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Reincarnation in Abrahamic Religions

Submitted by: S. Meysami-Azad

Supervisor: Prof. dr. A.F. de Jong

Second reader: Dr. E.M. de Boer

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ADAM

ENOC

NOAH

ABRAHAM

MOSES

DAVID

ESRAH

JESUS

MUHAMMAD

Table of Contents

Foreword	4
1. Reincarnation; Terminology and Definition	7
2. Views of the Afterlife in Judaism	11
2.1. General Views	12
2.2. The Belief in Reincarnation in Judaism	16
2.2.1. Early Period	16
2.2.2 In Kabbalistic Tradition.....	19
3. Views of the Afterlife in Christianity	21
3.1 General Views	22
3.2. Alternative Views.....	24
3.3. Western Spiritualism and Esotericism.....	28
4. Views of the Afterlife in Islam	31
4.1. General View.....	32
4.2. Alternative View	35
5. Reincarnation in the Bible and in the Quran	44
5.1. Hermeneutical method	45
5.2. Spiritual Death and Biological Death.....	47
5.3. Temporary Death and Sleep	49
5.4. Paradise and Hell.....	52
5.5. Resurrection.....	56
5.6. End of Time.....	59
6. Reincarnation of the Messiah	60
6.1. Historical Background.....	61

6.2. Reincarnation of the Messiah in the Bible 63

6.3. Reincarnation of the Messiah in the Quran 69

7. Conclusion..... 72

7.1. Evaluation in two Paradigms 73

7.2. Relevance of the Study 74

Bibliography 76

Books and articles 77

Websites 82

Foreword

One of the important functions of religion is to provide answers to human questions about their destiny in life and about life after death. The fact that religion answers some existential human questions in terms of the meaning of life, its goal, and human nature is well known. Even a cursory glance at the *Encyclopedia of Religion* shows that one of the fundamental human questions from ancient times onwards and all over the world concerns death and the afterlife. The entry “afterlife” alone counts forty-eight pages and the entry on “death” ten pages.¹ According to the latter entry the meaning of life is dependent in part on one’s understanding of death, and although death as a biological fact is uniform across time and space, the human sense or experience of it is not.² In his article about ‘death’ in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* Gary Eberesole asserts that “the central role of death in the conceptual worlds of human beings has led occasionally some Western scholars to establish their theories on the origins of religion based on human response to death. He mentions the nineteenth-century anthropologist Edward B. Tylor, who went so far - in his influential work *Primitive Culture* (1871)- to claim that death was the reason religion existed.³ However, Hiroshi Obayashi points out that at least in the case of Christianity the story of Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection, which guarantees the future resurrection of all the faithful, has played a crucial role in the emergence of this religion.⁴ Also in Judaism and Islam resurrection and the Last Judgment play a significant role both in producing belief in a just God and stimulating individuals to keep their faith in this God and follow religious guidelines.

In line with such an outlook on the origin of religion, some religious systems seem to have considered paving the way for life after death the main goal of religion and to have assumed that the present life is fundamentally a preparation for the life to come. They considered this world as a preliminary stage to achieving eternal life, and therefore the role of religion in this world is only to lead man to salvation and blessing in the life after death. Accordingly, the entry on “afterlife” points out that “not all religious persons have addressed the same kind of question. Nonetheless, there is a certain commonality in the kinds of basic questions that have been addressed.”⁵ One of these common questions refers to the issue of the afterlife. Therefore, the entry ends by stating that “despite the variations in conceptions of what the afterlife may entail, a belief that human beings will continue to exist in some form after the experience they term death is a universal phenomenon.”⁶ John Hick also affirms this notion in his book *Death and*

¹ Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. Pp. 127-172, pp. 2235-2245.

² *Ibid.*, P. 2235.

³ *Ibid.* P. 2237.

⁴ *Ibid.* P. 156.

⁵ *Ibid.* P. 128.

⁶ *Ibid.* P. 135.

Eternal Life: “These studies show that some kind of after-life belief was universal, and took a number of forms.”⁷

Moreover, the answer to the question concerning human survival after death has various consequences for our understanding of human nature, pre-existence, human destiny, the justice of God in rewards and punishment, which itself has influence on notions of human responsibility and ethical life. In his article *Rebirth* Roy W. Perrett juxtaposes the Western religious traditions –Judaism, Christianity, Islam – with the Indian traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. He states that traditional conceptions of the Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism are that they believe in numerous existences for each human, whereas the Western traditions presume that man lives in this worldly life only once and dies once, until – according to some- achieving a post-mortem existence.⁸

Such traditional categorizations of the Western traditions are a simplistic generalization that refers only to the orthodox belief of the majority and ignores many different viewpoints. In fact, conceptions of life after death and related issues such as the pre-existence of the soul and the constitution of a human being differ not only *among* different religions but also *within* them. For example, Judaism, at least since the third century BCE, recognized various concepts of resurrection,⁹ and in Christianity the disputes over the nature and time of resurrection have started since the early days of the Church.¹⁰ Similarly in Islamic history the view on the afterlife has been developing in various ways by various groups, since its inception up to modern time.¹¹ As Alan F. Segal puts it: “Each group within the society develops an afterlife doctrine to parallel and legitimate its own position, taking the elements of its position from the historical past of the society and attempting to argue that its interpretation is the truest representation of it.”¹² It is therefore not surprising that the belief in rebirth in the form of reincarnation, also known as metempsychosis or transmigration of souls, has also had proponents among Jews, Christians, and Muslims and has been propagated by some philosophers or schools of thoughts.

This thesis attempts to demonstrate the belief in reincarnation among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, with a focus on their textual background in the Bible and in the Quran. It therefore dedicates one chapter to each of them. In the first part of each chapter a historical overview of the belief in the afterlife will be presented. Then different sects and minorities or individuals who believed in rebirth and reincarnation will

⁷ Hick, J., 1994. *Death and eternal life*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press. P. 56.

⁸ Perrett, R.W., 1987. ‘Rebirth’. *Religious Studies*, 23(1), p. 41.

⁹ Tromp, J., ‘Can These Bones Live? Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Eschatological Resurrection’ in Jonge et al., 2007. *The Book of Ezekiel and its Influence*, Aldershot [etc.]: Ashgate. P. 75.

¹⁰ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 532.

¹¹ Ryad, U., ‘Eschatology between Reason and Revelation: Death and Resurrection in Modern Islamic Theology’, in Günther, Sebastian; Lawson, Todd (ed.) 2016, *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*. Leiden: Brill. P. 1189.

¹² *Ibid.* P. 697.

be considered. The next chapter will proceed to discuss possible references to reincarnation in the Bible and in the Quran. In this chapter arguments of the proponents of reincarnation will be considered. Therefore, the first three chapters are more descriptive and historical, and the fourth chapter will be more analytical and comparative. The last chapter concerns traces of the belief in the reincarnation of the Messiah and the possible textual background for it.

If reincarnation has been indicated in the text of the Bible and the Quran, and if as some proponents of reincarnation claim the founders of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, namely Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad have themselves also been reincarnated, Abrahamic religions might have more in common than what has been already assumed. On the other hand, eschatological views in Abrahamic religions are not just theological issues but they have serious social and political consequences. Those views depend directly on the issues such as the end of the world and the advent of the Messiah. Eventually the veracity of reincarnation not only will have significant effect on the interpretation of the Bible and the Quran and change our perception of Abrahamic religions, but also might pave the way to solve many political conflicts which have been justified in the name of religion.

The aim of this thesis is primarily to investigate the potential capacity of the Bible and the Quran in supporting reincarnation thesis among followers of Abrahamic religions, and therefore it focuses on hermeneutics of the text from the point of view of those who believe in reincarnation. Furthermore, it approaches the Bible and the Quran not just as a record of historical facts but as a narrative discourse that might contain symbolic and figurative aspects. From this perspective, the issue is not how the primary readers of the text interpreted or understood the text, but how the text could be interpreted and understood in modern times. It is one thing to say the writer and reader of a text have not been familiar with the concept of reincarnation, it is another to claim that the text is void of indications to this notion. The best example for this phenomenon is the development of the notion of resurrection in Judaism. Primary readers of Ezekiel 37 have had different perceptions of this vision than post-Christianity Jews. This can illustrate that the Bible and the Quran could be approached like any other literary product of humans from a hermeneutical perspective. Just as dreams of humans are capable to reveal more than what one might personally realize from it, the sacred writings and books could reveal more than a reader's or orthodox understanding of them.

It does not fit in the scope of this thesis to discuss all related issues to life after death, such as different views on the constitution of humans, pre-existence, the origin of souls and so on from different perspectives. Therefore, the present study will present the outline of history of the belief in reincarnation among Jews, Christians, and Muslims with a focus on debates concerning the veracity of metempsychosis in the Bible and in the Quran.

1. Reincarnation; Terminology and Definition

Reincarnation is the most common term for the concept of the rebirth of the soul or self in a series of physical or supernatural embodiments, which are customarily human or animal in nature but are in some instances divine, angelic, demonic, vegetative, or astrological.¹³ There are different terms to express the concept of reincarnation (from Latin *re* “back” and *caro*, “flesh”) such as rebirth, *metempsychosis* (from Greek *meta*, “again”, and *psychê*, “soul”¹⁴) or more accurately *metempsychosis*: passage from one body to another, *palingenesis* (from Greek *palin*, “again”, and *genesis*, “birth”): to begin again, and transmigration (of souls).¹⁵ In Hebrew, the Qabbalistic term *gilgul* (‘wheel’, ‘cycle’) is used which denotes that the souls “revolve” through successive bodies, and in Arabic *tanāsukh* which means to replace one thing by another¹⁶.

Although some of these terms imply belief in an immortal soul that transmigrates or reincarnates, Buddhism, while teaching rebirth, denies the eternity of the soul due to its doctrine of *anatta* (Sanskrit, *anatman*: ‘no soul’, ‘egoless’). This leads many contemporary Buddhist scholars to prefer the term ‘rebirth’ to ‘reincarnation’.¹⁷ Further, a notion of ‘Rebirth’ which literally denotes being born as a baby, is more incompatible with the concept of resurrection in the orthodox view on life after death in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, whereas a conception of reincarnation which denotes to a transformation into another body is more compatible with some traditional views of after life that considered the transformation of the righteous ones and martyrs into planets and angelic creatures.¹⁸ It is further common to distinguish ‘metempsychosis’ from ‘reincarnation’ in that the first refers to the passage of a single soul into successive, and different bodies, both human and animal or plant,¹⁹ while the second, which is more current, denotes the reincarnation

¹³ Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. P. 7676.

¹⁴ *Psyche* has had different connotations in different traditions and different times such as ‘self’, ‘consciousness’, ‘personality’ etc. For a brief discussion on different meanings and development of this concept see Bremmer, J., 2002. *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife*, London: Routledge. Pp. 1-4.

¹⁵ Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. P. 9325.

¹⁶ Gimaret, D., “Tanāsukh”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 13 March 2017
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7388>

¹⁷ Hick, J., 1994. *Death and Eternal Life*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press. P. 332.

¹⁸ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 265.

¹⁹ Di Bernardino, A., ‘Metempsychosis’, in Oden, T.C., Elowsky, J.C. & Di Bernardino, A., 2014. *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. P. 2:782.

into a person.²⁰ Furthermore, the term metempsychosis or transmigration of souls may not denote the notion of being born again, since transmigration could be in the form of transfer to an already existing body. In contrast, the term ‘reincarnation’ is more common to refer to the notion of rebirth as a human and therefore will be used in this study. Thus reincarnation in this thesis technically entails death and rebirth as a human. Such a definition is important in order to distinguish reincarnation from closely related concepts such as *hulūl*: “infusion” denoting inhabitation of the divinity or divine element in a creature, or *radj’ah* (*radj’at* in Persian): the return of a messianic figure – like Elijah, Jesus, or Mahdi of the Shite - who has not passed away.

Hicks contends that “The idea of reincarnation, or transmigration is found among many primitive peoples.”²¹ In the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Smart states that “In one form or another the doctrine of rebirth has been held in various cultures. It was expressed in ancient Greece (Pythagoras, Empedocles, Orphism, Plato, and later, Plotinus); among some Gnostics and in some Christians heresies such as Cathars; in some phases of Jewish Kabbalism; in some cultures of tropical Africa; and most notably in such Eastern religions as Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism.”²² The Manichaeans taught that the soul could be reborn in humans, plants and animals.²³ Also in Islam some groups such as the Syrian Alawites, the Lebanese Druze, and the Anatolian Alevites have embraced the doctrine of reincarnation.²⁴ The idea of reincarnation has gained increasing popularity among the adherents of New Age religions, and is even accepted by some Christian theologians.²⁵ The concept of reincarnation has been propagated by some modern schools of thought such as the Theosophy of H. P. Blavatsky and Annie Besant and the humanistic psychology of thinkers like C. G. Jung and Fritz Perls.²⁶

Although many cultures have accepted reincarnation, there are different views on the mechanism and scope of reincarnation. Indian traditions often consider reincarnation in different species such as in animals and plants, whereas other religious and philosophical traditions only perceive of

²⁰ Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. P. 9327.

²¹ Hick, J., 1994. *Death and Eternal Life*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press. P. 56.

²² Smart, N., ‘Reincarnation’ in Edwards, P., 1967. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York [etc.]: Macmillan. P. 122.

²³ Jones L., Eliade, M., ‘Reincarnation’, in Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. P. 9329.

²⁴ Ibid. P. 9330.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 9330. ; Hanegraaff, W.J., 1996. *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the mirror of secular thought*, Leiden: BRILL. P.262. ; Grayson, B., 1989. *Is Reincarnation Compatible with Christianity? A historical, biblical, and theological evaluation*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. Pp. 1-9.

²⁶ Ibid. P. 7676. ; Goodrick-Clarke, N., 2008. *The Western Esoteric Traditions : a historical introduction*, Oxford [etc.]: Oxford University Press.

reincarnation of human into human. The Australian Aborigines believe that the spirit of human beings are periodically incarnated not only in animals or plants, but also in water, fire, wind, the sun, moon and stars. Therefore reincarnation can take place not merely on earth, but also in a multiplicity of heavens and purgatories.²⁷ Also the scope of reincarnation in some traditions is finite and in the other infinite. The time of its occurrence is also disputed; although some hold that reincarnation occurs immediately upon death, a transitional period between death and rebirth is postulated in the Tibetan Buddhist Book of the Dead.²⁸

Although Vedantic philosophy itself consists of two main streams of monistic (non-theistic) and theistic thought with different metaphysical frameworks, both teach essentially the same theory of karma and rebirth.²⁹ In a nutshell according to the Hindu conception of reincarnation the circumstances of a present life are the result of the actions in a previous life, which is known as the law of *karman* (action). Reward or punishment are not decreed by a god, but are the consequence of a person's own actions. The soul is eternal and everlasting, because of the nonexistent there is no coming to be. The only way to finish the successive states of existence is through extinguishing all desires which is the root cause of bondage and suffering. The eternal self (*ātman*) who succeeds to do this, will go to the universal self (*brahman*) and becomes the *brahman*. This state of complete union with the universal soul is known as *mokṣa* (salvation).³⁰

In contrast, the Buddhist conception of rebirth is based on the 'no soul' (*anātman*) doctrine. The entire universe perishes and is created in every instant, thus nothing remains the same from one moment to the next. Therefore there is no unchanging self and personality should not be understood as an integral and enduring substance. Humans are never the same from moment to moment and there is no permanent self.³¹ Hence, there is no soul or no self that transmigrates but yet there is an aspect of a person (the karmic deposit of former lives) which continues through various rebirths. This will be repeated until it has expended itself at the end of many lives.³²

This brief overview of the concept of reincarnation will help first to realize that there is no homogenous perception of this notion, secondly it will help to choose a term among similar concepts which is usually used as synonyms, but they are not sufficient for an analytical approach of this study. Consequently it will pave the way to consider which kinds of reincarnation are

²⁷ Smart, N., 'Reincarnation' in Edwards, P., 1967. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York [etc.]: Macmillan. P.122.

²⁸ Ibid. P. 122.

²⁹ Hick, J., 1994. *Death and Eternal Life*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press. P. 311.

³⁰ Jones, L., Eliade, M., 'Reincarnation', in Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. Pp. 7677-7678.

³¹ Ibid. P. 7678.

³² Hick, J., 1994, *Death and Eternal Life*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press. p. 343.

assumed in among some of the followers of Abrahamic religions and which one is more compatible with the textual indications in the Bible and in the Quran.

2. Views of the Afterlife in Judaism

2.1. General Views

The view of the afterlife in Judaism, like the religion itself has been developed through the historical stages and has been perceived in different ways. Just as there are various denominations in Judaism, there are also different views of life after death in Judaism. Since a great deal of Jewish ideas about the afterlife have been derived from reflection on the Hebrew Bible, it is perceivable that new ideas have been stimulated as long as the corpus kept growing. It is also very likely that different views have been shaped in exchange with several cultures and under different circumstances.

For instance, Segal claims that the lack of a concrete narrative of the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible in ancient Israel, is due to a polemical strategy against its pagan environment which emphasized life after death.³³ He also contends that in modern times mainline denominations of Judaism de-emphasize notions of afterlife to present Judaism as a rational religion.³⁴ Tromp points specifically to the interpretation of Ezekiel 37:1-14, which was a matter of contention in early Christian circles. Some Christian writers such as Justin Martyr (d. 165), Irenaeus (c. 135 – c. 202) and Methodius (early fourth century) had asserted that the vision of the dry bones refers to the general resurrection on the day of judgment. Tromp states that there is a consensus among modern scholars that this passage was originally considered to denote the restoration of Israel, however by the advent of Christianity and raising debates on the nature of resurrection, the Jewish perception of Ezekiel 37 has been influenced.³⁵

Scholars have distinguished more or less similar stages for the development of the Jewish view of the afterlife. Oesterley, for instance, considers three periods in the development of Hebrew thought, namely: ‘old-world beliefs’, ‘Sheol belief’, and ‘Resurrection belief’.³⁶ Segal considers the matter in different chapters, namely: ‘The First Temple Period’, ‘The Second Temple Period’, and ‘The Early Rabbinic Period’.³⁷ Although there are different opinions among scholars

³³ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 121.

³⁴ Ibid. P. 17.

³⁵ Tromp, J., ‘Can These Bones Live? Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Eschatological Resurrection’ in Jonge et al., 2007. *The Book of Ezekiel and its Influence*, Aldershot [etc.]: Ashgate. Pp. 61-78.

³⁶ Oesterley, W.O.E., 1941. *The Jews and Judaism During the Greek Period : the background of Christianity*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge [etc.]. Pp. 177-182.

³⁷ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday.

regarding details of this development, the outline and major factors could be summarized as follows.

