī, *Badr* 81–90.

31 Ibn al-Wazīr, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 378. See also idem, *Awāṣim* viii, 8; idem, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 203.

interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of ambiguous expressions (*mutashābihāt*) an unbeliever. Ibn al-Wazīr says that error in calling someone an unbeliever is among the worst crimes one could commit against fellow Muslims, even worse than offending God's rights by failing to label someone an unbeliever who is one. It is better to withhold judgment in the face of contradiction and ambiguity.³²

Ibn al-Wazīr's caution in regard to *takfīr* prevents him from dismissing *kalām* theology out of hand in the fashion of its virulent critics among the Sunni traditionalists. He allows that *kalām* functions to clarify and defend Islamic doctrines, and he warns against calling *kalām* theologians unbelievers or charging them with going astray. However, Ibn al-Wazīr criticizes *kalām* for erring in the obscurity of its proofs and for its propensity to delve into the interpretation of ambiguous matters like the modality (*kayfiyya*) of God's attributes and the secret of God's determination of evil, all of which lead to divisions and innovations within Islam. Moreover, Ibn al-Wazīr maintains that the Qur'an's proofs are superior to the complex proofs of *kalām*; the proofs in the Qur'an clarify the principles of religion, and they accord with true rationality.³³

In addition to permitting a range of interpretation in ambiguous matters, Ibn al-Wazīr manifests an ecumenical spirit in trying to conciliate opposing doctrines. Rizq al-Ḥajar outlines how Ibn al-Wazīr seeks to mitigate differences between the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites in several aspects of the divine-human relation. Brief attention to al-Ḥajar's findings in two aspects will suffice to illustrate Ibn al-Wazīr's approach. The first involves difference over God's will (*irāda*). The Mu'tazilites maintain that God wills that everyone believe, even the unbeliever, whereas for many Ash'arites God's will is all-encompassing such that God wills even unbelief and disobedience. Ibn al-Wazīr turns to the philosophically inclined Ash'arī theologian al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) for a more sophisticated view and responds that the Ash'arites do not say that God wills disobedience in itself. Rather, God hates disobedience and wills it only for the sake of something else. With this clarification, and even though real difference remains on the creation of the human act, Ibn al-Wazīr can claim that Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites agree that God does not will evil.³⁴

The second example from al-Ḥajar's analysis of Ibn al-Wazīr's conciliation efforts involves God's wise purpose (*ḥikma*), which will be further elaborated in conjunction with his views on chastisement in hell-fire discussed below. While Mu'tazilism affirms that God acts for purposes, classical Ash'arism denies purpose in God's acts in order to exalt God's power and self-sufficiency. Ibn al-Wazīr explains that the Ash'arites' extreme position is an over-reaction

32 Ḥarbī, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 190–9, summarizing Ibn al-Wazīr, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 414–51.

33 Ḥajar, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 138–90, 237–50.

34 *Ibid.*, 260–7.

to their opponents' excessive enthusiasm for detailing why God does what He does.³⁵ Taking inspiration from the philosophically-inclined Ash'arism of al-Ghazālī, as well as the traditionalist theology of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Wazīr seeks out a conciliatory path by affirming that God acts for wise purposes even if they cannot always be known. That wise purposes in God's acts are not always apparent, especially in evil and pain, does not mean that they do not exist.³⁶

As al-Ḥajar's analysis shows, Ibn al-Wazīr takes the edge off substantive theological difference by identifying shared affirmations between Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites and avoiding dissenting Ash'arī views, and he shows little interest in discrediting the Zaydis and their Mu'tazilī doctrines. It remains to explain why Ibn al-Wazīr adopts this conciliatory approach to theology as well as his extreme caution in the face of ambiguity and difference of interpretation. For Aḥmad Ṣubḥī, the conflictual character of *kalām* grated against Ibn al-Wazīr's temperament,³⁷ and for 'Alī al-Ḥarbī, Ibn al-Wazīr's conciliatory stance derived from a pious desire for unity in a fractious theological environment.³⁸ It was also a prudent strategy, as al-Ḥarbī and al-Akwa' both point to the physical danger that Zaydi fanaticism posed to Ibn al-Wazīr, a danger that drove him to dissimulation (*taqiyya*) as he himself explains in *Awāṣim*.³⁹ The following passage comes from an interpolation into the introduction to the work, apparently added by Ibn al-Wazīr later in life, as it makes direct reference to *Al-Rawḍ al-bāsim*, the abridgement of *Awāṣim*.

In this response [i.e., *Awāṣim*], I followed the paths of the dialecticians in reducing the opponent to absurdity in his principles. In part of it, I did not undertake to clarify my own choice [of doctrines]. This was for the sake of guarding against (*taqiyya*) the ignorant and fanatical. So, let the reader take notice of that and not take my answer to the opponent for my own doctrine. Then, I abridged this book into a small book that I called *Al-Rawḍ al-bāsim*, which is less [an instance of] dissimulation (*taqiyya*) than this one.⁴⁰

35 Ibid., 286, quotes the argument directly from Ibn al-Wazīr, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 194.

36 Ḥajar, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 286–312, 322–36.

37 Ṣubḥī, *Fī 'ilm al-kalām* iii, 349–50.

38 Ḥarbī, *Ibn al-Wazīr*, 66.

39 Ibid., 125–8; Akwa', *Imām* 81–2.

40 Ibn al-Wazīr, *Awāṣim* i, 225. It may be that Ibn al-Wazīr added the full introductory discussion found in *Awāṣim* i, 201–27, later in life, as it takes a reflective tone characteristic of some remove from the writing of the work. In modern terms, it reads like a new author's preface for a twentieth anniversary edition of a successful scholarly book.

Ibn al-Wazīr here makes clear that he concealed some of his views and measured his words carefully in *ʿAwāšim* so as not to provoke opponents unnecessarily. Al-Akwaʿ adds that Ibn al-Wazīr could not have forgotten that the Zaydi Imām al-Nāṣir Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had killed the Shāfiʿī jurist Aḥmad b. Zayd al-Shāwirī in 793/1391 after al-Shāwirī wrote a book attacking the Imam’s doctrines and actions. It thus comes as no surprise to al-Akwaʿ that Ibn al-Wazīr sometimes reconciled with his Zaydi opponents and leaned toward Zaydi views as much as he could without compromising the integrity of his own position.⁴¹

Given the danger that Ibn al-Wazīr felt from Zaydi opponents, it is not entirely clear why he never abandoned the Yemeni highlands for good. Perhaps it was an unwillingness to affiliate with a single Sunni school of law or a continuing sense of Zaydi identity and deep-felt loyalty to family and community of origin—recall his close relation to his brother al-Hādī noted above.⁴² Whatever be the case, Ibn al-Wazīr remained sufficiently connected to Zaydi society to appear in Zaydi biographical dictionaries,⁴³ and it is apparent that at least part of his strategy for carving out sufficient place for himself within the Zaydi intellectual world was adopting a theological stance of conciliation and accommodation. A more combative style would have made it difficult for Ibn al-Wazīr to sustain his Sunni traditionalism not only at home among the Zaydis in the Yemeni highlands but also during his visits to Sunni scholars in Mecca and the lowlands of Yemen. A conciliatory, accommodating and even dissimulating posture better served his purposes of developing and maintaining his ecumenical traditionalist vision in the interstices of the Yemeni theological and political conflicts of his day. This intellectually circumspect stance is especially evident in his deliberations over the duration of chastisement for unbelievers, to which we now turn.

3 Withholding Judgment on the Duration of Hell-Fire

Ibn al-Wazīr briefly narrates the controversy around Ibn Taymiyya’s case for the annihilation of the Fire in *ʿAwāšim* and *Īthār al-ḥaqq*. Here it becomes

41 Akwaʿ, *Imām* 82–3. On the killing of al-Shāwirī, see also Aziz, *Religion and mysticism* 167; and Madelung, *Zaydī attitudes* 134.

42 Ibn al-Wazīr also had a son ʿAbdallāh, who was an accomplished Zaydi jurist. See Ḥajar, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 56.

43 The introductory materials to Ibn al-Wazīr, *Al-Rawḍ al-bāsim*, contain a list of medieval and modern Yemeni biographies of Ibn al-Wazīr (pp. 17–9), as well as the biography of Ibn al-Wazīr by his brother al-Hādī’s grandson Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh (d. 897/1492) (pp. 21–52). Ḥarbī, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 85–6, also contains a list of biographies.

apparent that he composed at least two separate works on the topic, one a poem and the other a commentary on the relevant part of Ibn al-Qayyim's *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ*. In *Īthār al-ḥaqq*, Ibn al-Wazīr writes, "I composed independent works (*muṣannafāt mustaqilla*) on this issue," that is, on the duration of chastisement in the hereafter.⁴⁴ Moreover, Ibn al-Wazīr states in *ʿAwāṣim*,

Ibn Taymiyya wrote in support of his doctrine [of limited chastisement], and al-Dhahabī wrote in refutation of him. In this matter I have discussions and additions, and criticism of both of them. In this matter I have a long poem that I have called *Al-Ijāda fī al-irāda* ['The excellent expression on the will'], which is more than 1000 verses.⁴⁵

Ibn al-Wazīr continues in *ʿAwāṣim* by quoting twelve verses from the *Ijāda* and observing that the poem may be about the best one can say on the question. He adds that Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya wrote about this matter in his book *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ* and leaned very strongly toward supporting his teacher Ibn Taymiyya.⁴⁶ Among Ibn al-Qayyim's writings on the duration of hell-fire, it appears that Ibn al-Wazīr had access only to *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ*, as this is the only book that he mentions by name.

Presumably Ibn al-Wazīr's reference to al-Dhahabī is to the Shāfiʿī traditionalist and historian Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348). However, it is not otherwise known that al-Dhahabī wrote a refutation of Ibn Taymiyya on the duration of hell-fire, and, commenting on Ibn al-Wazīr's citation of al-Dhahabī more than 300 years later, the Yemeni traditionalist Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Amīr al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 1182/1768–9) observes that he could not find any such treatise.⁴⁷ Most likely, Ibn al-Wazīr confused al-Dhahabī with his Shāfiʿī counterpart Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, especially as Ibn al-Wazīr never refers to al-Subkī writing against the annihilation of the Fire otherwise.

In *Īthār al-ḥaqq* Ibn al-Wazīr again mentions his *Ijāda* and quotes 54 of its verses; these 54 verses are translated and annotated below in the Appendix. He adds in *Īthār al-ḥaqq* that the whole poem is about 1200 verses and that

44 Ibn al-Wazīr, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 290.

45 Idem, *ʿAwāṣim* vi, 365.

46 Ibid., 366. Ibn al-Wazīr also quotes 13 verses from the *Ijāda* in *ʿAwāṣim* v, 363 and another four verses, which he says are taken from the end of the poem, in *ʿAwāṣim* vi, 342.

47 Ṣanʿānī, *Rafʿ al-astār* 62. Al-Ṣanʿānī is here commenting on Ibn al-Wazīr's citation of al-Dhahabī in *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 219. Additionally, there is no discussion of Ibn Taymiyya's views on the duration of hell-fire in al-Dhahabī's book on major sins *Kitāb al-kabāʾir*. However, al-Dhahabī was not without theological and personal grievances against his erstwhile teacher Ibn Taymiyya, on which see Bori, *A new source*, especially 326–8.

he wrote it to avoid falling into danger and error in his youth.⁴⁸ Ibn al-Wazīr further states that he wrote a “long discourse” (*kalām ṭawīl*) on the question of chastisement in the hereafter.⁴⁹ As he elaborates,

Ibn Taymiyya wrote to expound [God’s] wise purpose in the chastisement of the hereafter. His disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya followed him and elaborated that in his book *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ ilā diyār al-afrah*, and I separated that out into a small volume (*juz’ latīf*) and added to it.⁵⁰

Ibn al-Wazīr also writes in *Īthār al-ḥaqq*, “Ibn Taymiyya and his disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya have composed interesting works on this, and al-Dhahabī has a work opposing them. I have a mediating [work] (*tawassuṭ*) between them.”⁵¹ As with the *Ijāda*, this “mediating” work was probably written before *ʿAwāṣim*, that is, before 808/1405–6, since Ibn al-Wazīr already mentions in that book that he had written something besides the *Ijāda* on the duration of chastisement. It is a matter of curiosity that Ibn al-Wazīr gave so much attention to this topic in his early years, and it is unfortunate that none of these works is known to be extant apart from the verses of the *Ijāda* quoted in *ʿAwāṣim* and *Īthār al-ḥaqq*. Obviously, the duration of the Fire had puzzled Ibn al-Wazīr greatly, and he may have considered adopting Ibn Taymiyya’s view for himself as he made his way from Zaydi to Sunni theological positions.⁵²

Ultimately, however, Ibn al-Wazīr does not take a position on the duration of hell-fire and instead devotes space in both *ʿAwāṣim* and *Īthār al-ḥaqq* to explaining how the different views on the question emerged. In *ʿAwāṣim*, in the context of discussing the problem of “perpetual evil that is not cut off, like the chastisement of the Fire and abiding in it [forever],”⁵³ he claims that the ominous and apparently irrational prospect of perpetual chastisement drove the extremists (*ghulāt*) among the Ashʿarites to deny wise purpose in God’s acts entirely⁵⁴ and Ibn Taymiyya to affirm the annihilation of the Fire. Ibn al-Wazīr explains that Ibn Taymiyya’s strongest proof comes from two Quranic verses

48 Ibn al-Wazīr, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 219.

49 Ibid., 216.

50 Ibid., 99.

51 Ibid., 223.

52 Ḥarbī, *Kashf al-astār* 17–8, 25–8, maintains that Ibn al-Wazīr “leaned” (*yamīl*) toward Ibn Taymiyya’s view before deciding to withhold judgment on the matter.