Divine justice is a significant issue in the development of Jewish views of the life after death.³⁸ However, in the history of pre-exilic Israelite thought reward and punishment will be met in this life. There are no notions of hell and heaven in the modern sense as the place where the sinners will be punished and the virtuous will be rewarded.³⁹ In most of the ancient world the realm of the dead was located in the underworld. Similar to the Greek notion of Hades as a dark and underground abode of the dead, Israelites considered *She'ol* as the final destination where the dead go.⁴⁰ Sheol also like the Greek Hades was neither a place of reward nor punishment. But if God is truly just, then how could the righteous and the wicked have the same end and go to the same place without any further judgment (*Ecc 9: 2 One event happens to the righteous and the wicked... 3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all*). Therefore, it became necessary to extend the doctrine of reward and punishment beyond this life and assume a form of afterlife.⁴¹

The ancient cultures faced the questions of personal identity and what remains of man after death. The Greek for example used the notion of 'soul' and 'shade' to explain what remained after death and who it was that was doing the thinking and speaking.⁴² In the ancient Biblical world, the term 'soul' (*nefesh*) refers to a quality of a living person, generally meaning a human being's personality. Similarly the term for the life principle in the ancient Hebrew is '*rūah*', denoting breath which God shares with human. However, the ancient Israelites did not conceive of an immortal soul, but this idea emerged during the Hellenistic period under influence of Greek thought. It is important therefore to notice that in modern thought we *have* a soul, whereas in the Israelites thought they *were* a soul. In contrast, the word '*refa*' in biblical Hebrew refers to what survives death, and essentially means 'ghost' or 'spirit'.⁴³ However, as Segal has observed: "The

³⁸ Jane I. Smith, 'Afterlife: An Overview' (1987) in Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. P. 129.

³⁹ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 121.p. 135.

⁴⁰ Bauckham, R., 1998. *The Fate of the Dead : studies on the Jewish and Christian apocalypses*, Leiden [etc.]: Brill. P. 9.

⁴¹ Russell, D.S., 1964. *The Method & Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, 200 BC - AD 100*, London: SCM Press. P.367. ; Jane I. Smith, 'Afterlife: Jewish Concept' (1987) in Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. P. 152.

⁴² Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 208.

⁴³ Ibid. P. 143.

real issue is not whether anything survives death but whether that something is punished for its sins or lives on in a beatific and desirable way”.⁴⁴

Consequently in the Second Temple Period Jewish views of the afterlife show significant development. For instance, Russell points out four significant changes which are observable through the apocalyptic writings from 200 B.C. to A.D. 100: first, the dead survive death as ‘souls’; second, a moral distinction is made between the wicked and the righteous after death; third, *Sheol* became an intermediary state to wait for the final judgment and resurrection; fourth, *Sheol* is divided into different levels corresponding to the moral condition of the souls.⁴⁵

In pre-Christian Judaism, ‘resurrection’ referred either to a resurrection of the martyrs, or to the collective resurrection of people at the end of time. This resurrection was commonly supposed to be a bodily resurrection and although it was not clear what would be the nature of that body, it was assumed that it is an imperishable angelic body. Notably, it was not obvious that the body is the same body that was placed in the grave.⁴⁶

It is generally accepted that the earliest reference to an eschatological notion of resurrection of the dead in the Hebrew Bible is in Daniel 12:1-2 (*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt*).⁴⁷ However, there is no consensus among scholars in terms of the origin of the doctrine of resurrection in Jewish thought. Although resurrection is certainly an element of Zoroastrian belief, some scholars have argued that the origin of this belief is the Greek belief in reincarnation, which has been gradually modified by Jews. For instance, Francis Glasson quotes I. Lévy support of his own argument:

“The first of the two stages distinguished by the Pharisaic doctrine, that of punishments and rewards in Hades, is indisputably a borrowing from Hellenism on the part of the Diaspora. The second stage, reentry of the soul in a body, is also exactly parallel to the reincarnation which bring the soul of the dead into the world of the living. Thus we meet again... the whole round of the doctrine of metempsychosis, the sequence of 1. Sojourn in Hades and 2. Palingenesis. We thus see the true origin of the idea of resurrection.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Russell, D.S., 1964. *The Method & Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, 200 BC - AD 100*, London: SCM Press. Pp. 357-366.

⁴⁶ Tromp, J., ‘Can These Bones Live? Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Eschatological Resurrection’ in Jonge et al., 2007. *The Book of Ezekiel and its Influence*, Aldershot [etc.]: Ashgate. Pp. 63-66.

⁴⁷ Greenberg, Moshe, et al. ‘Resurrection’, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 17. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. Pp. 240-244.

⁴⁸ Lévy, I., 1927. *La légende de Pythagore de Grèce en Palestine*, Paris. P. 255., in Glasson, T.F., 1961. *Greek Influence in Jewish Eschatology : with special reference to the apocalypses and pseudepigraphs*, London: S.P.C.K., P. 31.

Russell, however, argues to the contrary and contends that the foreign influences on the Jewish views of the afterlife have been exaggerated. Despite affirming similarity between the idea of an intermediate abode between each reincarnation in the Greek doctrine of transmigration with the character of *Sheol* in apocalyptic literature, he totally rejects the probability of any connection between resurrection and reincarnation. He further argues that the Jewish and the Persian conceptions of resurrection are different in their universalistic or nationalistic character. He confirms many Greek influences on the Jewish view of the afterlife, but he maintains nevertheless that the resurrection belief in Israel grew naturally out of the Jewish conviction that their fellowship with God must continue after death, and this could only happen by a corporeal resurrection.⁴⁹ Segal maintains in this regard that the Jewish writers borrowed the resurrection of the body from Persia and the immortality of the soul from Greece, but they adapted them to their own traditions.⁵⁰

In the Hellenistic period the notion of an eschatological judgement and resurrection continued to develop in Palestinian Jewish literature, and the concept of the immortality of the soul was introduced into Diaspora Judaism.⁵¹ For the first time the two important terms that are popular in the Islamic notions of the afterlife, namely ‘the world to come’ and ‘this world’ appear in the *Apocalypse of Enoch* (71:15), which was composed between 164 and 105 BCE.⁵²

The Gospels reveal the debates among Jews over the notion of life after death (Matt. 22:23-33; Mark. 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40). Sadducees who did not believe in life after death or resurrection opposed the Pharisees who believed in resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees later became the ruling body in Jewish life and took the position of rabbis.⁵³ Consequently, belief in the resurrection of the dead was highly supported in the rabbinic literature and became a fundamental dogma of Jewish faith. Rabbis perceived the resurrection in corporeal term and in all rabbinic sources belief in the immortality of the soul is conjoined with corporeal resurrection.⁵⁴ Segal

⁴⁹ Russell, D.S., 1964. *The Method & Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, 200 BC - AD 100*, London: SCM Press. Pp. 385-390.

⁵⁰ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 394.

⁵¹ Stern, D., ‘Afterlife: Jewish Concept’ (1987) in Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. P. 152.

⁵² Ibid. P. 152.

⁵³ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 368.

⁵⁴ Stern, D., ‘Afterlife: Jewish Concept’ (1987) in Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. P. 152.

points out that eventually in this way the notion of an immortal soul was synthesized with the notion of bodily resurrection.⁵⁵

In the Middle Ages extreme philosophical interpretations that denied the corporeal resurrection were propounded by some Jewish philosophers such as Maimonides (1135/8-1204). For many of the Jewish philosophers the notion of physical resurrection was problematic. In contrast, Jewish mystics had no difficulty to accept the concept of resurrection. A new trend within Jewish mysticism began with the emergence of the Kabbalah, which propagated the belief in *gilgul* (reincarnation). To the Kabbalists, the immortality of the soul was an indisputable fact based on the primary doctrine of the soul. The soul was considered as a spiritual entity, whose origin is in the supernal worlds and from the divine emanation. The soul entered the body in order to fulfill a specific task.⁵⁶

In Modern times, Orthodox Judaism has maintained a belief in the future resurrection of the dead and a belief in some form of immortality of the soul. In contrast, reform Judaism which has followed the Enlightenment outlook, rejects both the belief in bodily resurrection, and a literal belief in hell and paradise as abode for eternal punishment or reward. Following the medieval philosophical view, the afterlife is more considered in terms of a personal immortality and a spiritual life after death.⁵⁷

2.2. The Belief in Reincarnation in Judaism

2.2.1. Early Period

The origins of the belief in reincarnation in Jewish literature are not clear, because there is no explicit reference to this idea before the Middle Ages. However, according to Gershom Scholem the doctrine of transmigration was prevalent from the second century onward among many cultures and sects such as Gnostics and Manicheans with whom Jews have been in contact. It is further alleged that reincarnation was maintained in several circles in the Christian Church; even

⁵⁵ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 368.

⁵⁶ Stern, D., 'Afterlife: Jewish Concept' (1987) in Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed./Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. Pp. 153-4.

⁵⁷ Ibid. P. 155.

Origen was later suspected by some of the church fathers of holding the belief in reincarnation.⁵⁸ Gaster maintains that “ it is a fallacy to date the origin of metempsychosis among the Jews from the time when it becomes known publicly in the 9th or 10th century.”⁵⁹ This assumption is supported by Maritano who maintains metempsychosis was accepted by heterodox Christians and followers of esoteric Jewish teachings.⁶⁰ Similarly Hans Schwarz contends that “the idea of reincarnation has never been restricted to one geographical area. It has been widespread among neighboring cultures of Israel and tremendously influential.”⁶¹

Belief in reincarnation among Greeks has been traced back to Orphism, and also Pythagoreanism which was believed to have been founded by Pythagoras who lived, it is thought, somewhere between 750-500 BCE. They have often been cited as the source of the Platonic doctrines.⁶² Segal asserts that the issue of the immortality of the soul was settled by Plato and eventually Platonism became the most influential philosophical system for religion in the West; the cornerstone of the Christian doctrine of immortality of the Soul.⁶³ Plato believed in the salvation of the soul from the body through an individual endeavor. The soul travels through many bodies in order to purify itself by contemplation and asceticism.⁶⁴

Segal maintains that during the Second Temple period the Jews needed a notion of life after death and they borrowed it from the two dominant cultures of Greece and Persia.⁶⁵ He adds that the immortality of the soul was adopted by a very well educated Jewish elite in Greco-Roman culture who expressed the intellectual heritage of Platonism in Jewish form. They wished a continuation of their well-schooled and well-studied consciousness, and the knowledge and the wisdom they have acquired.⁶⁶ Such an argument, in fact, demonstrates that Jews were familiar with Greek ideas of life after death and eventually implies that they have been acquainted with the notion of

⁵⁸ Scholem, G., ‘Gilgul’ in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 7. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. P. 602.

⁵⁹ Gaster, M., ‘Transmigration’ in Hastings et al., 1908. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Edinburgh [etc.]: Clark [etc.]. P.439.

⁶⁰ Maritano, M., ‘Metempsychosis’, in Oden, T.C., Elowsky, J.C. & Di Berardino, A., 2014. *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. P. 2:782.

⁶¹ Schwarz, H., 2000. *Eschatology*, Grand Rapids, MI [etc.]: Eerdmans. P. 303.

⁶² Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. Pp. 220-21.

⁶³ Ibid. P. 224.

⁶⁴ Ibid. P. 237.

⁶⁵ Ibid. P. 394.

⁶⁶ Ibid. P. 395.

reincarnation as well. It favors the probability of adapting such a notion by at least those Jewish intellectuals who wished for a continuation of their spiritual and intellectual progress in life after death. Similar kind of argument is presented by the Encyclopedia of Religion under the entry for 'Transmigration'. It is attested that: "at the end of the archaic period, there seem to be signs of an increasing interest in a more personal form of survival. Reincarnation can be seen as a more radical answer to this general development."⁶⁷ It is therefore likely that the doctrine of reincarnation was known in some Jewish circles and adopted by some Jews who wished for a personal survival after death. It is relevant to point out that one of the reasons which has been suggested for the development of the idea of reincarnation by Pythagoras, is his loss of political power. It has been assumed that reincarnation would guarantee a survival beyond all previous possibilities.⁶⁸ In other words, the doctrine may have functioned as a source of hope and comfort. This applies to the situation of Jews under Roman supremacy as well; losing their political power while waiting for the emergence of the Messiah. That the early church father such as Tertullian and Ambrose have opposed the issue of reincarnation vehemently indicates its existence as a threat to the traditional belief.⁶⁹

Furthermore, several authors have considered that Josephus (37–Post 100CE), who has provided a systematic historiographical description of what Jews believed about life after death, associated the Pharisees with belief in reincarnation.⁷⁰ In *Against Apion* (2.218–219), Josephus comments "God has granted that they come into being again and receive a better life from the revolution." In this passage Platonic terminology of *palingenesia* has been used, which indicates the return of the soul to new bodies.⁷¹ Elledge asserts that the terminology of Josephus in *Jewish War* (2.163) and *Jewish Antiquities* (18.13-14) refers more likely to metempsychosis than to resurrection. He also mentions several other authors (such as Norman Bentwich, Henry St. J. Thackeray, F. F. Bruce, E. P. Sanders, and Emile Puech) who argued in favor of this position.⁷²

Nevertheless, there is no definite proof of the belief in reincarnation in Judaism during the Second Temple period. Even in the Talmud which is which vastly postdates the Second Temple period is no reference to reincarnation. However, later authorities found allusions to it by means of

⁶⁷Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. p. 9328.

⁶⁸Bremmer, J., 2002. *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife*, Bristol, London [etc.]: Routledge. P. 25.

⁶⁹Schwarz, H., 2000. *Eschatology*, Grand Rapids, MI [etc.]: Eerdmans. P. 303.

⁷⁰Beall, T.S., 1988. *Josephus' Description of the Essenes Illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Cambridge, [etc.]: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 105-6.

⁷¹Elledge, C.D., 2006. *Life After Death in Early Judaism : the evidence of Josephus*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. Pp. 107-8.

⁷²Ibid. Pp. 48-50.

allegorical interpretations of the statements of Talmudic rabbis.⁷³ Some of the Gnostics, in particular the Carpocratians were more sympathetic to reincarnation and rejected resurrection. On the other hand the Elcasaite community were adherent of the belief in reincarnation. The Manicheans taught that the soul could be reborn in humans, plants and animals and the Jews in Mesopotemia might have been aware of their ideas about reincarnation.⁷⁴ Further, after the advent of Islam some of the Jews were attracted to the philosophical principles of the Mu‘tazila and accepted the doctrine of reincarnation.⁷⁵

In the post-Talmudic period Anan b. David, the eighth-century thinker and founder of Karaism, upheld the doctrine of reincarnation. One of his arguments for reincarnation, which was not accepted by other Karaites, was the death of innocent infants. Although the treatise of Anan b. David is no longer extant, it has been mentioned by the prominent tenth century Karaite authority Jacob al-Kirkisani in his *Sefer ha-Orot*. Kirkisani devoted two chapters of his book to the refutation of the belief in reincarnation. This text is deemed to be one of the earliest explicit references to the doctrine of reincarnation in a Jewish text. Kirkisani’s contemporary Rabbi Saadia Gaon also rejected the doctrine in his famous philosophical treatise, *Emunot v’Deot*.⁷⁶

2.2.2 In Kabbalistic Tradition

The first extant exposition of reincarnation in a Jewish text occurs around 1180 CE with a pseudepigraphic Midrash attributed to the first century sage Nehunia b. ha-Kanah, *Sefer ha-Bahir*, redacted in the south of France.⁷⁷ Brian Orgen asserts that “Sefer ha-Bahir is the first known rabbinic style text to have espoused a doctrine of metempsychosis. Since the appearance of Sefer ha-Bahir upon the scene of Jewish thought, metempsychosis became a central, integral component

⁷³ Scholem, G., ‘Gilgul’ in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 7. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. P. 602.

⁷⁴ Zwi Werblowsky, R. J. and Bremmer, J. N., ‘Transmigration’ in Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. Pp. 9329-30.

⁷⁵ Ibid. P. 602.

⁷⁶ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 7. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. P. 12.

⁷⁷ Scholem et al., 1991. *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead : basic concepts in the Kabbalah*, New York: Schocken Books. P. 197.

of Kabbalistic thought”.⁷⁸ The appearance of the belief in reincarnation in Kabbalistic tradition in southern France is contemporary with the Christian movement of the Cathars who also held to the doctrine of reincarnation.⁷⁹ There is no explicit term referring to reincarnation in *Bahir*, nevertheless the notion of reincarnation is discussed through parables and biblical exegesis. For instance, according to *Bahir* the verse in Ecclesiastes 1:4 “One generation passes away, and another generation comes”, refers to the reincarnation of the same generation.⁸⁰

The *Bahir* paved the way for later generations of Jewish thinkers to read the concept of reincarnation into canonical texts. Some biblical verses and Talmudic *aggadot* (the non-legal or narrative material, such as parables or anecdotes) were explained in terms of reincarnation. For example, thinkers from the school of thought of Nahmanides (13 century) associated the commandment of levirate marriage in the book of Deuteronomy 25:5-6 - which obliges the oldest surviving brother of a man who has died childless to marry the widow of his childless deceased brother and produce a son in his stead with her - what they called ‘the secret of impregnation’ - which related to a very secretive type of reincarnation. This commandment was associated with reincarnation because they assumed the father would be reborn as the child of that marriage.⁸¹ The idea of reincarnation also functioned to explain the apparent absence of justice in the world. For example, Nahmanides interpreted the book of Job in terms of reincarnation.⁸²

Since the thirteenth century the notion of reincarnation has been a central Kabbalistic tenet, although it was viewed initially as an esoteric doctrine and was only alluded to, but in the fourteenth century many detailed and explicit writings discussed this idea. The term *gilgul* appears only from the *Sefer ha-Temunah* onward and is considered to be the translation of the Arabic term for reincarnation, *tanāsukh*. This term became prevalent in Hebrew literature as the dominant equivalent for reincarnation.⁸³

Another important book of Kabbalah is *Sefer ha-Zohar* (Book of Splendor) which is a mystical commentary on the Five Books of Moses. Although one tradition claims that the author of Zohar was Shimon Bar Yochai, a second century Palestinian Rabbi, historical scholarship has shown that the Zohar is a product of the medieval Jewish world. In fact linguistic analysis has revealed that

⁷⁸ Ogren, B., 2009. *Renaissance and Rebirth: Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah*, Leiden: Brill. P. 13.

⁷⁹ Scholem et al., 1991. *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead : basic concepts in the Kabbalah*, New York: Schocken Books. P. 199.

⁸⁰ Ibid. P. 602.

⁸¹ Ogren, B., 2009. *Renaissance and Rebirth: Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah*, Leiden: Brill. P. 17.

⁸² Scholem, G., ‘Gilgul’ in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 7. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. P. 602.

⁸³ Ibid. P. 602.

Zohar is not a single book but an entire body of literature.⁸⁴ *Zohar* emerged around 1275 in Castile, Spain and later became central text of the Kabbalah. Unlike the *Bahir*, *Zohar* contains explicit reference to reincarnation. In the commentary on Torah portion *Mishpatim*, known as *Sava d'Mishpatim*, Rav Yeiva Sava who is a mystic gives an elaborate homily concerning the soul, in which the theory of reincarnation is indicated.⁸⁵ Moreover, in other sections of the *Zohar* the theory of reincarnation expands beyond the levirate marriage as a general law for those who have not fulfilled the commandments within their lifetime.⁸⁶

Most of the early Kabbalists did not think of reincarnation as a universal law for all creatures or all humans, and not as a system of moral causes which have physical effects as in the Hindu concept of *Karma*. The majority of earlier Kabbalists regarded reincarnation in connection with certain offences, particularly sexual transgressions.⁸⁷ (ER 155) (EJ 602-3) Reincarnation was considered as both punishment for the soul and as an opportunity for restitution. It is therefore an expression of justice and mercy of the creator at the same time. Later Kabbalists, however, developed different theories of reincarnation in which the notion of reincarnation for other sins and into animals and plants was also accepted. Even an idea of cosmic reincarnation was presented by Joseph ben Shalom which considered reincarnation as a cosmic process that involves constant movement of all existing forms. According to this theory reincarnation is not because of sin, and it is not limited only to the human souls.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Raphael, S.P., 2009. *Jewish Views of the Afterlife* 2nd ed., Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. P. 178.