53 Ibn al-Wazīr, *ʿAwāṣim* vi, 356.

54 Ibid., v, 335–69, develops the charge that the Ashʿarites make God aimless to avoid problems of evil.

that make an “exception” (*istithnā*) to everlasting chastisement of unbelievers: “[God] will say, ‘The Fire be your dwelling place, abiding therein, except as God wills’ (Q 6:128), and unbelievers will be in the Fire ‘abiding therein, as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord wills’ (Q 11:107). In Ibn al-Wazīr’s analysis, Ibn Taymiyya uses the exceptions “as long as the heavens and the earth endure” and “except as your Lord wills” to specify or particularize (*takhṣīs*) the general applicability (*‘umūm*) of the great many Quranic verses affirming eternal chastisement for unbelievers. For Ibn Taymiyya, the Quranic exceptions justify setting aside the general witness of the Qur’an in favor of limited chastisement. Ibn al-Wazīr only explains how Ibn Taymiyya comes to this view; he does not condemn it even though he himself is not ready to embrace it. Rather, Ibn al-Wazīr notes that uncertainty in the matter could only be set aside if there were necessary knowledge (*‘ilm ḍarūrī*) deriving from the religion or the Muslim consensus (*ijmā’*) that spoke to it.⁵⁵ Earlier in *Awāṣim*, Ibn al-Wazīr speaks to this point more fully: there is no text calling someone who denies the perpetuity of the Fire an unbeliever, nor is the perpetuity of punishment known by consensus or known to be a necessary part of religion; this is because Muslims have differed over the exception given in the verses cited above.⁵⁶

Ibn al-Wazīr takes the same approach in his later work *Īthār al-ḥaqq*, which provides a more unified account of his position in the lengthy quotation from his poem, the *Ijāda*. Preceding the quotation is discussion of the tension in God between wisdom and power (*qudra*). Ibn al-Wazīr identifies three ways in which the tension is relieved: impugning God’s wise purpose, impugning God’s power, or impugning the perpetuity of chastisement (*dawām al-‘adhāb*). The extremists among the Ash‘arites impugn wise purpose in God’s acts because it is difficult to understand what wise purpose God might have in creating the evils of this world and in the hereafter. The extremists among the Mu‘tazilites impugn God’s power when they imagine that there are things that God cannot do, that for example God could not reach the disobedient with His grace. Ibn Taymiyya and his followers maintain that impugning wise purpose and power entails deficiency in God and comes close to unbelief. However, they themselves impugn the perpetuity of chastisement for unbelievers on account of God’s great mercy and wise purpose, as well as the “exception” in the revelation—this is the same exception to everlasting punishment noted from the Quranic verses cited above (Q 6:128, 11:107).⁵⁷

55 Ibid., vi, 365.

56 Ibid., 142–3.

57 Ibn al-Wazīr, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 215–6, cf. 246.

The beginning of the *Ijāda* invokes the problem of evil and God's will more generally (verses 1–5). Ibn al-Wazīr then pits the frequent mention of eternal Fire in the Qur'an against God's generosity and mercy (verses 6–8) and states, "The matter of eternity in the Fire becomes grave for everyone who ponders the names of the Lord of the worlds" (verse 7). So, how does eternal chastisement of unbelievers in hell-fire fit with an all-merciful God? This is no doubt the dilemma that Ibn al-Wazīr pondered as a young man. But then, as he writes in the *Ijāda*, the Qur'an itself provides relief: "When the exception to eternal chastisement appears openly in His Book, the edge is taken off the gravity [of the matter]" (verse 11). As we have seen above, the destiny of unbelievers is not eternal Fire without exception. Rather, it depends on the duration of the heavens and the earth and on God's will, and this suddenly opens up a broader range of doctrinal possibilities (verses 12–13). Reading the *Ijāda* autobiographically, Ibn al-Wazīr here begins to see a way out of his dilemma.

Ibn al-Wazīr continues in the *Ijāda* by alluding to three views on the duration of chastisement in the sparest of terms. Ibn al-Wazīr begins, "One view holds to the eternity [of chastisement] because the threats of that are abundant in the overwhelming [number of] revealed texts" (verse 14). The eternal chastisement in this verse apparently applies to both unbelievers and Muslim grave sinners, which is the view of the Mu'tazilites and the Zaydis. As I read the poem, the mainstream Sunni view that Muslim sinners will eventually reach paradise while unbelievers will not is what Ibn al-Wazīr identifies as a third position: "The third view, the prevailing one (*al-mansūr*), [maintains that] there is hope for the Muslim, but whoever resists Islam is not safe" (verse 16). In between these two positions, Ibn al-Wazīr mentions that of Ibn Taymiyya: "Another view gives precedence to the specific, and the names of the wisest Judge help him [in that]" (verse 15, cf. verse 29). That is, Ibn Taymiyya specifies the general Quranic witness to eternal chastisement with the exceptions "except as God wills" and "as long as the heavens and the earth endure" (Q 6:128, 11:107) and supports this with appeal to God's wise purpose.

In the following verses of the *Ijāda*, Ibn al-Wazīr in his ecumenical and conciliatory spirit admonishes against adherents of one view censuring proponents of another (verses 17–18, 20), and he counsels against calling Ibn Taymiyya an unbeliever, even if some of his proofs turn out to be weak (verses 29–32). Ibn al-Wazīr expands the domain of acceptable belief to include all three views because the evidence of the Qur'an is not uniform: "There is no unbelief in any of the views after decisive proofs in the revelation of the most knowledgeable Knower contradict" (verse 19). He also rationalizes the contradictory character of the Quranic evidence as having an ecumenical purpose. God's aim in introducing the "exception" or "specification" indicated in Quranic verses such

as 6:128 and 11:107 is to widen the scope of acceptable belief: “If God had not willed to widen His ruling, He would not have specified it in His Reminder openly” (verse 21).

The remaining verses of the *Ijāda* quoted in *Īthār al-ḥaqq* further discuss various attempts to resolve the tension between God’s power and God’s wisdom. The extreme Ash‘arites emphasize God’s power at the expense of His wise purpose, and the Mu‘tazilites underline wise purpose and justice at the expense of power (verses 35–54). Ibn al-Wazīr counsels affirming both God’s power and God’s wise purpose and withholding judgment on the matter beyond that (verse 49) because “the safety of the judicious in the face of fear [of error] is better than the correctness of the [overly] decisive” (verse 50). The “[overly] decisive” are those theologians who resort to reinterpretation to resolve the tension (verse 47), and here we see again Ibn al-Wazīr’s caution in the face of divisive theological questions.

To sum up Ibn al-Wazīr’s view thus far, there is no consensus on the duration of unbelievers’ chastisement in the Fire, contrary to the earlier view of Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, and this is in fact what God willed by providing contradictory indications in the Qur’an. Moreover, Ibn al-Wazīr neither adopts Ibn Taymiyya’s argument for limited chastisement nor condemns it. Both limited chastisement and everlasting chastisement fall within the domain of acceptable Muslim belief, but Ibn al-Wazīr judges it best to withhold judgment on which one it will be.

4 Agnosticism on the Ultimate Purpose of Hell-Fire

As the *Ijāda* indicates, Ibn al-Wazīr rejects the classic Ash‘arī denial of purpose in God’s will, and much like Ibn Taymiyya and al-Ghazālī, he affirms wise purpose in all of God’s acts, including the creation of evil.⁵⁸ Ibn al-Wazīr identifies specific wise purposes in some evils, especially in illnesses and punishments. These serve to expiate sins, test human beings, act as moral object lessons, and

58 Ibid., 193–209, defends wise purpose in God’s acts and ranges scholars into the various views on the matter. Ibn al-Wazīr, *Awāṣim* vii, 286–326, supports causality or rationality (*ta’līl*) in God’s acts against objections by the Ash‘arī theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209). However, this defense does not bring out the implications of purpose for God’s nature and God’s relation to the created world as thoroughly as does Ibn Taymiyya who follows them through to a vision of God as perpetually creative and dynamic. On this see Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya’s theodicy* 70–102.

instigate thanksgiving to God for the good in this world.⁵⁹ With respect to punishments in the hereafter, Ibn al-Wazīr states that the reason for chastising the People of the Fire is to recompense them for their sins,⁶⁰ and he affirms a consensus that absolute pardon of unbelievers is not permissible out of regard for the rights of prophets and messengers.⁶¹

Ibn al-Wazīr also gives special attention to God's creation of unbelievers to ward off the Zaydi-Mu'tazilī charge that the Sunni God brought them into existence for no reason other than chastisement. In *Awāṣim*, Ibn al-Wazīr counters that there is no proof in the Qur'an, the Sunna of the Prophet, or the consensus of the community that the chastisement of the People of the Fire was something that God willed for its own sake. God does not will chastisement as a pure evil, and He does not create unbelievers only for chastisement. Rather, everything is for a wise purpose, which cannot be known in every detail. Ibn al-Wazīr then lists seven wise purposes for which God creates unbelievers: (1) to worship Him (cf. Q 51:56), (2) to be tested (cf. Q 67:2), (3) to thank God for His gifts, (4) to chastise unbelievers for their ungratefulness toward God's blessing and their denial of God's proofs, (5) for a wise purpose that makes punishment preponderant over pardon and which is the interpretation of the ambiguous, (6) on account of God's absolute will, and (7) on account of what only God knows.⁶² Adherents of Mu'tazilī *kalām* would find this list disingenuous. The first four wise purposes presuppose independent human agents who could have freely chosen to worship and thank God had they wished. However, the Mu'tazilī objection is to the Sunni belief that God predetermines the unbelief of the unbelievers, obviating autonomous choice on their part. The last three wise purposes do not provide substantive reasons for the creation of unbelievers but hide these instead in God's will and knowledge.

Elsewhere in *Awāṣim*, Ibn al-Wazīr replaces the sixth wise purpose with the notion that God creates unbelievers to benefit believers in this life and in the hereafter.⁶³ Later in the same book, he elaborates that God created unbelievers—particular Jews and Christians—to serve as ransom payments to release disobedient Muslims from hell-fire. Jews and Christians are vicariously laden with the punishments due to be meted out to Muslim grave sinners so that the latter may enter paradise. In support he cites the hadith, “God gives every

59 Ibn al-Wazīr, *Awāṣim* vi, 7, 347.

60 Ibid., vii, 288.

61 Ibn al-Wazīr, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 245. For further discussion of God's wise purposes in pains, afflictions and the chastisement of the hereafter, see Ḥajar, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 323–36.

62 Ibn al-Wazīr, *Awāṣim* v, 344–6. The same list appears in idem, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 284–5.

63 Idem, *Awāṣim* vi, 5–6.

Muslim a Jew or a Christian, and He says, "This is your ransom (*fidā'*) from the Fire."⁶⁴ This goes some way toward explaining God's wise purpose in creating unbelievers. However, it implies a degree of unfairness unacceptable to Mu'tazilī Kalām, and it would not appear to provide sufficient reason for consigning unbelievers to Hell forever.

Ibn al-Wazīr acknowledges in *Awāṣim* that there is a problem rationalizing the evil of perpetual chastisement: "In every outward punishment is an inward blessing. ... It is indeed expiation (*kaffāra*) in addition to it being punishment and exemplary deterrence (*nakāl*). There is no difficulty in any of that evil except the perpetuity of chastisement."⁶⁵ Ibn al-Wazīr is not however willing to say decisively that chastisement is not perpetual, and his withholding judgment on the duration of hell-fire involves him in an agnostic position as to the Fire's ultimate purpose. If its purpose is reformative and therapeutic, as in the theology of Ibn Taymiyya, chastisement of unbelievers must eventually come to an end. If the purpose of the Fire is retribution for the entirely unforgiveable sin of associating partners with God (*shirk*), as in mainstream Sunnism, chastisement must be eternal. Consigning unbelievers to Hell eternally implies that Hell's ultimate wise purpose is retribution, and consigning them to Hell temporarily implies that its ultimate wise purpose is reform. As Ibn al-Wazīr does not take a position on the duration of hell-fire, he cannot speculate on God's fundamental reason for chastising unbelievers therein.