⁸⁵ Ogren, B., 2009. *Renaissance and Rebirth: Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah*, Leiden: Brill. P. 17.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, P. 17.

⁸⁷ Scholem, G.G., 1955. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* 3rd ed., New York. P. 281.

⁸⁸ Ogren, B., 2009. *Renaissance and Rebirth: Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah*, Leiden: Brill. P. 19.

3. Views of the Afterlife in Christianity

3.1 General Views

Jesus and Paul were both Jews and Christianity emerged from a Jewish milieu.⁸⁹ Although soon it began to spread out to the other cultures, it generally accepted the authority of the Hebrew Bible as (the first part of) its canonical texts. It is therefore conceivable that the view of afterlife in Christianity has its roots in the same background of Judaism, although it developed according to a different soteriological doctrine. In fact, the view of the afterlife in Christianity, just like Judaism, has been subject to change and development and it has never achieved a complete uniformity. Eventually the provenance of the Christian view of the afterlife should be discussed in terms of the contemporary Jewish thought, and its development should be considered in context of its soteriological speculations.

The previous chapter demonstrated that the views of the afterlife in Judaism at the time of Jesus were divergent. Whereas Sadducees hold that the soul perishes along with the body after death, Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body. Wright points out that in Second-Temple Judaism there was a wide spectrum of belief regarding life after death. He maintains that although there was a strong belief in resurrection, by no means all Jews believed in it and other views were known. Wright emphasizes that resurrection itself was evolved from a metaphorical concept, which was perceived of as an allegory of the return of Israel from exile (in Ezekiel) into a literal reference for individual bodily resurrection. With regard to the notion of an intermediate state between death and resurrection, he argues that resurrection was considered as a life, after life-after death. The relevance of his discussion for this thesis is that there was neither a uniform view of the afterlife nor a clear perception of how and when resurrection will be.⁹⁰

Contentions regarding the issue of life after death in Christianity could be traced back to the conflicts between Paul, and disciples of Jesus –among them James the brother of Jesus- who established the Church of Jerusalem. For the evangelists, Jesus resurrected body was a physical body, whereas for Paul who had experienced Jesus only in his visions, Jesus' resurrected body was a spiritual body. Furthermore, to the Jerusalem Christians Jesus was the Messiah of Israel

⁸⁹ Brandon states that the Jerusalem Christians did not regard their faith in Jesus as constituting a new religion (Man and His Destiny in the Great Religions, p. 199); similarly Segal points out that Paul never felt that he left Judaism (Life After Death, p. 401).

⁹⁰ Wright, N.T., 2003. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, London: SPCK, Pp.200-205.

who would soon return in glory to save only the Jewish people from oppression of Gentiles.⁹¹ In contrast, Paul was trying to proselytize Gentiles and therefore promulgated a universal salvation which includes the gentiles too. He removed therefore the Greek objection to a physical resurrection by using the concept of the 'spiritual body', which is derived from the incorruptible body that Pharisees had already assumed for the resurrection.⁹² However, this salvation was conditioned to the faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and therefore was in fact exclusive for the Christians. According to Paul death could not be a part of God's creation, but it was the result of sin. Through resurrection Jesus conquered sin and death for all humanity.⁹³ From this perspective, it is the bodily resurrection of Jesus that guarantees the salvation of the righteous believers, and deniers of the resurrection of Jesus are consequently deniers of the resurrection of the dead.

Assuming that Jesus' immortal soul had survived his death, removes miraculous aspect of his resurrection. As such, the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul by nature denies the salvific nature of Christ's death.⁹⁴ Hence the church had to insist on the bodily resurrection of Jesus in order to substantiate its extraordinary nature. The Synoptic Gospels depicted the resurrection of Jesus as a literally physical resurrection and conceived of the final resurrection of the believers, a bodily resurrection in the future. In contrast other Gospels such as the Gospel of Philip or the Gospel of Thomas, which are in the category of the Gnostic literature, argue for a spiritual resurrection. The Gospel of Thomas (second century), which was found in the Nag Hammadi corpus, demonstrates a spiritual resurrection of Jesus. This substantiates that earliest Christianity strongly favored resurrection over immortality of the soul, but it was divided on the issue of the spirituality or materiality of the resurrection body.

Christianity, which began as an apocalyptic movement, expected the quick return of Jesus and the end of history. After a century however, it was forced to provide new interpretation and strategy. When waiting for Jesus went beyond the first century and the final judgment was considered in a distant time, salvation was deemed to be attainable in present life through living with God. The eternal life that is offered by God is available now, and those who believe in him and live their life with God do not need to wait for the final judgment.⁹⁵ This view became later the dominant

⁹¹ Brandon, S.G.F., 1962. *Man and His Destiny in the Great Religions*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 204.

⁹² Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 381.

⁹³ Obayashi, H., 2005, 'Afterlife: Christian Concept', in Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. P. 156.

⁹⁴ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 425.

⁹⁵ Hick, J., 1994. *Death and Eternal Life*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press. p. 195.

pattern of the Protestant understanding of eternal life after Luther took the emphasis from the final judgment and bodily resurrection away, and stressed more on the living a Christian life in faith.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, the notion of resurrection is in the center of the Christian faith, because if immortality is a natural property of the soul, no one would need the death and sacrifice of Jesus for his or her salvation. It is the Church fathers therefore who needed to combine native Jewish idea of resurrection with Greek philosophical idea of immortality of the soul, in order to provide a comprehensible doctrine for the proselytization. After a century the Church began to synthesize the resurrection of the body with immortality of the soul. Augustine, for example, suggested that the correctly believing and acting soul could attain immortality upon death, and at the end of time will be resurrected physically. However, this body is an angelic body without sense for experiencing pleasure.⁹⁷

3.2. Alternative Views

Although all Christians had agreed that God manifested himself in Christ, and his death and resurrection had salvific significance, there was not a homogeneous interpretation of this event. As already mentioned some of the alternative Gospels reveal unorthodox views of alternative groups which are generally called Gnostics. These traditions believed in a spiritual Christianity that had little to do with literal resurrection. Because of their humiliation of the physical body, they rejected the physical resurrection both of Jesus and of Christians.⁹⁸ In the Gospel of Thomas for example, Jesus is never described as the messiah of Israel, and the resurrection of those who believed in him has already started.

To the Gnostics visions gave direct access to the Savior and they did not need to wait for the end of time and second coming of Jesus. They believed one could not achieve salvation through faith, but it is the knowledge of God found in visions that brings salvation. They believed there is a specific, divinely-revealed, saving knowledge that cannot be acquired rationally, but must be provided from the postulated realm of being. For example, according to the Gospel of Thomas humans come from the light and they must return to it. Achieving this goal is only possible

⁹⁶ Obayashi, H., 2005, 'Afterlife: Christian Concept', in Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. P. 158.

⁹⁷ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 583.

⁹⁸ Broek, R. van den, 2013. *Gnostic Religion in Antiquity*, New York [etc.]: Cambridge University Press. P. 202.

through obtaining knowledge.⁹⁹ This knowledge was revealed by Jesus who came himself as a divine being from the light and returned to the abode of the divine. Gnostics refused to believe in the physical presence of Jesus, and they suggested that Jesus only seemed to suffer and die, therefore neither was a physical resurrection of Jesus true. Eventually, their interpretation of Jesus' death and resurrection was much in harmony with the Platonic and Greek world which believed in the immortality of the soul.¹⁰⁰

It should be noted that Gnosticism has been a loose term which is connected with many different sects. Some of these sects believed in reincarnation, which is demonstrated in their literature. For instance, the 'Revelation of Paul' which describes a heavenly journey of the apostle Paul, narrates that in the fourth heaven Paul sees a soul 'from the land of the dead' who is delivered there by angels and accused by witnesses. As punishment the soul is reincarnated in a body prepared for it.¹⁰¹ According to another source (Irenaeus, AH I, 30, 12-14) after the ascension to heaven Jesus sits at the right hands of his Father, Yaldabaoth. Jesus receives the souls of those who have accepted his divine nature, and the more souls Jesus receives, the more Yaldabaoth is diminished, because he cannot send those soul back to the earth for another reincarnation.¹⁰²

The Apostolic Church Fathers had also diverging views on the afterlife, however, in a long historical process they created the orthodox position in Christianity. In doing so they had to explain resurrection to the Greek and pagan audience, distinguish it from Judaism, and fight with heresies. Since the view of Gnostics were in sharp contrast to the early Church, the term 'Gnostic' became a general term for many heretic Christians. Nevertheless, some of the Church fathers in this battle started to adapt and combine Gnostic and Greek philosophy to their thought. For example, Valentinus (CA. 100-175 CE), who was from Alexandria and educated in the school of Neoplatonism, exhibited a lot of Hellenistic and Gnostic characteristics. He believed that salvation comes through a saving knowledge of the true purpose of the savior, which is not available through the flesh, because Jesus is not of the flesh.¹⁰³

Also Clement of Alexandria and Origen were deeply influenced by Philo and Hellenistic Jewish philosophy. They went both so far in the synthesis of immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body that they were considered heretics from the perspective of orthodox eyes. Clement attempted to put 'knowledge' of Gnosticism in the center of the church's teaching. The perfection

⁹⁹ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 469-477.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 537.

¹⁰¹ Van den Broek, R., 2013. *Gnostic Religion in Antiquity*, New York [etc.]: Cambridge University Press. P. 78.

¹⁰² Ibid. P. 192

¹⁰³ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 546.

of the knowledge of faith was more important than bodily resurrection for him. He thought that sexual differentiation will disappear after resurrection and people will attain an angelic status.¹⁰⁴

Origen is the most controversial Church father regarding his view on the afterlife and preexistence of the soul. He also stressed the spiritual nature of the resurrection body, but his belief in preexistence brought him very close to Platonists. Like Philo he believed that human souls were never without bodies, even in the preexistent state, albeit spiritualized and luminous ones. Therefore the fall of human is not the fall into a body, but rather a fall of an already embodied creature whose celestial body is transformed to a terrestrial body.¹⁰⁵ Like Plato he believed that the soul is introduced into a body according to its former actions, and that this body presents a source of temptation to the soul.¹⁰⁶ Such ideas made Origen suspected by later church fathers as Jerome and Justinian of admitting doctrine of transmigration of souls of Platonists which did not exclude transformation of human souls into animals and plants. Despite that Origen consistently held that animal souls are not rational souls and he rejected the possibility of such a transmigration of souls¹⁰⁷, The Council of Constantinople in 532 issued fifteen canons against Origen's ideas, and again The Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553 condemned Origen regarding his belief in the preexistence of the souls, which was assumed to imply to a belief in reincarnation.¹⁰⁸ Yet, many scholars attribute to Origen belief in the transformation from one human body to another, which is reincarnation.¹⁰⁹ However, according to Blosser, Origen's perception of this transformation (metempsychosis) is a shift in the structure of the same body, such as transformation of the celestial body into the terrestrial one.¹¹⁰

According to Alexakis most of the philosophies and sects who accepted reincarnation were established and flourished during the first four centuries of the Christian era.¹¹¹ Indeed, Maritano discusses several Church fathers between the first to the eighth century, who have disputed the possibility of metempsychosis. He admits that some heterodox Christians erroneously

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. P. 571.

¹⁰⁵ Blosser, B.P., 2012. *Become Like the Angels*, Catholic University of America Press. P. 192, 201.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. P. 196, 201.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. P. 208.

¹⁰⁸ Alexakis, A., 2001. *Was There Life Beyond the Life Beyond? Byzantine Ideas on Reincarnation and Final Restoration*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 55, p.163.

¹⁰⁹ Bianchi, U., 'Origen's Treatment of the Soul and the Debate over Metempsychosis', in L. Ries (ed.), *Origeniana Quarta* (Innsbruck, 1987), Pp. 270-81, in Blosser, B.P., 2012. *Become Like the Angels*, P. 209-10; Bremmer, J., 2002. *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife*, Bristol, London [etc.]: Routledge. P. 60.

¹¹⁰ Blosser, B.P., 2012. *Become Like the Angels*, Catholic University of America Press. P. 210.

¹¹¹ Alexakis, A., 2001. *Was There Life Beyond the Life Beyond? Byzantine Ideas on Reincarnation and Final Restoration*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 55, p.161.

reinterpreted some of the biblical passages in terms of reincarnation. He adds that “It was also accepted by others who misinterpreted the resurrection, by followers of esoteric Jewish teachings, by Gnostics (Carpocratians, and Basilidians) and by Manicheans.”¹¹² He reports that the first church father who addressed metempsychosis is Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165). Hans Schwarz acknowledges that the idea of reincarnation has never been restricted to one geographical area, and it has been tremendously influential. He confirms that many church fathers had responded to this issue and maintains that many Christian theologians from the earliest time on were acquainted with the idea of reincarnation.¹¹³

Epiphanius of Salamis is one of the earliest writers who have discussed different heresies and their belief in reincarnation in his *Panarion*, which he completed some times before 378.¹¹⁴ Epiphanius classified a succession of Christian heresies that he claimed went back to Simon Magus (mentioned in Acts of the Apostles 8:9–24), among them the Gnostics, Carpocratians, Markionites, and the Manichaeans which he explicitly associated with the notion of the transmigration of souls. Alexakis adds to this list the Origenists, the Ophites, the Colarbasians, or the Nicolaites and states that other sects like Paulicianism and Bogomilism were also considered as heretics who believed in reincarnation.¹¹⁵ According to Gaster, Simon Magus claimed that he had been already many times reincarnated.¹¹⁶

Paulicians were a dualistic Christian sect that originated in Armenia in the mid-7th century. It was influenced most directly by the dualism of Marcionism, a movement in early Christianity, and of Manichaeism.¹¹⁷ Bogomils were also a dualist religious sect that arose in Bulgaria toward the middle of the 10th century from a fusion of dualistic, neo-Manichaean doctrines imported especially from the Paulicians. In the second half of the 12th century, it spread westward and by the early 13th century the dualistic communities of southern Europe - comprising the Paulicians and Bogomils in the east and the Cathari in the west - formed a network stretching from the Black Sea to the Atlantic.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Maritano, M., ‘Metempsychosis’, in Oden, T.C., Elowsky, J.C. & Di Berardino, A., 2014. *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. P. 2:782.

¹¹³ Schwarz, H., 2000. *Eschatology*, Grand Rapids, MI [etc.]: Eerdmans. P. 303-4.

¹¹⁴ Alexakis, A., 2001. *Was There Life Beyond the Life Beyond? Byzantine Ideas on Reincarnation and Final Restoration*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 55, p.161.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 165-166.

¹¹⁶ Gaster, M., ‘Transmigration’ in Hastings et al., 1908. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Edinburgh [etc.]: Clark [etc.]. p. 437.

¹¹⁷ Paulician 2017. *Britannica Academic*. Retrieved 10 July 2017, from <http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/levels/collegiate/article/Paulician/58784>

¹¹⁸ Bogomil 2017. *Britannica Academic*. Retrieved 10 July 2017, from <http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/levels/collegiate/article/Bogomil/80401>

Hence Cathars were also considered as the western Bogomils,¹¹⁹ who split into the Absolute (radical) Cathars, those who accepted reincarnation into animals, and the Mitigated (moderate) ones, those who only accepted reincarnation into humans.¹²⁰ Cathars never applied this term to themselves, but Ekbert of Schönau who has left the oldest reference to this term (1163 AD) reports that they call themselves *Ecclesia Dei* (Church of God).¹²¹ Cathars combined belief in reincarnation with the Bogomils' rejection of the resurrection of the dead, the Second Coming, and the Last Judgment.¹²² In addition to these sects it should be noted that there have been other individuals who believed in reincarnation. Although most of their ideas are lost, there are references to them in the works of their opponents. Several examples are mentioned by Alexakis such as: John Italos who was put on trial for heresy in 1082; Didymos and Evagrius who were condemned in the Fifth Ecumenical Council because of following Origen and writing in favor of reincarnation; and George Gemistos Plethon who was a Neoplatonist in the fifteenth century.

3.3. Western Spiritualism and Esotericism

Over the course of the twentieth century the popularity of the notion of reincarnation in the West has grown significantly. According to a study in popular attitudes to religion in the fifties in a London borough, ten percent of the people who believed in afterlife, spontaneously expressed their belief in reincarnation.¹²³ A decade later the British anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer wrote based on his research among five-thousand people living in a London borough that eleven percent believed in a life after death like their present life, two percent in life in another planet, and eleven percent in reincarnation.¹²⁴ According to a 1982 Gallup poll taken in the United States, twenty-

¹¹⁹ Hamilton, J. & Hamilton, Bernard, 1998. *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World*, c. 650-c. 1450, Manchester [etc.]: Manchester University Press. Pp. 43-52, in Alexakis, A., 2001. *Was There Life Beyond the Life Beyond? Byzantine Ideas on Reincarnation and Final Restoration*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 55, p.171.

¹²⁰ Angelove, D., 1987. *The Bogomil Movement*, Sofia Press. 14ff. in Alexakis, A., 2001. *Was There Life Beyond the Life Beyond? Byzantine Ideas on Reincarnation and Final Restoration*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 55, p.171.

¹²¹ Bremmer, J., 2002. *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife*, Bristol, London [etc.]: Routledge. P. 67.

¹²² Alexakis, A., 2001. *Was There Life Beyond the Life Beyond? Byzantine Ideas on Reincarnation and Final Restoration*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 55, p.172.

¹²³ Gollancz, V. 1948, *Puzzled People: A Study in Popular Attitudes to Religion, Ethics, Progress and Politics in a London Borough*, London: Mass-Observation. In Head, J. and Cranston S. L. 1967, *Reincarnation in World Thought*, New York: Julian Press. P. 138.

¹²⁴ Gorer, G., 1955. *Exploring English Character*, London : New York: The Cresset Press ; Criterion Books. Pp. 259-62. In Head, J. and Cranston S. L. 1967, *Reincarnation in World Thought*, New York: Julian Press. P. 138.

three percent of all Americans believe in reincarnation; also twenty-one percent of Protestants and twenty-five percent of Catholics indicated a belief in reincarnation.¹²⁵ Hans Schwarz points to a Gallup Poll survey between 1978 and 1982 that indicates at least one out of four North Americans and western Europeans believe in reincarnation of some kind. He stressed that these people are not only youth out of the church, but a large number of church goers.¹²⁶ Another poll on Americans' belief in the paranormal, by Gallup in 2001, reveals that twenty-five percent of Americans believe in reincarnation, and twenty percent is not sure about it.¹²⁷

In fact, the interest in reincarnation had already revived among European intellectuals in the nineteenth century, which had a burgeoning of interest in the Paranormal and esotericism.¹²⁸ The Western esoteric traditions have their roots in Gnosticism, Hermeticism, and Neoplatonism of the Hellenistic world.¹²⁹ The discovery of the ancient text in the Renaissance led to the revival of alchemy and Kabbalah which by the Reformation gave rise to theosophy, occultism and spiritualism. Following such developments the Theosophical society was established in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) which played a vital role in propagating esotericism in the modern era.¹³⁰ Blavatsky attracted many spiritual seekers to her new movement by popularizing ideas of reincarnation and karma.¹³¹ She combined Indian views of reincarnation with European ideas of the evolutionary development of the personality, however the development of her ideas on human constitution from triune view of body, mind, and spirit towards the septenary constitution indicates that her inspiration lay in Western esotericism.¹³² Theosophists consider reincarnation as the universal law of evolutionary progress, and hold that in an infinite universe there must be infinite possibilities for growth and development. Another person who attempted to make reincarnation one of the central tenets of his anthroposophy was Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). Steiner was much impressed by scientific advance in his time and tried to present reincarnation in a way that would be acceptable to the intellectuals. This was in

¹²⁵ Gallup, G. and Procter, W. 1982, *Adventures in Immortality*, New York: McGraw-Hill. Pp. 137-8. In Grayson, B., 1989. *Is Reincarnation Compatible with Christianity? A historical, biblical, and theological evaluation*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. P. 1.