Ibn al-Wazīr affirms that God indeed has an ultimate wise purpose in hell-fire even if humans cannot know it, and to motivate the possibility that good may be intended by evil without humans seeing the point, he invokes the Quranic story of Moses and his guide, traditionally said to be the legendary figure Khidr. In the story (Q 18:60–82), Khidr kills a boy, and Moses objects because he does not perceive the reason for the killing: Khidr knew that the boy would grow up to afflict his parents with tyranny and unbelief. Ibn al-Wazīr considers the objection that God should never have created the boy in the first place. He replies that had God not created this boy the moral of the story would have been lost, which is "that God's ambiguous acts have good interpretations in the minds of reasonable people" and that God does not will evil in itself.⁶⁶ Equally, in Ibn al-Wazīr's view, this story proves that humans do not know the interpretation of the ambiguous (*ta'wīl al-mutashābih*). For if

64 Ibid., 160–4. The hadith is translated from Ibn al-Wazīr's text (vi, 160). The wording is somewhat different in the collection of Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, k. al-tawba* 49 (*qubūl tawbat al-qātil wa-in kathura qatluhu*).

65 Ibn al-Wazīr, *Awāṣim* vi, 7. Cf. idem, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 98–9.

66 Idem, *Awāṣim* vi, 150. See also idem, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 210.

Moses, who was so close to God, knew less than Khidr, then he knew even far less of God's knowledge.⁶⁷

In reflections on the duration and purpose of hell-fire, Ibn al-Wazir also turns to passages from al-Ghazali's discussion on God's names the Merciful and the Compassionate (*al-Rahmān al-Rahīm*) in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*. Following the verses quoted from the *Ijāda* in *Īthār al-ḥaqq*, Ibn al-Wazir affirms that God has wise purposes even in things that appear irrational, such as inflicting pain on children and the innocent. To imagine how this could be so, he quotes al-Ghazali's contrast between a mother who protects her child from cupping out of pity and the father who imposes cupping on the child. An ignorant person thinks the mother is merciful and the father mean, while an intelligent person recognizes that the father is in fact the one showing mercy because he is inflicting the pain of cupping on the child to avert a greater evil. Al-Ghazali's point, and Ibn al-Wazir's as well, is that God's mercy takes precedence over God's wrath and that God does not will evil for its own sake but only accidentally for the greater good. Al-Ghazali adds that there is in this matter a secret that may not be divulged.⁶⁸ Ibn al-Wazir suggests that this secret may be "the great hope in God's mercy" (*sa'at al-rajā' li-rahmat Allāh*),⁶⁹ which he apparently takes to mean universal salvation for all human beings, especially as in *ʿAwāṣim* he understands this same text of al-Ghazali's to hint at that.⁷⁰

While Ibn al-Wazir presumes to divulge al-Ghazali's secret, he himself blocks the way to understanding God's fundamental purpose in the chastisement of unbelievers in hell-fire by withholding judgment on its duration. Whereas Ibn Taymiyya says that God could have no good reason for chastising creatures in the Fire forever, Ibn al-Wazir leaves open the possibility that God might have a good reason for doing so. It is, however, not for humans to know what it might be. Ibn al-Wazir establishes this in *ʿAwāṣim* with two rules. First, God's knowledge of the wise purposes and benefits in His acts far exceeds that of humans and what humans could ever bear. Those who do not accept this

67 Idem, *ʿAwāṣim* v, 342. Cf. idem, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 196.

68 Ibid., 220–2, quoting parts of Ghazali, *Maqṣad* 67–9 (tr. 55–7). Ibn al-Wazir invokes al-Ghazali's *Al-Maqṣad al-asnā* elsewhere, as in *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 98 (the cupping example), and *ʿAwāṣim* v, 365–6 (on God not willing evil for its own sake and on not divulging God's secret).

69 Idem, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 223.

70 Idem, *ʿAwāṣim* vi, 364. See also Khalil, *Islam and the fate of others* 46–8, on al-Ghazali's discussion of God's names *al-Rahmān al-Rahīm* in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* and an argument that al-Ghazali is not a universalist.

rule are guilty of placing God and creatures on the same level in respect of knowledge. Second, the chastisement of hell-fire falls under the category of ambiguous matters of which only God knows the interpretation (*ta'wīl*). It is in fact the “mother of ambiguous matters” (*umm al-mutashābihat*), and no one should try to understand it. Withholding judgment is the most fitting response. Ibn al-Wazīr counsels further that humans should recall that things happen that fall outside their normal experience, that they should fear the chastisement of the hereafter, and that they should not let passions divert them from the truth.⁷¹ In other words, nothing should be permitted to dissuade believers from prudent agnosticism on the ultimate purpose of hell-fire. In *Īthār al-ḥaqq*, Ibn al-Wazīr sums up to the same end by gently criticizing Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim and al-Ghazālī for trying to discern God’s wise purpose in evils, whether in this world or the hereafter:

The upshot of what [Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya] say is that it is not permissible to believe that God wills evil inasmuch as it is evil. Rather, it must be on account of a preponderant good toward which that evil is a means. That good is the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of that evil preceding it, in the way that Khidr’s interpretation was for Moses. They apply that to the evils of the two abodes [of this world and the hereafter] together, and al-Ghazālī supports that in commenting on [God’s names] the Merciful, the Compassionate [in *al-Maḥṣad al-asnā*]. Let us relate in this regard one hadith that indicates a prohibition against delving into specifying the wise purpose in that. We say, “Al-Bayhaqī said in his book *Al-Asmā’ wa-l-ṣifāt* from ‘Amr b. Maymūn, from Ibn ‘Abbās, when God raised up Moses and spoke to him, [Moses] said, ‘O God, You are a great Lord! If You willed to be obeyed, I would obey. And if You willed to be disobeyed, I would not disobey; You love to be obeyed, but in that You are disobeyed. How can that be, O Lord?’ So, God revealed to him, ‘I am not asked about what I do, but they are asked’ (cf. Q 21:23), and Moses stopped.”⁷²

71 Ibn al-Wazīr, *‘Awāsim* vi, 357–63. Near the beginning of *‘Awāsim* i, 212, Ibn al-Wazīr briefly explains that God has a wise purpose in not clarifying eschatological matters, which is to preserve the element of testing in the affairs of this world.

72 Idem, *Īthār al-ḥaqq* 99–100. The hadith is found in Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-asmā’ wa-l-ṣifāt* 169 (*b. mā jā’a ‘an al-salaf radiya Allāh ‘anhum fī ithbāt al-mashā’a*).