¹²⁶ Schwarz, H., 2000. *Eschatology*, Grand Rapids, MI [etc.]: Eerdmans. Pp. 299-300.

¹²⁷ http://www.gallup.com/poll/4483/Americans-Belief-Psychic-Paranormal-Phenomena-Over-Last-Decade.aspx?g_source=Reincarnation&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles. Retrived on 7-12-2017.

¹²⁸ Olcott, H.S., 2011. *Old Diary Leaves 1893-96 : The Only Authentic History of the Theosophical Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. i.

¹²⁹ Goodrick-Clarke, N., 2008. *The Western Esoteric Traditions : a historical introduction*, Oxford [etc.]: Oxford University Press. P. 3.

¹³⁰ Ibid. P. 211.

¹³¹ Ibid. P. 212.

¹³² Ibid. P. 222.

fact a general reaction to the challenge that modern science had created for the traditional view of Christianity from God, human, and afterlife.

These movements paved the way for the emergence of New Age religion in the twentieth century, which promoted the idea of reincarnation. Multiple reasons have been suggested for the decline of the belief in a traditional Christian view of the afterlife and the increase of the belief in reincarnation. On the one hand belief in resurrection and permanent punishment in hell, or exclusive reward in paradise were deemed to be less acceptable for the modern man,¹³³ on the other hand belief in reincarnation gives a logical and rationally consistent account of life after death.¹³⁴ Harvey Cox explains in his book 'Turning East' how the interest in oriental spirituality and practices such as Yoga and meditation has spread among common people, whereas before it was only a doctrinal interest among intellectuals.¹³⁵ Schwarz relates this to the religious emancipation of the people which gives freedom to the believers to choose among different options.¹³⁶ No need to say that in modern era facilities such as internet, easy traveling, translations of the Eastern sacred books and globalization have made dissemination of other religious ideas much more easier than before.

The New Age movement, like Theosophy have attempted to explain how reincarnation is compatible with a true interpretation of the teaching of Jesus, also both refer to the Scripture and find support in it for their claim. Some of the New Agers go so far to claim that many of the church fathers believed in reincarnation and often accuse later church councils for the removing of the indications to reincarnation out of the Scripture.¹³⁷

Wouter J. Hanegraaf maintains that "New Agers are generally very critical of how the churches have ministered Jesus's message, however, rather than rejecting historical Christianity for that reason, they prefer to look for a hidden tradition of 'esoteric Christianity' which is in fundamental agreement both with Jesus's message and with the esoteric core of other religions."¹³⁸ He adds on accordingly that the New Age belief does not attempt to end Christianity, but rather transform it to a more spiritual and universal vision.¹³⁹ This is indeed supported by the fact that reincarnation not

¹³³ Hick, J., 1994. *Death and Eternal Life*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press. P. 199.

¹³⁴ Hanegraaff, W.J., 1996. *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the mirror of secular thought*, Leiden: Brill. P.264.

¹³⁵ Cox, H., 1977. *Turning East: the promise and peril of the new orientalism*, New York: Simon and Schuster. P. 9.

¹³⁶ Schwarz, H., 2000. *Eschatology*, Grand Rapids, MI [etc.]: Eerdmans. P. 302.

¹³⁷ Head, J. and Cranston S. L. 1967, *Reincarnation in World Thought*, New York: Julian Press. Pp. 98-108; Weatherhead, L. 1965, *The Christian Agnostic*, London: Hodder and Stoughton. Pp. 209-210.

¹³⁸ Hanegraaff, W.J., 1996. *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the mirror of secular thought*, Leiden: Brill. P. 304.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* P. 319.

only among unchurched people is popular, but also among some Christians and even some clergies. To name a few: Edgar Cayce, a Sunday School teacher and professed Christian, propagated belief in reincarnation as the key to understanding the past, present, and future of mankind.¹⁴⁰ Quincy Howe, Jr. is an associate professor of classics at Scripps College and a graduate of Harvard, Columbia, and Princeton stated in his book that “It should be apparent in the ensuing pages that I personally believe in the doctrine of reincarnation and feel that it can enhance the framework of Christian life. I am further convinced that the contemporary Christian is not so inflexible as to reject out of hand a belief that has been attested for nearly three thousand years.”¹⁴¹ Irving Cooper, a priest in the Liberal Catholic Church, which is the Christian church that emerged out of Theosophy, considers the growing popularity of reincarnation in its inherent reasonableness and asserts that Jesus in the Bible affirms reincarnation.¹⁴² Similar position has been propagated by Frederick Spencer, Rudolf Frieling, Geddes MacGregor who is an Anglican priest and Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California (the author of *Reincarnation as a Christian Hope*), and Leslie Weatherhead who was an ordained Methodist clergyman (the author of *The Christian Agnostic*).¹⁴³

It should be added that there are several other authors such as John J. Hearney, and John Hick that they think in favor of reincarnation. Also some of the celebrities such as: Salvador Dali, John Denver, Patrick Duffy, Glenn Ford, Henry Ford, Anne Francis, Loretta Lynn, Shirley MacLaine, Peter Sellers, and Sylvester Stallone who hold to the belief in reincarnation and this in turn has affected public vision to reincarnation.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Furst, J. 1968, *Edgar Cayce's Story of Jesus*, New York: Coward-McCann, American ed., p. 71. In Grayson, B., 1989. *Is Reincarnation Compatible with Christianity? A historical, biblical, and theological evaluation*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. P. 4.

¹⁴¹ Howe, Jr. Q., 1974, *Reincarnation for the Christian*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press. P. 10. In Grayson, B., 1989. *Is Reincarnation Compatible with Christianity? A historical, biblical, and theological evaluation*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. P. 5.

¹⁴² S. Cooper, I., 1927, *Reincarnation: A Hope of the World*, 2ed ed. Chicago: American Theosophical Society, reprinted., Quest ed., Wheaton, 111.: Theosophical Publishing House, 1979, pp. vi, viii-ix. In Grayson, B., 1989. *Is Reincarnation Compatible with Christianity? A historical, biblical, and theological evaluation*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. P. 6.

¹⁴³ Grayson, B., 1989. *Is Reincarnation Compatible with Christianity? A historical, biblical, and theological evaluation*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. P. 6.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. Pp. 6-7.

4. Views of the Afterlife in Islam

4.1. General View

The doctrine of an afterlife in Islam has an emphatic background in the Quran and a significant position in Islamic theology and philosophy.¹⁴⁵ In Muslim thought, the notion of an afterlife is central for understanding the purpose of life, and it underscores God's divine justice. Hence, the belief in a future life beyond death in which all will be held accountable for their faith and for their actions is one of the most important articles of faith in the Islamic tradition.¹⁴⁶

As the Quran affirms the revelations to Moses and Jesus and considers the revelation to Muhammad being in line with the same tradition, one can expect a close relation between Islamic view of the afterlife and Jewish and Christian views.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, the notion of a life after death, which will be achieved through a resurrection in a time when people will be judged according to their actions, culminated in the Quran. Furthermore, in the language of the Quran similar Judeo-Christian concepts such as 'paradise', 'hell', 'this world', 'next world', and 'end of the world' are used to describe the eschaton and the afterlife. In general, the major outlines of the Islamic view on the human disposition, eschatology, and life after death have close connections with Judeo-Christian terminology and visions.

For example, similar Hebrew terms '*nafs*' for soul and '*rūh*' for spirit appear in the Quran. In Arabic '*nafs*' generally means 'self' in a reflexive sense rather than 'soul'.¹⁴⁸ Despite contentions on whether the soul and spirit are the same, there is a consensus that some aspect of human person will survive the death.¹⁴⁹ The relationship between body, soul, and spirit has been a topic of much debate among Muslims. In the Semitic view man is a union of body and soul, but those influenced by the Greek philosophy such as Mu'tazila, Shī'a, and Sufis believed that man is essentially a

¹⁴⁵ Tesei, T., 'The Barzakh and the Intermediate State of the Dead in the Quran', in Lange & Lange, Christian, 2015. *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*, Leiden: Brill. P. 31.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, J.I. & Haddad, Y.Y., 1981. *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press. P. 27.

¹⁴⁷ Brandon, S.G.F., 1962. *Man and His Destiny in the Great Religions*, Manchester: Manchester University Press. Pp. 238, 244.

¹⁴⁸ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 651.

¹⁴⁹ Smith, J.I. & Haddad, Y.Y., 1981. *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press. P. 19.

spirit, which is immortal, temporarily associated with a body. Some philosophers and mystics who held to the spiritualist perspective often disavowed the idea of a physical resurrection of the body.¹⁵⁰

The message of the Quran is that humans are in this world to be tested and they must demonstrate the ability of living according to the will of God.¹⁵¹ Humanity is responsible for its actions and will meet its reward or punishment in the next world. Death is not the end but rather the passage into a new and eternal existence. Multiple verses in the Quran affirm that God will raise the dead and that this is the indispensable part of His plan.¹⁵² Hence, faith in the resurrection of the dead for Muslims is also an affirmation of God's omnipotence.¹⁵³ As a result, there is no disagreement within the Muslim community on the resurrection of the dead. However, the corporeality or spirituality of resurrection has been a topic for much debate.¹⁵⁴

This controversy in Islamic theology and philosophy contributes significantly to this thesis; because it illustrates the two different approaches to the interpretation of the Quran, namely: the traditional approach which is a literal interpretation, in contrast with some philosophical and mystical approaches which use a hermeneutical method. This debate started from the outset of the rise of the systematic theology between Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites, and has continued through the Middle Ages up to the modern time. For instance, al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 CE), who is the seminal champion of Ash'arism, argues in favor of a bodily resurrection,¹⁵⁵ whereas Ibn Rushd (1126-1198 CE), who is the well-known in Andalusian philosophy, refuted the literally understanding of the Quran in general and in matters of the afterlife and resurrection in particular.¹⁵⁶ From his perspective, sensuous images of the resurrection, reward, and punishment in the Quran are only used to make them more readily intelligible to the masses, who cannot comprehend abstract, spiritual language.¹⁵⁷

Such a critique of the literal understanding of events related to the afterlife in the Quran has been delivered by many Sufis. Yūnus Emre of Turkey (d. approx. 1321 CE) ridiculed the eschatological

¹⁵⁰ Faḡrī, M., 2000. *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*, Oxford: Oneworld. P. 98.

¹⁵¹ Smith, J.I. & Haddad, Y.Y., 1981. *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press. P. 14.

¹⁵² Ibid. P. 1.

¹⁵³ Ibid. P. 2.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. Pp. 19-20.

¹⁵⁵ Faḡrī, M., 2000. *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*, Oxford: Oneworld. Pp. 69-71.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. Pp. 93-98.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. P. 98.

descriptions of the Quran that was expanded by later theologians.¹⁵⁸ He considered them folklore for the naïve masses and his idea has been accepted by many modern Muslims who consider the imagery of the Quran as appropriate more for the original Arab audiences of Islam than for modern people.¹⁵⁹ For example, Sayyid Ahmad Khān (d. 1898 CE) also maintained that the Quran did not teach a bodily resurrection in the literal sense; it expressed it in a sensual way in order to impress the reality of reward and punishment upon the minds of primitive Arabs.¹⁶⁰

Some of the modern spiritualists have suggested that by using psychological sciences, Hell and Paradise could be related rather than to locations to the states of mind.¹⁶¹ The well-known poet and thinker, Muhammad Iqbāl (d. 1938), for example, clearly states that Paradise and Hell are states of mind, not localities.¹⁶² Smith and Haddad have demonstrated that “there are some wide discrepancies in modern views of the various conditions of life after death and of the ways in which traditional material should be interpreted.”¹⁶³

It is not the purpose of this chapter to review the whole development of the afterlife doctrine in Islamic history or even to represent its various structural outlines. Rather its purpose is to give a general overview of discrepancies in Islamic notions of the afterlife with a particular focus on the discord between literalist interpretation and symbolic interpretations of the Quran. Having such an outline as a backdrop will help us to understand how proponents of reincarnation reject the particulars held dear by tradition, and reinterpret the Quranic references to eschatological issues.

¹⁵⁸ Schimmel, A., 1975. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. Pp. 159, 333.

¹⁵⁹ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 665.

¹⁶⁰ Troll, C.W., 1978. *Sayyid Ahmad Khān: A reinterpretation of Muslim theology*, New Delhi [etc.]: Vikas Publishing House. P. 211 .

¹⁶¹ Smith, J.I. & Haddad, Y.Y., 1981. *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press. P. 11.

¹⁶² Iqbal, Sheikh & Sheikh, M. Saeed, 1986. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture. Pp. 96-98. In Ryad, U., ‘Eschatology between Reason and Revelation: Death and Resurrection in Modern Islamic Theology’, in Günther, S., Lawson, T., Mauder, C., 2016, *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, Leiden: Brill. P. 1198.

¹⁶³ Smith, J.I. & Haddad, Y.Y., 1981. *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press. P. 28.

4.2. Alternative View

As already mentioned the belief in resurrection has been considered by Muslims to be an article of faith. Naturally, denying the resurrection of the dead at the end of time has been considered heresy. Furthermore, as Margaret Smith has pointed out, “The idea of the diffusion of the Divine Spirit implied that Deity was subject to transmigration, and this was even more abhorrent to Muslim teaching.”¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, from the early days, Islamic history has witnessed a number of disparate movements that have espoused *tanāsukh* (reincarnation) in many forms.¹⁶⁵ Such a tendency among Muslims sects and scholars has been discussed in much early Islamic literature and keeps attracting the attention of modern scholars.

A review of the studies in this field demonstrates three positions. The first group, those who are proponents of reincarnation, not surprisingly, have tried to include more figures to their own camp; The second group, those who are against the notion of reincarnation also have tried to exclude as much as possible. Nevertheless, even among the third group, which mainly consists of western scholars, there are some discrepancies regarding how to interpret extant literature that indicates a belief in reincarnation. Despite such disagreements about certain figures, there is plenty of evidence that demonstrates the existence of such a belief among Muslim minorities.

An old article on belief in reincarnation among Muslims is ‘The Doctrine of Metempsychosis and Incarnation among nine heretic Muhammadan Sects’ written by Edward Rehatsek (1819 - 1891), an Orientalist and translator of several works of Islamic literature. Rehatsek argues that the doctrine of reincarnation might have been known to the ancient Arabs via their trade with India and Greece, but later banned by the emergence of Islam. Nevertheless, it has again permeated into the Islamic community through the Persian culture.¹⁶⁶ Like most of other authors, he refers to the well-known book of Shahrastānī, ‘*Kitāb al-Milal wan-Nihal*’ in which different sects and creeds are described.

Rehatsek points out the three definitions of reincarnation according to Shahrastānī: I. The Tanāsukhīyah, who believed in the transmigration of spirits into bodies to meet the reward or punishment of their previous lives. The highest degree of achievement is becoming a prophet, and the lowest degree is becoming a serpent. II. Khārbanyah, a class of Sabians who believed in the infinite repetition of cycles and periods of reincarnation. III. Hulūlīyah, believed that an essence of God could dwell in a human form, being incarnated in an individual.

¹⁶⁴ Smith, M., 1940. ‘*Transmigration and Sufis*’, in *The Muslim World*, Vol. 30, (4), Blackwell Publishing Ltd. P. 351.

¹⁶⁵ Khalil, M. H., ‘Which Road to Paradise? The Controversy of Reincarnation in Islamic Thought’, in Günther, S., Lawson, T., Mauder, C., 2016, *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, Leiden: Brill. P. 735.

¹⁶⁶ Rehatsek, E., 1880. ‘The Doctrine of Metempsychosis and Incarnation Among Nine Heretic Muhammadan Sects’, in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society (JSAB)* Vol. 14, (3), No. 38. Bombay. Pp. 418-19.

Afterwards Rehatsek discusses the beliefs of nine different sects which held to various perceptions of reincarnation, namely: 1. Haytyah, the adherents of Ahmad B. Hāyt; 2. Ghālīyah, the extremist Shī'ites; 3. Kāmelīyah, the adherents of Abu Kāmel, who held to both Hulūl and Tanāsukh ; 4. Vāhedy, the followers of Vāhed Mahmud (1203 CE), who considered himself to be the individual in whom the prophetic mission and nature of Muhammad were perfected. They hold to the reincarnation of man to both animals and plants; 5. 'Alī Allāhīs, who deified 'Alī and asserted that at every period of time God was incarnated in the bodies of prophets and saints. Thus they thought that from the time of Adam the light of God has been transmigrated in different prophets and has continued to dwell in the Imams. Rehatsek mentions 'Alawītes as a sub-sect of 'Alī Allāhīs (also known as 'Alī-ilāhīs, 'Alī deifiers). 6. Nuṣayrīs, who also held to manifestation of God in different prophets and 'Alī and his descendants. Hence they believed that 'Alī existed before the creation of Heaven and Earth. They held to metempsychosis, this being the transmigration of human to animals. 7. Ismā'īlīs, who have constituted many other sects (such as *Tayyibīs*) with various beliefs. 8. Drūzes, who believe in metempsychosis, despite the repudiation of Hamza (one of the chief propagator of Drūze) who propagated only reincarnation into human bodies. 9. Bābīs, who believe their saint comes back after forty days of earthly death to assume another body.¹⁶⁷

Much later in 2012, Patricia Crone dedicated a chapter of her book, 'The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran' to reincarnation. She maintains that the pre-Islamic figure Mazdak (d. 528 C.E.) believed in reincarnation, then she goes on to discuss post-Islamic sects that reportedly have believed in reincarnation in one form or another. In her analysis Crone mainly considers the early Muslim heresiographers such as Shahrastānī, al-Baghdādī, Ja'far b. Harb, al-Nawbakhtī, and al-Qummī, who report on the belief in reincarnation among various sects. She mentions: Khurramīs, Rāwandīyya, Khidāshīyya, Muslimīyya (followers of Abū Muslim who were also deemed to believe in reincarnation), Saba'iyya / Khurramdīniyya, the Harranians, Ḥarbiyya / Ḥārithiyya / Janāhiyya, Qarāmita and Daylam, Pārsīs, Nuqtavīs, and Mukhammisa.¹⁶⁸ Interestingly Crone even mentions the account of some Dahrīs (Materialists) who, according to Ibn Ḥazm (994-1064 CE), believed in reincarnation: "Ibn Ḥazm mentions Dahrīs who said that since neither the soul nor the world would come to an end, the soul had to come back again and again for ever in different bodies."¹⁶⁹

Crone refers to the 13th century Persian book '*Tabṣīrat al-'awāmm*' which tells that the philosophers, Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, Sabian, and many Muslim sects believe in reincarnation. Further, the philosophers hold reincarnation to be of four kinds, *naskh* (substitution), *maskh* (transformation), *raskh* (immobilisation), and *faskh* (disintegration); *naskh* is reincarnation

¹⁶⁷ Rehatsek, E., 1880. 'The Doctrine of Metempsychosis and Incarnation among Nine Heretic Muhammadan Sects', in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* (JSAB) Vol. 14, (3), No. 38. Bombay. Pp. 420-438.

¹⁶⁸ Crone, P., 2012. *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran : Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 233-252.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. P. 248.

into human bodies; *maskh* into the bodies of animals; *faskh* into diverse forms of reptiles and creeping things on the earth and in the water; and *raskh* is reincarnation into diverse kinds of trees and plants.¹⁷⁰ It should be noted that later perceptions of these four sorts of reincarnation are slightly different: “*naskh* is said to refer to the passage from one human body to another human body, *maskh* to passage from human to animal, *raskh* to transformation into a vegetal state, and *faskh* to that into mineral form.”¹⁷¹

Margaret Smith, in 1940 wrote an article, ‘Transmigration and Sufis’. She also acknowledges that the doctrine of reincarnation became known to Muslims in an early period in Baghdad. However she assumes it came from India. She admits that some of the Mu‘tazilītes and sectarians who were perhaps influenced by the Greek philosophy, adhered to the notion of reincarnation. However, she goes on to argue that the Mu‘tazilītes emphasized the justice of God, and no doubt it was their belief in essential justice of God which made them hold that all must be given an opportunity to attain salvation. They believed that those who are neither good enough for Heaven nor bad enough for Hell, will have the opportunity of reincarnation.¹⁷² She concludes that “the doctrine of transmigration, in the sense of a belief in the passage of the human soul from one body to another, with the implication that the state of the soul in each new incarnation is determined by its ethical progress in a previous life, is accepted by a few individual Sufis, but not by the great majority.”¹⁷³ As a result, she associates certain well-known Sufis and mystics such as Mansūr al-Ḥallāj (858-922 CE), Ibn Sīnā (980-1037 CE), Abdullāh Ansārī (1006-1089 CE), Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (1154- 1191 CE), Farīd al-Dīn Aṭār (1145-1221 CE), and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207-1277 CE) with the belief in transmigration.

In contrast, Mohammad Hassan Khalil, in his study of reincarnation in Islamic thought is less inclined to consider all of aforementioned Sufis as proponents of reincarnation. According to Khalil, a careful examination of their representative writings demonstrates the challenges of characterizing them as true proponents of metempsychosis.¹⁷⁴ In his critique on the book of Nadarbek K. Mirza, ‘Reincarnation and Islam’, published in 1927, he disagrees with Mirza, who considered Ḥallāj and Rūmī as the proponents of reincarnation. The famous words of Ḥallāj which is usually used to paint him as a reincarnationist follows:

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. Pp. 242-3.

¹⁷¹ Gimaret, D., “Tanāsukh”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 August 2017
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7388>

¹⁷² Smith, M., 1940. ‘Transmigration and Sufis’, in *The Muslim World*, Vol. 30, (4), Blackwell Publishing Ltd. P. 351.

¹⁷³ Ibid. P. 357.

¹⁷⁴ Khalil, M. H., ‘Which Road to Paradise? The Controversy of Reincarnation in Islamic Thought’, in Günther, S., Lawson, T., Mauder, C., 2016, *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, Leiden: Brill. P. 735.

Like the herbage,
I have sprung up many a time
On the banks of flowing rivers.
For a hundred thousand years
I have lived and worked and tried
In every sort of body.

Similarly, the following verses of Rûmi, has been considered as the evidence of his support for reincarnation:

I died as mineral and became a plant,
I died as plant and rose to animal,
I died as animal and became Man.
Why should I fear?
When did I become less by dying?
Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar
With angels blest; but even from angelhood
I must pass on: all except God doth perish.
When I have sacrificed my angel-soul,
I shall become what no mind e'er conceived.
O let me not exist! For Non-existence
Proclaims in organ tones "To Him we shall return!"

Khalil argues, however, that "we must not forget that these are the ecstatic musings of mystics. One could just as easily read these passages as poetic expressions of either the unity of existence or the evolution of the soul (within a single body) as it deepens its understanding of the nature of the all-encompassing God, His creation, and the hereafter."¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless Khalil admits that

¹⁷⁵ Khalil, M. H., 'Which Road to Paradise? The Controversy of Reincarnation in Islamic Thought', in Günther, S., Lawson, T., Mauder, C., 2016, *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, Leiden: Brill. P. 742.

some of the Sufis – particularly modern ones- have been the most influential reincarnationists in the Muslim world.¹⁷⁶

Sabine Schmidtke in her paper on metempsychosis according to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī and his followers, points out how the philosophers of illumination considered themselves the true followers of ‘ancient wisdom’. Similar to some New Age movements and Theosophy, they believed in an eternal truth shared by all divinely revealed religions. Illuminationists sought to synthesize various traditions such as those of the ancient Egyptians (Hermes, Agathodaemon), Persians (Jāmasf, Farshāwashtar, Buzurjmīhr), and Greeks (Empedocles, Pythagoras, Plato) who were known to believe in reincarnation.¹⁷⁷ According to Schmidtke, “Suhrawardī maintained different views on metempsychosis, ranging from outright rejection in the majority of his writings to evident sympathy towards, possibly even support for this doctrine in his *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*.”¹⁷⁸ Schmidtke affirms, however, that later representatives of the Illuminationist tradition who wrote commentaries on the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* concluded that Suhrawardī supported this doctrine.¹⁷⁹

Paul E. Walker mentions in his article, ‘The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam’ several Muslims who were either proponents of reincarnation, or deemed by other Muslims to hold to such beliefs. For instance, he quotes Shahrastānī who has mentioned a few of the Mu‘tazilītes and in particular several followers of the early theologian al-Nizzām as the proponents of the belief in reincarnation. Walker goes on to exculpate well-known philosopher Abu Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925/935) from the charges of advocating reincarnation, due to the lack of explicit evidence. However, Rāzī has been considered by many as the greatest Platonist of Islam. For example, according to Majid Fakhri, “Like Plato, Rāzī argued that the soul was originally separate from matter, but was subsequently beset by erotic passion and physical lust. Hence, those who attach to the physical pleasure will continue to circle round through reincarnation.”¹⁸⁰

Another figure in Islamic history accused of adherence to the doctrine of reincarnation is Abū Ya‘qūb Al-Sijistānī (d. ca. 971 CE), who was an Ismā‘īlī author of strong Neoplatonic tendencies. Walker admits that he explicitly rejected the resurrection of the body; he maintained that the salvation is only for the soul; and considered paradise as being spiritual.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, although he had repudiated reincarnation in terms of transmigration of the human soul to an animal form,

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. P. 739.

¹⁷⁷ Schmidtke, S., 1999. *The Doctrine of the Transmigration of Soul according to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (killed 587/1191) and his Followers*. *Studia Iranica*, 28(2), pp.238.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. P. 239.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. P. 243.

¹⁸⁰ Faḡrī, M., 2000. *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*, Oxford: Oneworld. P. 31.

¹⁸¹ Walker, Paul E., ‘*The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam*’, in Adams et al., 1991. *Islamic studies presented to Charles J. Adams*, Leiden [etc.]: Brill. P. 235.

al-Bīrūnī and Nāṣer Khosraw both have accused him of holding to the belief in reincarnation, since, in his other works, he had admits reincarnation of human to human.

In contrast to Paul E. Walker, Wilferd Madelung's analysis of al-Sijistānī points out that Nāṣer Khosraw who was himself an Ismā'īlī missionary, referred to al-Sijistānī in his book '*Zād al-musāfirīn*', as those who like Hindus believe that reward and punishment take place on Earth.¹⁸² However, according to Nāṣer Khosraw he called the Ismā'īlīs to this doctrine at a time when he suffered from melancholy.¹⁸³

Madelung argues that the disagreement on whether al-Sijistānī believed in reincarnation among the scholars such as Wladimir Ivanow and Henry Corbin stems from his rejection of metempsychosis in the meaning of transmigration of the human soul to an animal body, but he did not deny the possibility of a return of the human soul in a human body.¹⁸⁴ Madelung support his view by asserting that al-Sijistānī rejected the orthodox belief in a universal resurrection at the end of the world, and considered that the rebirth for the recompense occurs soon after death.¹⁸⁵

Indeed, the issue of different definitions among Muslim philosophers and religious scholars must not be ignored. Various perceptions of both resurrection and transmigration of the soul have affected the position of each of them. The general problem for some philosophers such as Ibn-i Sīnā and Mullā Ṣadrā is the bodily resurrection, which would merge with their definition of transmigration of the soul. For them, accepting a corporeal resurrection, would lead to the acceptance of transmigration of the soul to another body. It did not matter to them that this transmigration would happen in another world, not in this world (such as Nāṣer Khosraw). This was because they were considering two different definitions of resurrection: spiritual and corporeal, and two different definitions of transmigration, general (*tanāsukh-i malakūtī*) and particular (*tanāsukh-i melkī*). As a result, they rejected corporeal resurrection and reincarnation in this world, whereas they accepted a transmigration of the soul to another spiritual body in another world (such as Ghazālī).¹⁸⁶

The same issue of demarcation and determination applies to the concept of *raj'at* (return) in the Shī'a belief system, which has various connotations such as metempsychosis; the transmigration of the spirit of holiness from one Imam to the next; return from concealment, usually of a particular Imām at the end of his occultation; the return to life of some of the dead before the

¹⁸² Madelung, W., '*Abū Ya'qūb Al-Sijistānī and Metempsychosis*', in Yāršāṭir et al., 1990. *Iranica varia: papers in honor of professor Ehsan Yarshater*, Leiden: Brill. Pp. 131-143.

¹⁸³ Ibid. P. 131.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. Pp. 134-5, 141.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. P. 137.

¹⁸⁶ Faryāb, M. H., '*Tanāsukh va Ma'ād-e Jesmānī; Senkhīyat yā Gheyriyat*', *Ma'rifat-e Kalāmī*, Vol. 2, No. 4.

Resurrection.¹⁸⁷ As a result, this also has raised many disputes both inside and outside of the community. Some consider it just as another term for reincarnation, whereas others consider it an exceptional eschatological phenomenon.¹⁸⁸

One of the earliest attestations of the belief in various forms of reincarnation is found among ‘*ghulāt*’, the extremist Shī’a groups. Heinz Halm in his book on Shī’ism states that extremist Shī’ites are said to have committed three acts of heresy: I. The claim that God takes up his abode in the bodies of the Imāms (ḥulūl); II. The belief in metempsychosis (*tanāsukh*); III. The spiritual interpretation of Islamic law.¹⁸⁹ He notices that their notions of migration of the souls have nothing to do with Indian Karma doctrines, but rather resemble a kind of metempsychosis as it occasionally appears in the Gnosticism of late antiquity.¹⁹⁰ Halms illustrates that the *ghulāt* ideas could be considered an attempt to establish pre-Islamic gnostic traditions as the eternal truth of all revelations, thus also as the secret inner sense of the Quranic revelation.¹⁹¹ Another book of Halm ‘Die Islamische Gnosis’ reveals much more of the belief in reincarnation among early Shī’a sects.

Ahl-i Ḥaqq and Nuṣayrīs are two sects which Halm considers as the descendants of the *ghulāt*. The religion of Ahl-i Ḥaqq is a superficially Islamicized polytheistic mythology of Indo-Iranian extraction. According to Mansur Khaksār, Ahl-i Ḥaqq like other Muslims believe in the general eschatological idea of the Last Judgment which they call *tanāsukh-e malakūtī*, since they believe after the near advent of Mahdī the world will be renovated. As a result, the Good shall enter paradise, and the Wicked shall be annihilated. In contrast the term *tanāsukh-e melkī* refers to the successive transmigration of a human’s soul is seen as a means to perfection and purification. The term *tanāsukh* in the meaning of transmigration can be equally applied to the reincarnation of the theophanies, as their central dogma concerns a successive manifestation of divinity. In this sense *tanāsukh* denotes the descent of the divine principle in certain men.¹⁹²

Nuṣayrīs – also known as ‘*Alawīs*’ – are the only Islamic sect that have preserved most of the *ghulāt* traditions in their gnostic cosmogony, the doctrine of metempsychosis, spiritual interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of the Quran, and deification of ‘Alī.¹⁹³ Nuṣayrīs use various terms to refer

¹⁸⁷ Kohlberg, E., 2012. “Radj’a”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs.

¹⁸⁸ Movahediyān Attār, A., 2011. ‘*Tabāyon-e Māhavi-e Rajd’at va Tanāsokh*’, in *Falsafey-e Dīn*, 8th year, No. 11.

¹⁸⁹ Halm, H., *Shi’ism* (2ed ed.), translated by Watson, J. and Hill, M., New York: Colombia University Press. P. 154.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Khaksar, M., 2009. *Reincarnation as Perceived by the “People of the Truth”*, Iran and the Caucasus, 13(1), Pp.118-20.

¹⁹³ Halm, H., *Shi’ism* (2ed ed.), translated by Watson, J. and Hill, M., New York: Colombia University Press. P. 157.

to transmigration, such as *tanāsukh*, *naskh*, *naql*, *radd*, and *karr*. In each new life, the person wears a new ‘shirt’ that denotes a new body. Nuṣayrī literature contains numerous descriptions of different levels of transmigration, the more severe a person’s sins, the more inferior the creatures into which his soul will transmigrate. For example, “In his *Risāla al-rāstbāshiyya*, al-Khasībī mentions five possible levels:

- (1) *naskh* (replacement): passage of the soul from one human body to another.
- (2) *maskh* (transformation): passage from a human body to that of an animal
- (3) *waskh* (dirty): passage of the soul into the smallest creatures and grass dwellers
- (4) *faskh* (separation): the soul of a sinner in his lifetime passes into the body of a sick man, and again from a the sick man to another sinner.
- (5) *raskh* (to stay in the same position): transfer of the soul into inanimate matter.”¹⁹⁴

al-Khasībī explains that the term *tanāsukh* is the opposite of *ma‘rifa* (gnosis/ knowledge), since the gnosis is the only chance of escaping from transmigration. While the *ma‘rifa*, leads to Heaven, the transmigration into inferior creatures is considered Hell. It is remarkable that the Nuṣayrīs did not find any contradiction between transmigration and judgment at the end of time. According to Al-Khasībī the sinners could pass through 100000 transmigrations and the believers only 80, until the coming of Judgment Day.¹⁹⁵

Other sects that believed in reincarnation are the Druze and Nizarī. Hamza al-Labbād, the real founder of Druzism propagated that God reincarnated himself in the Fatimid Califs.¹⁹⁶ According to Anne Bennett the Druze believe that reincarnation occurs among all humans at all places and times, however there is no agreement among all of them regarding reincarnation, and even some of them dismiss it outright.¹⁹⁷ Similar to the Nuṣayrīs, the Druze refer to reincarnation as *taqammuṣ* (to clothe with a shirt), implying that a soul changes its clothes from one life to another. According to their religious writings, human souls were created at once and are fixed in number. When a Druze dies the soul is immediately reborn in another (Druze) body. A Druze propagandist, Hamza, rejected vehemently the concept of metempsychosis, of Nuṣayrīs which allows the possibility of transmigration of the human’s soul to animals. Moreover, the Druze concept of

¹⁹⁴ Friedman, Y., 2010. *The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs : an introduction to the religion, history and identity of the leading minority in Syria*, Leiden [etc.]: Brill. Pp. 105-6.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. P. 110.

¹⁹⁶ Halm, H., *Shi‘ism* (2ed ed.), translated by Watson, J. and Hill, M., New York: Colombia University Press. P. 179.

¹⁹⁷ Bennett, A., 2006. *Reincarnation, Sect Unity, and Identity Among the Druze*. *Ethnology*, xlv(2), p. 87.

reincarnation is positive, while the Nuṣayrī is negative. While the former gives the soul another chance to correct itself and achieve purity, the latter is merely a means of retribution.¹⁹⁸

The Nizāri-Ismaʿīlīs of Northwest India also known as the Khojas, venerate several dāʿīs who came from Iran in the 14th and 15th centuries. The most important dāʿī, Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn made great concessions to Hinduism and portrayed Imams as reincarnations of the God Vishnu. Among them the belief that those who does not recognize the True Imam are condemned to reincarnation is widespread.¹⁹⁹

In 14th and 15th century the Iranian world witnessed phases of ‘heterodox’ resurgence with similar doctrinal features to the Nizāri-Ismaʿīlīsm. The mutual doctrinal pattern of these movements was: the cyclical renewal of the sacred time; anticipation of a messianic advent; and a hermeneutical interpretation of the text.²⁰⁰ At this time in Iran a body of antinomian and incarnationist doctrines evolved under Faḏl-Allāh Astarābādi (d. 1384 CE) who is the founder of Ḥurūfiyya. He taught that the Divine revelation moves in cycles and in each cycle is made of repeated events and persons from the preceding cycles.²⁰¹ Hence, he was deemed to be both Jesus returned and the promised Mahdi from the lineage of the Prophet. According to Ḥurūfīs Paradise consists of knowledge, and Hellfire of ignorance.²⁰²

From the Ḥurūfī sect Nuḡṭawīya emerged, founded by Maḥmūd Paṣīkhānī (d. 1427 CE), the former follower of Faḏl Allāh who was ex-communicated. Paṣīkhānī advocated a peculiarly materialist and evolutionary type of metempsychosis according to which plants emerged from the earthly matter, and animal came from the plants, and humans grew from the animals. The particles of the body do not disintegrate upon death but are absorbed as a single mass into the soil. They then re-emerge in vegetable or solid form, possibly to be consumed by animals or men.²⁰³ The level of existence on which they are finally reintegrated depending on the degree of virtue and knowledge attained by their previous owner. Paṣīkhānī himself claimed to be the reincarnation on

¹⁹⁸ Friedman, Y., 2010. *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs : an introduction to the religion, history and identity of the leading minority in Syria*, Leiden [etc.]: Brill. Pp. 109-10.

¹⁹⁹ Halm, H., *Shiʿism* (2ed ed.), translated by Watson, J. and Hill, M., New York: Colombia University Press. P. 186.

²⁰⁰ Amanat, A., ‘The Nuḡṭawī Movement of Maḥmūd Paṣīkhānī and his Persian Cycle of Mystical-Materialism’, in Daftarī, F., 1996. *Mediaeval Ismaʿīli history and thought*, Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, p. 282.

²⁰¹ Bausani, A., “Ḥurūfiyya”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs.

²⁰² Algar, H. 2012. ‘Horufism’, in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, derived from: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/horufism> on 07-26-2017.

²⁰³ Amanat, A., ‘The Nuḡṭawī Movement of Maḥmūd Paṣīkhānī and his Persian Cycle of Mystical-Materialism’, in Daftarī, F., 1996. *Mediaeval Ismaʿīli history and thought*, Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, p. 287.

a higher plane both of the Prophet Muḥammad and of ‘Alī. They also believed that Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī was the reincarnation of Moses, and Yazīd was the reincarnation of the Pharaoh.²⁰⁴

Such an overview demonstrates that the concept of reincarnation has been known and disputed from the early period of Islamic era and accepted by some individuals and sects. All these groups and sects shared one doctrinal or methodological idea, which is that of a hermeneutical approach to the Quran. This is the essential point of the next chapter in which the indications to reincarnation in the Bible and the Quran will be examined.

²⁰⁴ Algar, H., ‘Nuḳṭawiyya’, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs.