5 Conclusion

In the controversy over Ibn Taymiyya's arguments for universal salvation, Ibn al-Wazīr exchanges the theological speculation of *kalām* and of Ibn Taymiyya for an ecumenism grounded in ambiguity. Ibn al-Wazīr withholds judgment on the duration of punishment for unbelievers in hell-fire and, breaking with the consensus alleged by al-Subkī, includes within the realm of acceptable belief both the limited chastisement view of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and the eternal chastisement doctrine of Zaydi Mu'tazilism and the Sunni mainstream. Ibn al-Wazīr takes this tolerance of diverse belief to be God's intention and justifies it with the contradictory witness of the Qur'an: while the general testimony of the Qur'an is to everlasting chastisement of unbelievers, a few exceptions open the door to the opposite view by making the duration of chastisement conditional upon the duration of the heavens and the earth, as well as upon God's will. Moreover, and following on from his agnosticism regarding the duration of hell-fire, Ibn al-Wazīr withholds judgment as to God's ultimate wise purpose in chastising unbelievers. As this is "the mother of ambiguous matters," it cannot be known whether the purpose of hell-fire is to reform unbelievers for paradise as in Ibn Taymiyya's theology or to mete out eternal retribution for the unforgiveable sin of associating partners with God.

The origins of Ibn al-Wazīr's agnosticism on the duration and purpose of hell-fire probably lie in the need to find a *modus vivendi* between the competing Yemeni Muslim confessional communities that his life and thought bridged. Born into the Zaydi community of the Yemeni highlands and educated in its Mu'tazilī theology, Ibn al-Wazīr switched to Sunni theological doctrines and the authority of the canonical Sunni hadith collections early in life. He travelled to the Yemeni lowlands and Mecca to learn from various Sunni masters before spending his later years living within his Zaydi community teaching and writing. Ibn al-Wazīr developed a conciliatory approach to theology so as not to unduly antagonize the Zaydis among whom he lived, and, according to his own testimony, he engaged in a measure of dissimulation to protect himself from opponents. Perhaps Ibn al-Wazīr could have joined a Sunni school of law and found adequate security within its embrace to adopt a more dogmatic stance. However, it appears that his independence of mind and Zaydi communal loyalty prevented him from affiliation with a single Sunni law school. As he was unwilling to take the steps required to integrate fully into the Sunnis' structures of religious authority, he probably needed to tread lightly within their scholarly circles as well.

Appendix

*Translation of the Verses from Ibn al-Wazīr's Ijāda Found in His Īthār al-ḥaqq*⁷³

1. Those endowed with intelligence become confused: what does [God] will for the disobedient among the jinn and the sons of Adam?
2. Does God will good for creatures initially, or does the wisest Judge intend evil?
3. If good, is it conceivable that it elude a Master who knows in the Unseen what He wills?
4. If evil, does [God] will it for its own sake? Or does [God] intend good in it along with [its] necessary concomitants?
5. Does the prior intention of good in evil require that that intention be congruent with the value of the outcomes?⁷⁴
6. When mention of [spending] eternity in His Fire overrides His generosity in His Reminder [the Qur'an] and the decisive [texts],
7. the matter of eternity in the Fire becomes grave for everyone who ponders the names of the Lord of the Worlds.
8. For He is not vanquished, and He is not ignorant, definitely not aimless, and nothing but merciful.⁷⁵
9. Everyone who investigates seriously will submit to what the Lord of the Worlds says in the Reminder,

73 I am grateful to Geert Jan van Gelder and Jamal Mohammed Robain for their kind assistance in reading this poem. The translation was made from the Arabic of Ibn al-Wazīr, *Īthār al-ḥaqq*, 216–9.

74 In verse 1 Ibn al-Wazīr begins the poem by raising the issue of what God wills for those who disobey. The more specific question of eternal punishment for unbelievers arises later in verse 6. The intervening verses 2–5 inquire more generally into the relation between evil and God's will. If God only wills the good, then why does some evil occur? Surely it cannot be that God lacks sufficient power to effect His will to create the good (verse 3). So, if God wills evil directly, then does God will it for its own sake or for some greater good?

75 Verses 6–8 draw attention to the tension between God's justice and God's mercy. The Qur'an is filled with threats of eternal punishment to such an extent that they appear to override its message of God's generosity and mercy. Yet, Ibn al-Wazīr affirms, God's mercy is God's dominant attribute, and God will not be defeated in his purposes. However, it is not yet clear how Ibn al-Wazīr thinks this tension can be eased.

10. no matter whether He decreed eternity in the Fire or that the chastisement (*‘adhāb*) of the wretched is not perpetual.⁷⁶
11. When the exception to eternal chastisement appears openly in His Book,⁷⁷ the edge is taken off the gravity [of the matter].
12. The range of what can be said about that widens again, for the matter had become as tight as signet rings.
13. The doubts of the heretics are driven back, repelled, and the vast knowledge of the most honorable people of knowledge is broadened.⁷⁸
14. One view holds to the eternity [of chastisement] because the threats of that are abundant in the overwhelming [number of] revealed texts.⁷⁹
15. Another view gives precedence to the specific (*khuṣūṣ*),⁸⁰ and the names of the wisest Judge help him [in that].⁸¹

76 Verses 9–10 invoke the unassailable authority of the Qur’an. For Ibn al-Wazīr, whatever view one takes on the duration of chastisement, the Qur’an is the ultimate standard for belief.

77 The exception appears in those Quranic passages subjecting the duration of hell-fire to God’s will and the duration of the heavens and the earth (Q 6:128, 11:106–7).

78 Whereas verses 6–10 heighten the tension in the Quranic testimony between God’s mercy and God’s punishment of unbelievers forever, verses 11–13 ease that tension by alluding to the Qur’an’s subjection of the duration of chastisement to God’s will. This means that a dilemma that had become so grave in Ibn al-Wazīr’s eyes as to compare with the tightness of signet rings now appears much less severe. This gives the benefit of the doubt to the honorable scholars of religion over against the heretics who now have no reason to highlight apparent contradiction in God’s ways to justify their skepticism. This sets the stage for Ibn al-Wazīr in verses 14–16 to present the doctrinal views on the duration of chastisement that he judges to lie within the realm of Muslim belief.

79 The first Muslim view, according to Ibn al-Wazīr, maintains that the Qur’an’s testimony to eternal punishment of unbelievers is overwhelmingly preponderant. This corresponds to the dominant Sunni view, as well as to that of the Mu‘tazilites and the Zaydi Shi‘is. However, while not indicated in the poem, Ibn al-Wazīr maintains that Mu‘tazilites and Zaydi Shi‘is err by consigning not only unbelievers but also unrepentant Muslim grave sinners to eternal chastisement (on this see al-Ḥarbī, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 266–9). The dominant Sunni doctrine that Muslim grave sinners will eventually be saved is implied in the third view given in verse 16.

80 Reading *al-khuṣūṣ* instead of *al-khuṣūm* (opponents).

81 Ibn al-Wazīr identifies this view in verse 29 below as that of Ibn Taymiyya. Here in verse 15, Ibn al-Wazīr explains that Ibn Taymiyya gives the specific exceptions in Q 6:128 and Q 11:106–7 precedence over the general Quranic affirmations of eternity in hell. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya supports this judgment with the names of God, especially All-Wise and All-Merciful, which would seem to preclude consigning anyone to hell-fire forever.