5. Reincarnation in the Bible and in the Quran

5.1. Hermeneutical method

The previous sections demonstrated that the common method of the proponents of reincarnation is interpreting the text beyond its literal aspect. This method has been prevalent among Cabbalists, Gnostics, New Agers, Sufis and many groups which have been accused of heresy by the orthodox majority. However, one should not conclude that allegorical reading of the Bible exclusively belongs to unorthodox groups. Actually, it has been always common in both Jewish and Christian exegetical tradition.²⁰⁵ This is of course a sensitive issue, since most of the text-related arguments endorsing reincarnation are based on the symbolic interpretation. However, it should be stressed that not all of such textual evidence are symbolic. On the contrary, as it will be demonstrated in this section, wherever there is a literal indication to reincarnation, the opponents of reincarnation also tend to propose a non-literal interpretation.

For instance, in referring to the belief in metempsychosis among some sects and individuals, Smith and Haddad remark on the alternative interpretation of ‘*barzakh*’ in Q 23:100, proposed by Nadarbek K. Mirza in his book ‘*Reincarnation and Islam*’. They maintain: “Such latitude in interpretation of a verse that almost all others have seen as proof of the opposite point suggests the ways in which different groups and sects have been able eisegetically to justify a wide range of different understandings.”²⁰⁶ Such a remark implies that orthodoxy accuses heretic groups of reading reincarnation into the text of the Bible or the Quran. Likewise, Bobby Kent Grayson, in his dissertation asserts that “the problem seems to be the practice of eisegesis by those who bring a preconceived view of reincarnation to the passage.”²⁰⁷

Such accusations of eisegesis or anachronistic interpretations, requires a methodological explanation before proceeding to analyze the Bible and the Quran. Certainly this study does not support or justify eisegesis, however, it attempts to distinguish hermeneutics which signifies a systematic and logical interpretation from eisegesis which denotes an arbitrary interpretation. It is therefore necessary to underline a few essential aspects of hermeneutics that are relevant to this

²⁰⁵ Bakhos, C., 2015. ‘Interpreters of Scripture’, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Abrahamic Religions*, ed. by A. J. Silverstein and G. G. Stroumsa, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp.275-6.

²⁰⁶ Smith, J.I. & Haddad, Y.Y., 1981. *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press. P. 8.

²⁰⁷ Grayson, B., 1989. *Is Reincarnation Compatible with Christianity? A Historical, Biblical, and Theological Evaluation*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. P. 154.

study. 'The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion' describes hermeneutics as follows:

“1. When interpretation is developed into a scientific method, it is given a Greek name ‘hermeneutics’. Hermeneutics is the art of accurately understanding the text.

2. Hermeneutics was developed in antiquity when a distinction was made between literal and allegorical meanings.

3. Hermeneutics consists of a reading that moves back and forth between the parts and the whole of a text, and between the text and its contexts. Different contextualizations lead to different readings.

4. It includes adding layers of meaning and understanding in a never-ending process. No text speaks for itself and no interpretation is ever final.”²⁰⁸

In sum, hermeneutics is scientific, systematic, with a holistic approach to the text, based on internal and external contextualization, and is therefore a continuous process. It should be added that as Michael Fishbane has demonstrated in his book ‘*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*’, the Bible itself presents numerous examples of such an interpretation.²⁰⁹ For instance, when Joseph relates his dream to his brothers (Gen. 37:5-8); or when he interprets the dream of Pharaoh (Gen. 41:1-32); or when the disciples of Jesus realize that the yeast of Pharisees means their teaching (Matt. 16:5-12).

Ole Davidsen points at two kinds of interpretation: ‘descriptive interpretation’, which tends to describe the meaning of the text, and ‘prescriptive interpretation’ or ‘normative interpretation’, which tries to defend and actualize the values of a text. Descriptive reading includes reading the text according to the conventions determined by the text itself and looking for the text’s own contribution to the establishment of meaning. This is a reading based on the text’s data and using narrative as interpretive context.²¹⁰ To paraphrase a text in this sense is not only reading the text progressively in a linear process, but also a reverse reading which considers presuppositions. It should be stressed that a text may not always explicitly express some data, but also implicitly establish some reasonable inferences. To use the example of Davidsen, “sex before marriage does

²⁰⁸ Gilhus, I. S., ‘Hermeneutics’, in Stausberg, M. & Engler, S., 2011. *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, London [etc.]: Routledge. Pp. 276-277.

²⁰⁹ Fishbane, M., 1985. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, Oxford [etc.]: Clarendon.

²¹⁰ Davidsen, O., ‘Is there a Monkey in this Class’, in *Semeia. An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism*, Nr. 71, 1995, P. 134.

not necessarily imply the birth of a bastard, but the birth of a bastard presupposes illegitimate sex.”²¹¹

This study attempts to present an alternative interpretation of the Bible and the Quran, stressing what Paul Ricoeur points out: “the interpreters have usually been obedient and respectful towards religious text and particularly to religious interpreters. According to the hermeneutics of acceptance text should be read in an empathic way with an eye to their intentions. This could however lead to reproduce the views of an elite group. Ricoeur points at the *hermeneutics of suspicion* which stresses the hidden meanings and critiques of ideology.” Using such a method offers new insight to the text by avoiding an approach to the text through the prevalent prejudice of the normative interpretations.

5.2. Spiritual Death and Biological Death

The first step to analyzing life after death in the Bible and in the Quran is to consider the gate to the afterlife: death. There are often confusion between a biological death and spiritual death in the literature that discusses the issue of the afterlife. Alan Segal’s analysis often demonstrates such a merge. For example, he sets forth Psalm 115:17 “The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence” as an evidence of the virtual nonexistence of the dead.²¹² However, it could be imagined that many who are not dead also do not praise the Lord. Therefore, such ‘dead’ is more likely to be a metaphor for the spiritually dead and could be read as ‘those who are spiritually dead do not praise the Lord’.

Also in his analysis of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Segal underlines the irony that despite the forecast of God in terms of dying as the result of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17), Adam and Eve did not die. In contrast, the snake’s statement appeared to be true (Gen. 3:5).²¹³ Likewise, Segal considers the tree of life as the tree of biological immortality, stating: “If the Lord God means that one bite of this fruit will make one immortal, then the real stupidity in the story is that Adam and Eve did not eat from it before God prevents them at the end of the story.”²¹⁴

²¹¹ Ibid. P. 139.

²¹² Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P 137.

²¹³ Ibid. P 163.

²¹⁴ Ibid. P. 166.

These scholars ignore the spiritual context of the Scripture and forget that the Bible is neither a medical book, nor a book of history or science, but a religious book for spiritual matters. In order to find the alternative meaning of 'death' in terms of the spiritual aspects of life, one must consider another indication to such a death in Genesis. This comes in the story of Abimelech (Gen. 20:3), when God reveals to him in his dream that he is dead because he took Sarah, the wife of Abraham. In this context, it is clear that he was not biologically dead, but committed an act that damaged his spiritual vitality. More examples are found in Leviticus 10:9, and 22:9; Deut. 30:15-18; and in Deuteronomy 8:3 "...that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

Moreover, it should be noted that in the context of the finite reincarnations, there is a 'temporary death' after which the soul comes back to body by a new birth, and there is a 'final death' after which the soul does not come back to the body. This point is crucial to determine which afterlife is discussed in some passages of the Bible and the Quran. For instance, in the well-known passage of Luke 20:27-37 Jesus answers the Sadducees:

34 ...The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage. 35 But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage 36 Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.

The interpretation of this text in terms of reincarnation is in fact twofold. On the one hand, it points to the life after the final death, in which the soul does not come back to another body, and eventually does not enter into a sexual relationship, whence 'they cannot die any more'. On the other hand, it refers to the so-called fall of Adam and Eve. According to the interpretation that massively developed in later church tradition, death is a punishment due to the sin of sexuality.²¹⁵ From this perspective, what set out the man out of the Garden of Eden was the intercourse between Adam and Eve. According to such an interpretation, performing sexual acts is equivalent to (spiritual) death, hence God warned that they will die, if they eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The following aspects of the narrative substantiate such an outlook:

- 1) Despite the fact that they did eat from the tree, they did not die, thus the death forecasted by God referred to spiritual death, not biological death.
- 2) After eating, their eyes were opened to their nakedness and they tried to cover it (Gen. 3:7), whereas, before they were not ashamed of their nakedness. (Gen. 2:25).
- 3) Later on, the narrative associates 'knowing' with 'conception' of Eve: Gen 4:1 "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived."
- 4) The snake could be considered as a phallic symbol, and fatal.

²¹⁵ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 540.

It should be added that in a reincarnationist paradigm, if humans do not regenerate more humans through sexual acts, then they cannot come back through reincarnation into any posterity. Accordingly, Jesus points out that those who deserve the salvation from rebirth, will not give birth by involving in a marriage.

Similarly, when the Quran states that: ‘Q. 3:169 Think not of those, who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provision.’ it has a double meaning. On the one hand, it suggests that those martyrs are not spiritually dead. On the other hand, it denies that biological death is an annihilation of the soul and the end of life. A good example of spiritual death in the Quran is in Q. 27:80 “Truly thou canst not cause the dead to listen, nor canst thou cause the deaf to hear the call, (especially) when they turn back in retreat.”

5.3. Temporary Death and Sleep

It has been already pointed out that from the perspective of reincarnation, there is final death, and temporary death. One of the metaphors which indicates the temporary death in the Bible and Quran is sleeping, or lying down in dust.²¹⁶

Deuteronomy 31:16 And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers;

Psalms 13:3 Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;

Daniel 12:2 Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

Matthew 9:24 He said, "Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep."²¹⁷

Quran 39:42 It is Allah that takes the souls (of men) at death; and those that die not (He takes) during their sleep: those on whom He has passed the decree of death, He keeps back (from returning to life), but the rest He sends (to their bodies) for a term appointed verily in this are Signs for those who reflect.

Many scholars claim that early Bible traditions seem uninterested in the notion of an afterlife. As Segal puts it: “Practically every scholar who systematically surveys the oldest section of the

²¹⁶ Tromp, N.J. & Pontificio Istituto biblico, 1969. *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament*, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute. P. 183.

²¹⁷ For more examples see <https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/topics/Sleep,-And-Death>

Biblical text is impressed with the lack of a beatific notion of the hereafter for anyone.”²¹⁸ In addition, many scholars point at the book of Job as evidence. Tromp maintains: “The idea of resurrection is denied not less than three times in Job.”²¹⁹ He exactly points at the verse in which metaphor of sleep is used.

Job 14:12 So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.

Segal correctly contends that human beings can justifiably sue God, only if there is not a notion of life after death. However, he concludes incorrectly that no postmortem reward or punishment is present in the book of Job.²²⁰ These scholars read the text partially and only through the eyes of Job in the beginning of narrative. They totally ignore that, at the end of story, Job confesses:

Job 42:2 I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. 3 Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

In other words, the text itself invalidates any earlier statements of Job and indicates that one should not consider hardship in life just as punishment, without a higher purpose.

Those who believe in resurrection may argue that such a metaphor stands for ‘resurrection’, which is a valid hermeneutical possibility. However, it should be noted that because most of the people experience multiple sleeping and awakening, the indication of multiple rebirths is more likely and reasonable. The aforementioned verse of the Quran is very revealing when one just substitutes ‘sleep’ with ‘temporary death’ in line with the temporary and final death: “It is Allah that takes the souls at *death* and those that dies not during their sleep (*temporary death*): those on whom He has passed the decree of the (*final*) death, He keeps back, but the rest He sends for a term appointed.” Another verse also supports such notions:

Q. 6:60 It is He who doth take your souls by night, and hath knowledge of all that ye have done by day: by day doth He raise you up again; that a term appointed be fulfilled; In the end unto Him will be your return; then will He show you the truth of all that ye did.

If the portrait of death in the Hebrew Bible was indeed a virtual nonexistence as some scholars have claimed, the phrase “being gathered to one’s ancestor” (Gen. 49:33; 50:1-13) would be a riddle, as Segal confesses: “We cannot entirely tell what the Bible means when it says that a

²¹⁸ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P 121.

²¹⁹ Tromp, N.J. & Pontificio Istituto biblico, 1969. *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament*, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute. P. 184.

²²⁰ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P 147.

person was gathered to his ancestors”.²²¹ However, as Segal himself ascertains, according to the Bible (I Sam. 28) the dead can be recalled.²²² In Deuteronomy 32:39 one can read: “There is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive”, and in I Samuel 2:6 “The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up”. Hence one can make the conclusion that, even in the first books of the Bible, death is not a total annihilation and life after death is attested. At the end, it should be noted that on two different occasions the Quran explicitly reveals that there is more than one life and more than one death.

Q. 2:28 How can you disbelieve in God, seeing that you were dead and he gave you life; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life; then unto Him shall you be returned.

Q. 40:11 They will say, “Our Lord, Thou hast caused us to die twice over, and given us life twice over; so we admit our sins. Is there any way out?”

It is remarkable that both verses indicate more than two lives, because the order runs as death, life, death, life, which simply indicates another life before the first death. It alludes thus readily to three lives and two deaths, and this is a great problem for traditional view of one life, one death, one resurrection as the second life. Here again the orthodoxy must appeal to eisegesis for such a theological predicament. Therefore they construe either a resurrection in the grave, before the final resurrection,²²³ or consider the first death as the non-existent (lifeless) state before creation, and even a possibility for a spiritual death has been considered.²²⁴ However, none of these solutions will fit into two verses in combination, because if the first death refers to ‘that which is not living and has never lived’, then the second death should also mean the same, but the second death according to tradition means ‘that which was once alive but is now dead’. Comparing the two verses demonstrates that the first death is as the second death and therefore one could not indicate to a non-existence or spiritual death when the other indicates the death of that which existed.

It should be noted that in order to deny such literary evidence for more than two lives and one death, traditional exegetes must also ignore other evidence that the Quran presents for the people who underwent an additional death and were granted an additional life. Only in the second Sūra (chapter), four cases are reported: in Q. 2:56, 73, 243, 259, but tradition considers them as the exceptions and miracles.

In the end, one might consider the relevant passage in Psalm which indicates a recreation:

²²¹ Ibid. P. 140.

²²² Ibid. Pp. 124-126.

²²³ Nasr, S. H., 2015. *The Study Quran*, Broadway: Harper Collins. Pp. 20, 1140-1.

²²⁴ Khalil, M. H., ‘Which Road to Paradise? The Controversy of Reincarnation in Islamic Thought’, in Günther, S., Lawson, T., Mauder, C., 2016, *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, Leiden: Brill. P. 744.

Pslam 104:29 Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. 30 Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.

5.4. Paradise and Hell

As it has been already pointed out, the current perception of Paradise and Hell is absent in the Old Testament. The notions of a beatific afterlife or punishment in Hell were developed later under Persian and Greek influence and entered into Christianity and consequently into Islam. The word Paradise is the Persian '*paradis*' which signifies a garden. In this sense it is found a few times in the Old Testament and is used to refer to the Garden of Eden in Gen. 2:8 in the LXX translation. However, nowhere in the Old Testament does it denote the future resting-place of the righteous; this development has taken place in the apocalyptic writings.²²⁵ Needless to say, that the first biblical conception of paradise as a garden refers to the primordial place of Adam and Eve, the original Garden of Eden. It consequently signifies a humanly sinless status and obedience to God. That this paradise is situated at this world, not only is obvious in the story of the Garden of Eden which locates it on Earth, but also in the reference of Jesus in Luke 23:43 "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise". This implies that Paradise refers to a spiritual state that could be even here and now. Also in the Quran one can find such a reference to entering Paradise in this life as a result of obedience to God:

Q. 36:25 For me, I have faith in the Lord of you: listen, then, to me! 26 It was said: Enter thou the Garden. He said: Ah me! Would that my People knew 27 For that my Lord has granted me Forgiveness and has enrolled me among those held in honor!

The graphic descriptions of Paradise in the Quran have stimulated most of the Muslim theologians to assume a corporeal resurrection. However, as has been already pointed out there is no consensus on how this would happen. Therefore, it can be assumed it will happen through a rebirth, and, in fact, reincarnation could be considered a possible form of resurrection. In other words, resurrection itself could be considered a metaphor for reincarnation. In support of this argument, the following examples indicate that Hell and Paradise are not in another world, but rather on this one. For instance, the next verse is explicit in terms of the similarity of the reward in Paradise to this world.

Q. 2:25 But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Gardens, beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: "Why, this is what we were fed with before," for they are given things in similitude, ...

²²⁵ Russell, D.S., 1964. *The Method & Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, 200 BC - AD 100, London: SCM Press. P. 366.

In the following verse, the Garden (Paradise) is literally associated with and placed on Earth:

Q. 39:74 They will say: Praise be to Allah, Who has truly fulfilled His Promise to us, and has given us the land in heritage: We can dwell in the Garden where we will: how excellent a reward for those who work (righteousness)!

In terms of Hell, the first reference to the idea of Hell, is in the apocalyptic writings, in I Enoch 22.13 is a reference to the sinners who have already received punishment in this present life. However, no specific term is used for Hell.²²⁶ I Enoch 27.1 tells of sinners who will be raised for further punishment in the ‘accursed valley’, presumably the Valley of Hinnom, or *Ge Hinnom* in Hebrew, from which the term *Gehenna* is derived. In the Old Testament it refers to a valley west of Jerusalem notorious for its idolatrous worship and offering of child sacrifices (cf. II Kings 16:3, II Chron. 28:3). Later on it signified the place of punishment for apostate Jews where “the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched” (Isa. 66:24, cf. Jer. 7:32; Dan. 12:2).²²⁷

The indiscriminate translations of three different words *Sheol*, *Hades*, and *Gehenna* as Hell in many translations such as the King James Version has exacerbated the confusion of readers regarding this notion. In fact both *Sheol* and *Hades* are not exclusively used for the place of the punishment of unjust or wicked people, but they signify the place of all dead. However, *Gehenna*, as it appears in Mat. 5:22 “whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire”, exclusively associates Hell with punishment by fire. Several other passages in the New Testament demonstrate such a relation, as in Mt. 5:29-30; Mt 10:28; Luke 12:5. A combination of these passages with those in which an everlasting punishment for the wicked has been proclaimed (Mt. 3:12; 25:41,46), stimulates many to think of a place after death in which punishment with fire is everlasting. However, a hermeneutic, holistic reading would help determine the fire and Hell according to its symbolic background. In order to illustrate the symbolic meaning and function of fire, it is necessary to refer to a few examples:

Deuteronomy 32:22 For a fire is kindled in My anger, And burns to the lowest part of Sheol, And consumes the earth with its yield, And sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. (NSAB)

Isaiah 9:19 Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire.²²⁸

Ezekiel 15:7 And I will set my face against them; they shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them;

²²⁶ Ibid. P. 365.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Also IS. 33:14.

It is readily perceivable that 'fire' is merely a metaphor for the anger of God, His disfavor, and for the destruction and torment as the punishment. Thus it should not be interpreted literally. Segal supports this point of view: "Changes in the concept of the afterlife over time argue against taking it literally. But reversals in the idea and existence of afterlife raise skeptical thoughts against the whole enterprise of describing heaven and hell as literal places where we literally go."²²⁹ Also in the Quran, fire is used in a similar symbolic sense and the text even states that people, themselves, are fuel for the fire, indicating that Hell is in this life and in this world. The next three verses in combination vividly illustrate that the fire of Hell is in this world:

Q. 3:10 Those who reject Faith,- neither their possessions nor their progeny will avail them aught against Allah: They are themselves but fuel for *the Fire*.