16. The third view, the prevailing one (*al-mansūr*), [maintains that] there is hope for the Muslim, but whoever resists Islam is not safe.⁸²
17. One view, which is confused, censures someone who delves into that [matter]. Another withholds judgment and is not censuring.
18. Yet another delves into it while charging his opponent with unbelief for something similar to what he [himself] does; he is not safe.
19. There is no unbelief in any of the views after decisive proofs in the revelation of the most knowledgeable Knower contradict.
20. [The wise scholar] fears charging another with unbelief and bearing the burden of it or of committing sins.⁸³
21. If God had not willed to widen His ruling, He would not have specified it in His Reminder openly.⁸⁴
22. Concerning the Garden, He made an exception and followed it with what indicates the eternity of the perpetual gardens⁸⁵
23. in accord with the fact that the ascription of generosity to God is perpetual and definitely makes the perpetuity of [God's] noble deeds follow necessarily.
24. How could sovereignty, generosity and laudation persist, while the good is cut off in the words of One Who Knows?!⁸⁶

82 The third view presented by Ibn al-Wazīr is an allusion to the mainstream Sunni doctrine that sinful Muslims may suffer punishment in the Fire for a period of time before entering paradise while those outside Islam face eternal chastisement.

83 In verses 17–20 Ibn al-Wazīr makes room for all three of the preceding views within the fold of Islam. According to Ibn al-Wazīr, it is unenlightened confusion to censure someone who delves into the duration of chastisement (verse 17), and it is dangerous to censure as unbelief any one of the three views at the expense of the others because the Quranic testimony is subject to contradictory interpretations.

84 Ibn al-Wazīr argues that God must have had a reason for specifying or making an exception to the general Qur'an testimony to eternal chastisement of unbelievers. Had God not wished to soften this testimony, he would not have introduced exceptions.

85 In verse 22 Ibn al-Wazīr turns to the eternity of the paradisiacal Garden and alludes to the Quranic verse, "As for those who are made happy, they will be in the Garden, abiding therein, as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord wills, a gift never cut off" (Q 11:108). The phrase "a gift never cut off" that comes after the exceptions "as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord wills," confirms that the Garden is most certainly eternal. The same exceptions occur in the preceding verse (Q 11:107), but without a comparable confirmation of the Fire's eternity. Thus, while the eternity of the Garden is assured, the eternity of the Fire is not.

86 Verses 23–4 affirm that the Garden must be perpetual to accord with God's generosity.

25. And there are authentic hadith reports that agree with rational minds concerning the exception of the Lord, the most Merciful.⁸⁷
26. When [the exception] appears after the reward, it is to increase the reward of the most honorable people out of generosity.⁸⁸
27. When it appears after the threat [of chastisement], it is to pardon and forgive the punishment of crimes,⁸⁹
28. and agreeing with it is mention of an increase and a superabundance in the Reminder in the decisive texts.
29. Ibn Taymiyya went on at length about the second view. Take interest in his learning in his writing and the biographical works.
30. He supports [his view] on the authority of six of the greatest of the most honorable Companions of the Prophet whose words he quotes.
31. Do not consider a scholar [i.e., Ibn Taymiyya] an unbeliever even if what [the six Companions] say is not authentic and comes to light as weak and disreputable.
32. This is nothing but thinking well [of Ibn Taymiyya]. If, after all, it is necessary [to call him an unbeliever], the All-Merciful will not reduce the hope of mercies.⁹⁰

87 Ibn al-Wazīr is presumably referring to hadith reports such as “My mercy overcomes my anger” (Muslim) and “My mercy precedes my anger” (Bukhārī) that lend support to the notion that God’s mercy will bring an end to chastisement.

88 Ibn al-Wazīr’s sense is apparently this: Q 11:108 first indicates that those who are happy “will be in the Garden, abiding therein;” then, the text qualifies this reward with the exception, “as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord wills” to respectfully submit everything to God’s will before coming back to affirm all the more so that the reward will last forever; it will be “a gift never cut off.”

89 Ibn al-Wazīr affirms that when the exceptions “as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord wills” appear in Q 11:107, God’s purpose is to forgive and pardon. The next verse, verse 28, underlines the Quranic witness to God’s will to forgive.

90 Verses 29–32 treat Ibn Taymiyya’s view, the second view on the duration of chastisement cited previously in verse 15. Ibn al-Wazīr first underscores the value of Ibn Taymiyya’s scholarship in verse 29 and then in verse 30 states that Ibn Taymiyya supports his view from six Companions of the Prophet. Four of these are easily identified. In *Fanā’ al-nār*, Ibn Taymiyya ascribes the doctrine of finite chastisement of unbelievers directly to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, Ibn Mas‘ūd, Abū Hurayra, and Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, and he quotes the report from ‘Umar, “Even if the People of the Fire stayed in the Fire like the amount of sand of ‘Alīj, they would have, despite that, a day in which they would come out” (p. 53). The fifth and sixth Companions are presumably Ibn ‘Abbās and ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ. Ibn Taymiyya cites a number of reports from Ibn ‘Abbās lending support to the limited duration of the Fire (pp. 57–62), and he quotes the following from ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Amr, “A day is indeed coming to hell when its doors will slam shut, and no one will be in it” (p. 69). It is doubtful that Ibn al-Wazīr read Ibn Taymiyya’s *Fanā’ al-nār* directly, but Ibn al-Qayyim quotes the relevant parts of the treatise in *Ḥādī al-awwāh*, to which Ibn al-Wazīr

33. The words of the Friend of God, and then the Son of Mary, are proof of the invalidity of the censure of those who censure.⁹¹
34. The majority of humankind would almost have disbelieved by mistake because of that had it not been for the grace of the most Merciful.⁹²
35. One view [the Ash'arī] intends to render Him incomparable, wishing to safeguard for Him the weightiness of the gravity of the Omnipotent, the Real.
36. A [second] view [the Mu'tazilī] intends to magnify His greatness, wishing to safeguard for Him praises of One praised as the wisest Judge.⁹³
37. All those who know uphold both [God's omnipotence and God's wisdom], and this is the straight path for someone steadfast.
38. This is a point that a rational person does not throw into jeopardy. The worlds were created for it,
39. to disclose the causes of the creation of the seven [heavens]. All seven [were brought into existence] through the determination of His two qualifications All-Powerful and All-Knowing.⁹⁴

had access. In verses 31–2 of the poem, Ibn al-Wazīr allows that the Companion reports cited by Ibn Taymiyya may not be reliable but still urges the utmost respect for him.