Q. 9:55 Let not their wealth nor their sons dazzle thee: in reality Allah's plan is to punish them with these things *in this life*,

Q. 66:6 O ye who believe! Save yourselves and your families from *a Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones*, ...

Contrary to the traditional Islamic view that Hell is an eschatological punishment, only at the end of time, there are multiple verses which indicate that some of the unbelievers have been already sent to the fire. For instance, in the case of the people of Noah:

Q. 71:25 Because of their sins they were drowned (in the flood), and were made to enter the Fire (of Punishment): and they found- in lieu of Allah- none to help them.

Q. 4:145 Lo! The hypocrites are in the lowest deep of the Fire, and thou wilt find no helper for them;

Q. 17:8 ... And we have made Hell a prison for the disbelievers.

Q. 98:6 The disbelievers among the People of the Book and among the idolaters are in the Fire of Hell, abiding therein;

Q. 45:34 It will also be said: "This Day We will forget you as ye forgot the meeting of this Day of yours! And your abode is *the Fire*, and no helpers have ye! 35 This, because ye used to take the Signs of Allah in jest, and the life of *the world* deceived you:" that Day, therefore, they shall not be taken out therefrom, nor shall they be received into Grace.

The last example literally indicates that the fire is in this world and the sinners want to get out of life in this world, but they cannot. Logically one may raise the question in terms of the duration of

²²⁹ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 170.

Hell and Paradise, since the Quran explicitly stresses the eternity of Hell and Paradise, and the Bible references the eternity of Hell:

Isaiah 66:24 And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

Q. 43:74 Lo! the guilty are immortal in hell's torment. (Pickthal)

Matthew 25:41 Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

This is of course, a great problem for the justice of God, as has been pointed out by many scholars, how a finite crime, could deserve infinite punishment.²³⁰ Again, a hermeneutical reading of the text which does not read verses in isolation, solves the problem. It should be noted that, from the perspective of reincarnation, this world is both Hell and Paradise, and reincarnation should not be regarded as only a punishment, but at the same time it as another chance for spiritual growth and achieving salvation. By the way of analogy, it is like systematic education in school. One cannot regret going back to school, unless it keeps failing.

Obviously, in the first view, the Quran depicts Hell as permanent, but a thorough investigation demonstrates that permanency of Hell is contingent to the permanency of disobedient. Just like in a school where no one can automatically graduate; as long as one keeps failing, one stays permanently in the same grade. This view could be justified when one considers that a couple of verses in the Quran indicate that, in fact, everybody enters Hell. However, those who are righteous will be saved and exit it.

Q. 11:119 ... I shall surely fill Hell with jinns and men all together.

Q. 19:71 And there is not one of you, but that he will approach it. It is, with thy Lord, a decree determined. 72 Then we shall save those who are reverent and leave the wrongdoers therein, on their knees.²³¹

By conceiving of Hell as just a figurative allusion to the hardship and torments of life in this world, the eternity of Hell in the Quran must be perceived of as a multiplex existence which will continue until one reach the required condition to leave this earthy life. From this perspective, the following verses vividly indicate multiple rebirths.

Q. 4:56 Those who reject our Signs, We shall soon cast into the Fire: as often as their skins are roasted through, *We shall change them for fresh skins*, that they may taste the penalty;

²³⁰ Abrahamov, B., 2002. The Creation and Duration of Paradise and Hell in Islamic Theology. *Islam-Zeitschrift Fur Geschichte Und Kultur Des Islamischen Orients*, 79(1), p. 93.

²³¹ Also in Q. 3:87-88.

Q. 32:20 And as for those who do evil, their retreat is the Fire. Whenever they desire to issue forth from thence, *they are brought back thither*. Unto them it is said: Taste the torment of the Fire which ye used to deny. (Pickthal)

In the end according to both the Bible and the Quran the place of reward and punishment is in this world (Lev. 26:1-26; Is. 24:21, Pro. 11:31 “Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the Earth: much more the wicked and the sinner”). Of course, the Orthodox view can consider such as in the same life one has, but then it would be difficult to explain many cases of the apparent injustice in this world.

5.5. Resurrection

Since both the Bible and the Quran explicitly contain references to resurrection, it is indispensable to clarify how resurrection is depicted, and how it is congruent with reincarnation. This study suggest that resurrection is just a metaphor in the Bible and in the Quran, used to create effective images of reward and punishment, according to common language and imagination of people. The idea of a metaphoric resurrection is not new and goes back to early Christianity and even the New Testament itself. From that perspective, resurrection could denote the new life, which believers have in the present, in baptism and holiness. In addition, Gnostics used resurrection language to denote a new spiritual experience in the present which leads to a final blessed disembodiment in the future.²³² Celsus, a pagan critique of Christianity (of whom Origen refers to in his major polemical work: *De Principiis*) suggested in his treatise: *On the True Doctrine*, that the Christian doctrine of resurrection is a misunderstanding of Plato’s theory of transmigration.²³³

Segal himself admits that when Josephus said “The soul of the good alone passes into another body”, he meant that the earthly body is corruptible, and the Pharisees believed that the righteous persons would receive a new incorruptible body. This does not mean, Segal argues, that Josephus attributed to Pharisees the Platonic notion of reincarnation, though he certainly used that language.²³⁴ By the same token, it could be argued that the Bible and Quran have adopted the language and worldview of their contemporary audience. For instance, in the Bible and Quran the word ‘heart’ is used as a metaphor for the mind and the intellectual center of the body. (Deut. 30:6 “Love the Lord thy God with all thine heart”) However, no one would argue in modern age that according to the Scripture human’s heart is the organ of thinking or feeling.

²³² Wright, N.T., 2003. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, London: SPCK. P. 527.

²³³ Ibid. P. 526.

²³⁴ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P 381.

The first simple hint at reincarnation is that resurrection is depicted – particularly in the Quran-corporeal. This in fact supports that idea that the next life is in a physical body, in accordance with reincarnation. Again, in order to find out how resurrection as a metaphor indicates reincarnation, the relevant verses should be analyzed. For instance, one of the symbols which is usually used for the resurrection in the Quran is the analogy of the growing of plants and revivification of land.

Q. 7:57 It is He Who sendeth the winds like heralds of glad tidings, going before His mercy: when they have carried the heavy-laden clouds, We drive them to a land that is dead, make rain to descend thereon, and produce every kind of harvest therewith: thus shall We raise up the dead: perchance ye may remember.

Q. 71:17 And Allah hath caused you to grow as a growth from the earth, And afterward He maketh you return thereto, and He will bring you forth again, a (new) forthbringing. (Pickthal)

In his study of the controversy of reincarnation in Islam, Khalil challenges the argument of reincarnationists that such verses make up evidence for cyclical reincarnation because the verb '*kharaja*' in other passages (Q. 20:55) generally means 'resurrection', rather than reincarnation.²³⁵ This is a typical proposal which demonstrates how reading the text from one point of view filters the possibilities of alternative interpretations. Indeed, traditionally 'resurrection' is strictly different from 'reincarnation' because resurrection happens only once at the end of time and (perhaps) in the previous body, with the person having the same identity. In contrast, from the reincarnation point of view, each reincarnation could be conceived as a resurrection, and there is no discrepancy between them. Through scrutinizing the text from this perspective, one can find plausible arguments in support of the reincarnation perspective. To start with the verse that Khalil has mentioned:

Q. 20:55 From it (the earth) did We create you, and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again.

One can logically inquire how humankind has come out of the earth the first time, then one realizes that the answer would clarify the second coming as well. Human has come out of this earth by a birth, and will come out of it again by a birth. Khalil is right to include that '*khurūj*' denotes a resurrection, but he is wrong in assuming that resurrection cannot occur through reincarnation. The next example is revealing because not only it uses the same verb '*khurūj*', but also it juxtaposes it with the turning of day and night, which alludes to a cyclical phenomenon.

Q., 3:27 Thou causest the night to pass into the day, and Thou causest the day to pass into the night. And Thou bringest forth the living from the dead, and Thou bringest forth the dead from the living. And Thou givest sustenance to whom Thou chooseth, without stint. (Pickthal)

²³⁵ Khalil, M. H., 'Which Road to Paradise? The Controversy of Reincarnation in Islamic Thought', in Günther, S., Lawson, T., Mauder, C., 2016, *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, Leiden: Brill. P. 746.

Another expression which gives a hint at reincarnation in line with the aforementioned argument is ‘*khalqan jadīdan*’ (a new creation) which occurs in various passages Q. 13:5; 14:19; 17:49; 35:16. When the Quran responds to the people who doubt or deny the next life, it refers to this term. When they ask how this will happen, the text stresses that it shall happen as it has happened the previous time, thus again alluding that, just as the first time people have come to this world through a natural birth, the next creation will be through a natural rebirth.

Q. 50:15 Were We then weary with the first Creation, that they should be in confused doubt about a new Creation?

Q. 56:60 We have decreed Death to be your common lot, and We are not to be frustrated, 61 from changing your Forms and creating you (again) in (forms) that ye know not. 62 And ye certainly know already the first form of creation: why then do you not reflect.

Another verse precisely points out that the creation of man is giving him ‘another’ creation:

Q. 23:12 Verily We created man from a product of wet earth 13 Then placed him as a drop in a safe lodging 14 Then We made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a (foetus) lump; then we made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then we developed out of it *another creature*.

Likewise another verse of the Quran responding to doubt about the resurrection stresses the creation itself, which implies that resurrection will be a new creation. Significantly, the passage even implies how man forgets his previous life with each new creation:

Q. 22: O mankind! if ye are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, then lo! We have created you from dust, then from a drop of seed, then from a clot, then from a little lump of flesh shapely and shapeless, that We may make (it) clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then that ye attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dieth, and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life, so that, after knowledge, he knoweth naught.

Chapter 84 of the Quran, precisely states that the unbeliever thinks he will never return. According to the Orthodox view of course ‘return’ denotes a return to God through resurrection,. However, the following verses allude that it will be not a single return, but multiple returns:

Q. 84:14 He verily deemed that he would never return. 15 Nay, but lo! his Lord is ever looking on him! 16 Oh, I swear by the afterglow of sunset, 17 And by the night and all that it enshroudeth, 18 And by the moon when she is at the full, 19 That ye shall journey on from plane to plane. (Pickthal)

The last verse, that is very revealing, is the verse in which, for resurrection, the word *ḥayāt* (life) is used. This verse denotes that the good deeds of this life will affect ‘the next life’, thus it is again a new life:

Q. 89:24 He will say: Ah, would that I had sent before me (some provision) for my life! (Pickthal)

5.6. End of Time

So far, how and where resurrection happens in a reincarnationist paradigm has been clarified. Yet from the Orthodox point view there is a harsh discrepancy between resurrection and reincarnation in terms of the timing. According to the Bible and the Quran, resurrection is at the end of time, and this concept is essential in the eschatological discourse. In Abrahamic religions, the end of time has a close relationship with the messianic advent, and Jews, Christian, and Muslims expect the advent of a messiah before the end of time. This study argues that the end of time is not the end of the world, or a universal destruction, but again only refers to the end of the biblical narrative.

It is perceivable that the prophecies in the narrative extend to the end of the narrative, consequently the end of the narrative has been perceived of as the end of the real world. That is why, for example, the return of Jesus in Christianity should be at the end of the world; likewise the advent of Mahdi of Muslims is again at the end of the world. This in turn has instigated a misunderstanding by the Orthodoxy that all people will be resurrected at the end of time. This is supposedly supported by a literal interpretation of passages such as Ezekiel 37:12-13; Daniel 12:2; John 5:28 “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation”.

However, a holistic hermeneutical approach reveals that those passages should not be taken literally as a reference to rising from biological death. A good example is Luke 2:34 “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel”. Such a rise alludes to the spiritual rise of Israel from ignorance at the second coming of Jesus. The following conversation illustrates best both aspects of resurrection:

John 11:23 Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. 24 Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. 25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: 26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

On the one hand it attests that resurrection is not on the last day, but now, on the other hand, it points to the symbolic aspect of rising from a spiritual death.

The Quran and the canonic Gospels both exhibit similar features for the end of time: it is soon, it is sudden, but the time of its occurrence is a secret. For instance:

Matthew 24:36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Q. 7:187 They ask thee about the (final) Hour - when will be its appointed time? Say: "The knowledge thereof is with my Lord (alone): None but He can reveal as to when it will occur. Heavy were its burden through the heavens and the earth. Only, all of a sudden will it come to

you." They ask thee as if thou wert eager in search thereof: Say: "The knowledge thereof is with Allah (alone), but most men know not.

In his analysis of the controversy of reincarnation in Islam, Khalil raises the question: "The great hurdle of Islamic reincarnationism is addressing why the Quran would be evasively ambiguous about such a major feature of our existence."²³⁶ It should be first stressed that the Bible and Quran are generally ambiguous on many issues. That is why for example one can read in Proverb 25:2 "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings is to search out a matter." However, Khalil further states " It is one thing to conceal, quite another to sidetrack."²³⁷ Again, the Quran provides the answer: Q. 20:15 "Verily the Hour is coming - My design is to keep it hidden - for every soul to receive its reward by the measure of its Endeavour."

In the following verse the Quran precisely states that the whole creation of death and life is to test people: Q. 67:2 "He Who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed" and it emphasize in another verse that the life and death of the wicked and the righteous will not be the same: Q. 45:21 "What! Do those who seek after evil ways think that We shall hold them equal with those who believe and do righteous deeds,- that equal will be their *life* and their death? Ill is the judgment that they make. 22 Allah created the heavens and the earth for just ends, and in order that each soul may find the recompense of what it has earned, and none of them be wronged."

In addition to the perspective just outlined, it should be again stressed that the common feature of the end of time in the Scripture is that it is near, and that's why one of the attributes of Allah in the Quran is that He is quick in His judgment and recompense (*sari' al-hisāb*). Taking all these features into account, then it is reasonable to assume resurrection of each person is hidden of course, since no one knows when he will return. Yet resurrection is a continuous collective phenomenon in this world, and therefore it is soon. It is notorious that each lifetime in the Quran is expressed as a 'day', and resurrection is also always expressed as 'the day of resurrection', then in another verse of the Quran vividly states that it is a day in which child's hair turns gray, implying the lifetime in which a child grow old: Q. 73:18 "Then how shall ye, if ye deny, guard yourselves against a Day that will make children hoary-headed."

²³⁶ Khalil, M. H., 'Which Road to Paradise? The Controversy of Reincarnation in Islamic Thought', in Günther, S., Lawson, T., Mauder, C., 2016, *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, Leiden: Brill. P. 750.

²³⁷ Ibid.

6. Reincarnation of the Messiah

6.1. Historical Background

The notion of the reincarnation of the Messiah is parallel to the general notion of reincarnation in Abrahamic religions. An overview of the literature about reincarnation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam demonstrates traces of such an idea among multiple reincarnationist individuals and groups. It is somehow indispensable to any study of reincarnation in Abrahamic religions to discuss the topic, therefore a brief introduction to this notion will be presented in this section. Afterwards a brief analysis of the Bible and the Quran will be conducted in order to examine the possible indications to the reincarnation of the Messiah.

It is remarkable that no one who has ever claimed to be a return of Jesus, or Mahdi has ever fallen from the sky and, evidently, all of them have been born naturally. A recent article in National Geographic by Jonas Bendiksen, reports on five men who say they're the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.²³⁸ It is perceivable that none of them has fallen from the air and therefore if someone wants to accept such a claim, primarily he must believe in reincarnation. That is why it is reasonable to consider reincarnation of the Messiah as a primary issue in the eschatological discourse in Abrahamic religions. The following examples present a historical background of such notion.

According to Bill Missett, Talmud states that the soul of Abel passed into the body of Seth, and then into Moses.²³⁹ He also quotes Zohar which states

“The soul of Adam, because he had sinned, had to begin a period of migration through other bodies and thus passed through David, who, by the sin which he had committed with the wife of Uriah, impeded the complete purification of Adam's soul. But by its final entry to the last descendant, the Messiah would also bring about the desired result meant by the divine plan when Adam, the first Man was created.”²⁴⁰

Moses Gaster, asserts that there cannot be any doubt that these views are extremely old. “Simon Magus raises the claim of former existences, ...The Samaritan doctrine of the *taheb* teaches the same doctrine of pre-existing soul, which was given to Adam, but which, through successive

²³⁸ <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/08/new-messiahs-jesus-christ-second-coming-photos/> (Retrieved on 08-04-2017)

²³⁹ Missett, B., 2006. *Awakening The Soul: The Trilogy*, Bloomington: Author House. P. 98.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

‘incarnations’ in Seth, Noah, and Abraham reached Moses.”²⁴¹ Also a Christian source reports that one of the Elcasaites, Alcibiades, taught that Christ had experienced many rebirths.²⁴²

Ebion, the alleged founder of the Judeo-Christian sect, (Apparently not a historical person – but an invention on the basis of the “Ebionites”), held that Christ was Adam, who used to come down sometimes, and appear to patriarchs.²⁴³ Gershom Scholem, points out that Kabbalists alongside the tendency to see metempsychosis as a solution for theodicy, endeavored to use it as a key to the understanding of sacred history and the hidden dynamics within scripture. Hence they started to find connections between biblical figures, and they found chains of persons who were regarded as linked by the secret process of *gigul*.²⁴⁴ Scholem adds that the doctrine of the true prophet, which is a reminiscent of the Jewish-Christian Ebionite sect, has played an important role in the formation of the Kabbalistic theory regarding the messiah who supposedly reappears throughout the present aeon in various figures from Adam to Christ. Scholem further points out that R. Moses de Leon was the first among Kabbalistic circles who claimed a connection between the souls of Adam, David, and the Messiah. The consonants in Adam’s name are read as an acronym for the names of the three bearers of this one soul: Adam, David, Mashiah.²⁴⁵ Such notion has permeated to the New Age literature, according to Cayce, Christ’s soul had already been incarnated repeatedly in the past: as Adam, Enoch, Melchizedek, Joseph, Joshua, Jeshua.²⁴⁶

Ideas of this kind have been developed in Muslim thought, particularly among extremist Shī‘ites. Patricia Crone, for instance, attests to the belief in reincarnation among Khurammīs and Rāwandīyya who believed they existed in the past. She also mentions the mid-Umayyad poet Kuthayyir ‘Azza who believed in reincarnation and himself to be Jonah. Crone further suggests that al-Mukhtār also believed that Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya was in some sense Muḥammad, who was Moses, and he himself was in some sense Aaron.²⁴⁷ Ismā‘īlī and Druze doctrine of reincarnation considered that God reincarnated himself in Fāṭimid Caliphs starting with al-Qā’im

²⁴¹ Gaster, M., ‘Transmigration’ in Hastings et al., 1908. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Edinburgh [etc.]: Clark [etc.]. P.437.

²⁴² Jones, L. & Eliade, M., 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd [rev.] ed. / Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., Detroit, Mich., [etc]: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson/Gale. P. 9329.

²⁴³ Andrae, T. & Menzel, T., 1960. *Mohammed : The Man and His Faith*, New York: Harper. P. 100.

²⁴⁴ Scholem et al., 1991. *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead : basic concepts in the Kabbalah*, New York: Schocken Books. P. 213.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. P. 214.

²⁴⁶ Read, A., 1970. *Edgar Cayce On Jesus and his Church*, New York: Warner Books. P. 13. In Hanegraaff, W.J., 1996. *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the mirror of secular thought*, Leiden: BRILL. Pp. 316-7.