- 91 Ibn al-Wazīr here invokes Abraham, the Friend of God, and Jesus, the Son of Mary, to support his call for leniency toward Ibn Taymiyya, but it is not apparent what words or deeds of Abraham and Jesus are referred to. The mention of Jesus may be an allusion to Jesus' defense of his mother Mary against her people's charge of unchastity against her (Q 19:27–33). Al-Ḥarbi, *Ibn al-Wazīr* 481, takes the reference to Abraham to be an allusion to his supplication for himself and his posterity that they not worship idols (Q 14:35–6) and the mention of Jesus to refer to his submission to God in stating, "If You punish them, they are your servants; if you forgive them, you are truly all-mighty and all-wise" (Q 5:118).
- 92 The reference is perhaps to the question of eternal chastisement and the moral difficulties it raises: had it not been for the mercy of God in introducing the exceptions to everlasting chastisement in Q 6:128 and Q 11:107, many people would have disbelieved.
- 93 Verse 35 marks a shift of topic that may indicate some verses of the *Ijāda* are missing. As it is, the poem swings from discussing the duration of chastisement for unbelievers and the tension between God's justice and God's mercy to the theological challenge of holding God's power and God's wisdom and justice in proper balance. In verses 35 and 36 Ibn al-Wazīr mentions the Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī stances, respectively, on God's power, justice and wise purpose. The Ash'arī *kalām* theologians underline God's power at the seeming expense of God's justice and wisdom, while the Mu'tazilites exalt these latter qualities at the seeming expense of God's omnipotence. Ibn al-Wazīr comes back to treat the two groups of *kalām* theologians in more detail in verses 42–8.
- 94 Over against the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilites, Ibn al-Wazīr maintains in verses 37–9 that God's power and wisdom must both be upheld without sacrificing one to the other. This is in fact the point or purpose that the worlds were created to reveal, that is, God created them to reveal his omnipotence, wisdom and knowledge in proper balance.

40. Indeed, a point at which [God's] Addressee [Moses] became confused and was unable to be patient with the Best of the Worlds [Khiḍr]
41. is worthy of great study and wariness of error on the part of every scholar when deciding [the matter].⁹⁵
42. Do you not see what the two parties' *kalām* theology leads to when they are out of their depth?
43. [The Ash'arites] deny the wise purpose of the All-Merciful in justice and recompense, and [the Mu'tazilites deny] His power to guide the basest unjust person.
44. The one party weakens the might of the most Powerful, and the other party weakens the holiness of the wisest Judge.⁹⁶
45. This is their excuse concerning these views [of their opponents]: that they are an abomination in the view of the majority of the most honorable people.
46. [It is] as if they longed to help those endowed with intelligence and put souls blind with passion for the Unseen at ease.
47. So, they could not find an escape from one of the three calamities in the [religious] sciences except through reinterpretation (*ta'awwul*)
48. of the wise purpose of the Lord in creation, or His capacity to be gracious, or the consignment of evildoers to eternity [in the Fire].⁹⁷

95 In verses 40–1 Ibn al-Wazīr calls on scholars to exercise great care in the question of God's power and wisdom in order to avoid error. For this is a matter that even God's Addressee (*kalīm*) Moses failed to understand adequately, and it caused him to be impatient with Khiḍr, his guide through the three ordeals related in Q 18:60–82. The implication is that the Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī *kalām* theologians discussed in the following verses also fail to give the matter sufficient care.

96 In verses 42–4 Ibn al-Wazīr identifies the errors of the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilites regarding God's power and wisdom. Verse 42 charges both groups of *kalām* theologians with going to extremes, of following their method beyond what it can know. Verse 43 censures the Ash'arites for denying that God has wise purposes in the justice and recompense that he metes out and the Mu'tazilites for denying God's power to guide the unjust and disobedient. In Mu'tazilī theology and the Zaydi theology influenced by it, humans create their own acts free of God's direct intervention. Ibn al-Wazīr interprets this to mean that God can never intervene in human choices to set a sinner back on the right way, which inappropriately limits the reach of God's power. Verse 44 restates the errors of the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites identified in verse 43.

97 In verses 45–8 Ibn al-Wazīr examines the reasoning behind the Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī views on God's power and wisdom. According to verses 45–6, the two groups of *kalām* theologians justify their views as avoiding what violates the religious and moral sensibilities of the majority; additionally, they are apparently trying to put minds troubled by the conundrum of God's power and wisdom to rest. According to verses 47–8, the *kalām* theologians engage in reinterpretation (*ta'awwul*, i.e., *ta'wīl*) of God's qualities in order to evade what they perceive to be one of three religious "calamities." It is implied first that

49. Better than this is withholding judgment in [the matter] because we all are definite about the goodness of the judgment of the best Judge.
50. That suffices, seeing that the safety of the judicious⁹⁸ in the face of fear [of error] is better than the correctness of the [overly] decisive.⁹⁹
51. Laud and do not exclude anything from laudation, and leave innovations be like the muddles of a dreamer.
52. Fear neither impotence nor ignorance of wise purpose, neither the exasperation of the oppressed nor the tyranny of the oppressor,
53. and [think] not that He in His beneficence is not powerful and mighty, and not that He in His might is not merciful.
54. and not that He in His judgment is not just, wise and knowing what creatures do not know.¹⁰⁰

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the Ash‘arites reinterpret God’s wise purpose to avoid excessive focus on God’s wisdom and justice at the expense of his power. Second, the Mu‘tazilites reinterpret God’s “capacity to be gracious” to evade overemphasizing God’s power at the expense of his wisdom. Third, Ibn Taymiyya reinterprets the eternal punishment of evildoers in the Fire to avoid impugning God’s mercy. Ibn Taymiyya is here reintroduced alongside the *kalām* theologians as holding a position resulting from reinterpretation.

- 98 Reading *ḥāzīm* instead of *jāzīm*.
- 99 In view of the errors introduced by the reinterpretive efforts of the Kalam theologians and Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Wazīr counsels in verses 49–50 a reverent agnosticism, a withholding of judgment (*waqf*), concerning the question of God’s power and wise purpose. It suffices to affirm God’s goodness and say no more. It is in fact better, Ibn al-Wazīr affirms, to exercise caution than to be rashly and compulsively decisive and per chance get something correct.
- 100 In verses 51–4 Ibn al-Wazīr ends the portion of his *fjāda* quoted in *Ṭhār al-ḥaqq* with the exhortation to praise God and not to worry that God might be in any way deficient in power, wisdom, justice, mercy and knowledge.

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