²⁴⁷ Crone, P., 2012. *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran : Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 250.

through to al-Hākīm.²⁴⁸ Heinz Halm reports many cases of pretenders among *Ghulāt* who claimed to be the reincarnation of the Twelfth Imam.²⁴⁹ Muhammad ibn Falāh (d. 1461 CE), founder of the Musha‘sha‘ sects in fifteenth century, revealed the identity of all the prophets, Imams and holy men and presented himself as the last in the series of their reincarnations.²⁵⁰ The Nizārī-Isma‘īlī, Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn (15th century) portrayed the Imams in his main work, the *Das Avatar*, as reincarnation of the god Vishnu.²⁵¹ Also according to the Ḥurūfī theory of creation, Adam is the only being who is able to establish the connection between the form of any Letter and the element of the divine reality which constitutes its meaning. This knowledge is transmitted only in the line of the prophets and Adam is himself the Savior of the End of Time.²⁵²

6.2. Reincarnation of the Messiah in the Bible

All these examples point to the saying that ‘where there's smoke, there's fire’. Indeed, the Bible and the Quran give both direct and indirect hints to the notion of a messiah who comes back. To begin with the Old Testament, Deut. 31:16 could be read alternatively as: “And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold thou shalt sleep with thy fathers and rise up (again), instead of common reading that associates ‘rise up’ with the next word, ‘people’. The issue is therefore how one applies the punctuation.²⁵³ Even if this indication is not conclusive, because it is contingent on punctuation, there are other literary references to the return of David that are more convincing. For instance, two times in the prophecies of Ezekiel it has been predicted that David will be again the King and the leader of Israel in the eschatological sense:

Ezekiel 34:23 And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. 24 And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant *David* a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it.

²⁴⁸ Halm, H., *Shi'ism* (2ed ed.), translated by Watson, J. and Hill, M., New York: Colombia University Press. P. 179.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. P. 73.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. P. 75.

²⁵¹ Ibid. P. 186.

²⁵² Mir-Kasimov, O., 2008. The Ḥurūfī Moses: An Example of Late Medieval Heterodox Interpretation of the Qur'an and Bible. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 10(1), Pp.24-5.

²⁵³ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. Pp. 615-6.

Ezekiel 37:24 And *David* my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd.

Such a prophecy can be found in the book of Jeremiah as well:

Jeremiah 30:8 For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: 9 But they shall serve the Lord their God, and *David* their king, whom I will raise up unto them.

Most of the traditional exegetes maintain that these verses do not refer to David, but someone who comes in his power and spirit; they either ignore ‘David’ and render ‘a King’, or they add in parenthesis ‘a descendant of’ to explain away this literary reference to the rise of David in future.²⁵⁴ Again when Hosea 3:5 repeats this prophecy, ‘The Oxford Bible Commentary’ states that this is probably a Judean redactional addition, since the northern Hosea is unlikely to have supported the Davidic monarchy.²⁵⁵ These few examples are sufficient to demonstrate that the charge of eisegesis against reincarnationist interpretation is at least valid also for the Orthodox exegesis.

The same hurdle applies to the well-known prophecy of Malachi 4:5 “Behold, I will send you *Elijah* the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” This oracle plays a major role in the disputes on reincarnation, since it is narrated in all of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 11:14, 16:14, 17:10-13; Mark 8:28, 9:11-13; Luke 1:16-17, 9:8, 19). In much New Age literature these verses have been associated with John the Baptist as the reincarnation of Elijah. The critics point out first of all Elijah did not die to have a rebirth, and secondly John the Baptist denied being Elijah (John 1:21). They contend that John was not Elijah himself, but he came in the spirit of Elijah based on Luke 1:17 “And he (John) shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias”.²⁵⁶ However, the proponents of reincarnation respond that the denial by John was because Jews expected the return of Elijah himself, but John refused to be Elijah himself, rather a reincarnation of him. Thus he was the same soul, but in a new body with a new identity.²⁵⁷

Both interpretations seem to be weak and contentious since they try to explain the text away through ignoring one part while emphasizing another part. Therefore, this study rejects both suggestions and proposes an alternative interpretation based on holistic hermeneutical considerations. The first issue to consider is the claim that Jesus said John is Elijah. In fact, this is

²⁵⁴ Barton, J. & Muddiman, J., 2001. *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford [etc.]: Oxford University Press. P. 557; MacKane, W., 1986. *A critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, Edinburgh: Clark. P. 761; Cooke, G.A., 1936. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, Edinburgh: Clark. P. 378.

²⁵⁵ Barton, J. & Muddiman, J., 2001. *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford [etc.]: Oxford University Press. P. 574.

²⁵⁶ Grayson, B., 1989. *Is Reincarnation Compatible with Christianity? A Historical, Biblical, and Theological Evaluation*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. Pp. 175-91.

²⁵⁷ Smith, E. R., 2003. *The Soul's Long Journey*, Great Barrington: Steiner Books, Pp. 222-6.

a conclusion which has been put in the mouth of Jesus. Nowhere in the Synoptic Gospels has Jesus said that John is Elijah, but because he talked of them consecutively this conclusion has been drawn. For example, in Matthew 17:13, the disciples thought Jesus implied to John. However, this is not what Jesus said. In other words, John was neither a reincarnation of Elijah, nor was he functionally similar to Elijah to fulfill the prophecy of Malachi. On the one hand Jesus literally said Elijah has already come (Mat. 17:12); he did not say someone has come in the spirit of Elijah, while, on the other hand, John denied being Elijah in any way.

If John was not Elijah, who was Elijah then? A holistic hermeneutical investigation of the narrative indicates that the main candidate is Jesus himself. The first hint at such argument is the scene in which disciples state that people think Jesus is Elijah:

Luke 9:18 And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am? 19 They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, *Elias*; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again. (Matt. 16:13-14; Mark 6:15, 8:27)

It is notorious that some people thought that Jesus who was born of Mary, was one of the old prophets who has been already deceased. It is also important that they thought Jesus might be Elijah, who according to common perceptions did not die. In fact the traditional view holds to the assumption that Elijah did not die because, according to 2 Kings 2:11 he ascended to heaven. This is again a conclusion taken for granted. The fact that the narrative does not reveal anything further of the life of Elijah than his ascension, does not mean at all that he never died. From this perspective, it is then possible to consider Jesus as the reincarnation of Elijah. Further comparative study of the Synoptic Gospels reveals the second hint at this presumption.

As many early church fathers and modern scholars have presumed, there are indications of two comings of Elijah.²⁵⁸ Simply because Jesus said Elijah has already come, and will come again (Mark 9:12-13). That view is obviously similar to what Jesus said about 'the Son of man' and about himself; both have come and both will return (Mark 10:45, 13:26). This implies that Elijah, the Son of man, and Jesus are the same. In addition the return of Jesus has been also implied in both generation trees of him in Matthew and Luke, which establish, the third hint.

According to Matthew 1:17 all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations. This simply means 3×14 which is equal to 6×7 . However, the name of Jesus in this generational tree is the 41st, which is $(6 \times 7) - 1$. This implies to the return of Jesus which must be added to this generation tree to complete it, and eventually explains why Matthew states 42 generations up to the Messiah, instead of Jesus.²⁵⁹ The

²⁵⁸ Grayson, B., 1989. *Is Reincarnation Compatible with Christianity? A Historical, Biblical, and Theological Evaluation*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. Pp. 179-80.

²⁵⁹ Davies, Allison & Allison, Dale C., 1988. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew. Vol. 1: Introduction and Commentary on Matthew I-VII*, Edinburgh: Clark. P. 186.

numerical structure of the other generational tree demonstrates similar features. Luke 3:23-38 counts 76 names, which is $(11 \times 7) - 1$. This again points to the return of Jesus to complete his circle of life alluded by the multiple of seven. From this perspective, the story of Enoch who is the seventh generation after Adam, is another indication of the reincarnation of the Messiah, because it could be considered as a type for the Messiah who finally will not come back to the Earth any more, (Gen 5:24 “And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.”) This also indicates that reincarnation in the Bible and the Quran is a finite reincarnation.

Table 1. Genealogy of Jesus according to Matthew:

1. Abraham	15. Solomon	29. Shealtiel
2. Isaac	16. Rehoboam	30. Zerubbabel
3. Jacob	17. Abijah	31. Abiud
4. Judah	18. Asa	32. Eliakim
5. Perez	19. Jehoshaphat	33. Azor
6. Hezron	20. Joram	34. Zadok
7. Ram	21. Uzziah	35. Achim
8. Amminadab	22. Jotham	36. Eliud
9. Nahshon	23. Ahaz	37. Eleazar
10. Salmon	24. Hezekiah	38. Matthan
11. Boaz	25. Manasseh	39. Jacob
12. Obed	26. Amon	40. Joseph
13. Jesse	27. Josiah	41. Jesus
14. David	28. Jeconiah	42. Jesus' Rebirth

Table 2. Genealogy of Jesus according to Luke:

1. Adam	2. Seth	3. Enosh	4. Cainan 1	5. Mahalalel	6. Jared	7. Enoch
8. Methuselah	9. Lamech	10. Noah	11. Shem	12. Arphaxad	13. Cainan 2	14. Shelah
15. Eber	16. Peleg	17. Reu	18. Serug	19. Nahor	20. Terah	21. Abraham
22. Isaac	23. Jacob	24. Judah (1)	25. Perez	26. Hezron	27. Ram	28. Amminadab
29. Nahshon	30. Salmon	31. Boaz	32. Obed	33. Jesse	34. David	35. Nathan
36. Mattathah	37. Menan	38. Melea	39. Eliakim	40. Jonan	41. Joseph	42. Judah (2)
43. Simeon	44. Levi 1	45. Matthat 1	46. Jorim	47. Eliezer	48. Jose	49. Er
50. Elmodam	51. Cosam	52. Addi	53. Melchi	54. Neri	55. Shealtiel	56. Zerubbabel
57. Rhesa	58. Joannas	59. Judah (3)	60. Joseph	61. Semei	62. Mattathiah 1	63. Maath
64. Naggai	65. Esli	66. Nahum	67. Amos	68. Mattathiah 2	69. Joseph	70. Janna
71. Melchi	72. Levi 2	73. Matthat 2	74. Heli	75. Joseph	76. Jesus	77. Jesus' Rebirth

The fourth hint is the statement of John the Baptist in John 1:15, 30 ... “He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me”. Again to explain it away, it has been suggested that the text should be rendered as if it points to someone who takes precedence by rank.²⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Jesus himself attested his pre-existence in the same gospel in John 6:38 “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” And in John 17:5 “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”, and in John 8:58 “Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” Again Christian interpretation of this verse takes it as the evidence that Jesus claimed for himself the timeless being of Deity.²⁶¹ The contention of such an interpretation is simply due to its contradiction with multiple verses, which undermines such an assumption. Compare these two statements of Jesus:

John 6:38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.

John 13:16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

²⁶⁰ MacHugh, J. & Stanton, G.N., 2009. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1-4*, London [etc.]: T&T Clark. Pp. 63-4.

²⁶¹ Bernard, J.H. & MacNeile, A.H., 1928. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, Edinburgh: Clark. P. 322.

Note that John 8:58, is immediately followed by the question of the disciples regarding the blind man: John 9:2 “And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” To explain away this indication, several solutions have been proposed, such as the possibility that the disciples believed only in pre-existence of soul, but not in the reincarnation. Or the suggestion that the sin refers to a future sin of the man that God had punished in advance or as Grayson proposes some Jews believed child can commit sin in the womb.²⁶²

The last hint to discuss is the well-known conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus in John 3:

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8 **The wind** bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

The adherents to reincarnation consider this passage as a literal indication of reincarnation, whereas, the opponents consider it as a reference to the necessity of a spiritual rebirth. It should be noted that there are three reasons to support the first interpretation. 1) The wind indicates to *Rūah* because in all Semitic languages (except those of the eastern branch) *rūah* indicates ‘an initial awareness of air in motion, particularly Wind’.²⁶³ 2) Also the following of the conversation points out to a literally rebirth, since it stresses that one does not know about his previous life and his next life. However if this was indicating to an spiritual life it would make no sense. 3) Moreover Jesus alludes again to the return of the Son of man from the sky, which alludes to his own reincarnation.

John 3:13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

From the reincarnation perspective, here again is a literal and conclusive indication of the notion of rebirth because Jesus not only attests to his own reincarnation, but also claims such for everybody.

²⁶² Grayson, B., 1989. *Is Reincarnation Compatible with Christianity? A Historical, Biblical, and Theological Evaluation*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. Pp. 133-46.

²⁶³ Brandon, S.G.F., 1962. *Man and His Destiny in the Great Religions*, Manchester: Manchester University Press. P. 117.

6.3. Reincarnation of the Messiah in the Quran

It is certainly controversial to claim that the Quran manifests both direct and indirect indications of the reincarnation of the Messiah because one would ask how this could have been ignored. The reason is that the traditional exegesis fails to recognize it not only because they follow a literal interpretation of the Quran, but also because Islamic tradition has an effective device for distorting the Quran, known as Hadith (alleged sayings of Muhammad). For instance, the well-known story of the *Mi'rāj* (Ascension) of Muhammad, in Q. 17:1, has no textual basis in the Quran, but is justified by Ahadith and biographical material. In order to connect the elements that display an alternative picture of the Messiah, the Quran should be analyzed through a holistic hermeneutical approach.

The method of finding this picture is to realize that it is like a picture puzzle which has two sides and various parts. Thus by way of analogy, the literal aspect is the back, and metaphorical aspect is the front. The mainstream exegetes have stared at the back in isolation. By looking to the other side one can find the nexus to connect the related parts together and to present the whole picture. To begin with, it is easy to look for the verses that refer to the resurrection of a person in the Quran.

Q. 2:259 Or (take) the similitude of one who passed by a hamlet, all in ruins to its roofs. He said: "Oh! how shall Allah bring it (ever) to life, after (this) its death?" but Allah caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him up (again). He said: "How long didst thou tarry (thus)?" He said: (Perhaps) a day or part of a day." He said: "Nay, thou hast tarried thus a hundred years; but look at thy food and thy drink; they show no signs of age; and look at thy donkey: And that We may make of thee *a sign* unto the people, Look further at the bones, how We bring them together and clothe them with flesh." When this was shown clearly to him, he said: "I know that Allah hath power over all things."

The commentators typically identify the man in this verse as Ezra, but others as Ezekiel, Khidhr, or even a disbeliever.²⁶⁴ The nexus in this verse which connects it with a series of other verses related to the Messiah is 'a sign'. In order to understand its background, consider the following examples:

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you *a sign*; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Luke 2:34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for *a sign* which shall be spoken against.

²⁶⁴ Nasr, S. H., 2015. *The Study Quran*, New York: Harper Collins. P. 113.

From this point of view the verse is referring thus to the Messiah and this notion has additional support in other verses. For instance, consider the following verses which clarify that the Messiah is the sign of the Hour (the time of resurrection) and is an example for humanity:

Q. 43:57 When *the son of Mary* is held up as **an example**, behold, thy people raise a clamor thereat, 58 And they say, "Are our gods best, or he?" This they set forth to thee, only by way of disputation: yea, they are a contentious people. 59 He was no more than *a servant*: We granted Our favor to him, and We made him *an example* to the Children of Israel. 60 And if it were Our Will, We could make angels from amongst you, succeeding each other on the earth. 61 And he shall be a Sign for the Hour: therefore have no doubt about it, but follow ye Me: this is a Straight Way.

This verse is also related to another verse about Jesus which literary points both his death and his resurrection:

Q. 19:21 He said: "So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, 'that is easy for Me: and (We wish) to appoint him as *a Sign* unto men and a Mercy from Us':It is a matter (so) decreed."

Q. 19:33 "So peace is on me the day I (Jesus) was born, the day that I die, and *the day that I shall be raised up to life* (again)"

Islamic tradition that assumes Jesus will come back before the Judgment Day, eventually assumes that he will die in his return to be raised up again in the final resurrection.²⁶⁵ The issue is thus to determine whether this will occur in the future or if it happened already. The previous verses indicate that according to the Quran the Messiah died and raised already, and the following verses elaborate it further. The aforementioned example, Q. 43:59 presents a new nexus, 'servant', which connects it again with the Messiah. That has also a biblical background, for example in Numbers 12:8 "My servant Moses"; Ezekiel 37:24 "My servant David"; John 13:16 "The servant is not greater than his lord". From this point of view, the well-known verse of *Mi'rāj* (Ascension) of Muḥammad, could be reconsidered and connected to the reincarnation of Jesus into Muḥammad in the following way:

Q. 17:1 Glory be to Him Who carried *His servant* by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him some of *Our Signs*, Truly He is the Hearer, the Seer.

All commentators have taken for granted that 'the servant' is Muḥammad.²⁶⁶ However, Gabriel Said Reynolds in 'The Quran and Its Biblical Subtext' asserts that in this verse Muḥammad is not mentioned and no further reference is made to such a journey before or after this verse. He strongly doubts the reliability of the traditional narratives.²⁶⁷ In fact, the verse contains the nexus

²⁶⁵ Ibid. P. 772.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. P. 694.

²⁶⁷ Reynolds, G.S., 2010. *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, London [etc.]: Routledge. P. 18, 186.

‘servant’, which is associated nine times with Jesus and the Messiah in the Quran, for instance Q. 4:172 “The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God”. Thus so far it attests that Jesus is already transformed from one place to another. In order to discover how Jesus is related to Muḥammad, only a few more verses should be considered:

Q. 6:122 Is he who was dead and We have raised him unto life, and set for him *a light* wherein he walketh among men, as him whose similitude is in utter darkness whence he cannot emerge?

This verse is also referring to a person who was dead and raised already. Moreover, it has a new nexus, ‘light’ which connects it to the verses in which the revelation to Muḥammad has been expressed as the light. For instance in Q. 5:15; 7:157; 14:1; 39:22; 42:52

64:8 Believe, therefore, in Allah and His Messenger, and in the Light which we have sent down.

At first sight critics might consider a single argument weak, but in fact there are multiple indications to add to this argument. For example, the story of the change of the *Qiblah* (direction of the prayer) in Q. 2:142-144

Q. 2:142 The fools among the people will say: "What hath turned them from the Qibla to which they were used?" Say: To Allah belong both east and West: He guideth whom He will to a Way that is straight. 143 Thus, have We made of you an Ummat justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves; and We appointed the Qibla to which thou wast used, only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels (From the Faith). Indeed it was (A change) momentous, except to those guided by Allah. And never would Allah Make your faith of no effect. For Allah is to all people Most surely full of kindness, Most Merciful.

From the mainstream point of view, this narrative readily refers to the change in the direction of daily prayer towards Jerusalem into Mecca. However, such an interpretation is based on biographical or historical data. In contrast, the Quran itself does not provide any support for the traditional notion of prayer, let alone for the change of its direction. This narrative continues to mention that the People of the Book know Muḥammad as one of their sons, which arguably alludes that Muḥammad has been previously born among them.

Q. 2:146 The people of the Book know him as they know their own sons; but some of them conceal the truth which they themselves know.

As already mentioned there are multiple indications in the Quran to support this thesis. However, the scope of this study does not allow room to present more of them. Therefore, only one more example will be chosen to finish this section, because this verse of the Quran contains a word which is literally related to the Arabic word for reincarnation ‘*tanāsukh*’. The verse reads:

Q. 2:106 No *sign* do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but that we bring that which is better than it or like unto it.

The mainstream interpretation of this verse is that it refers to the abrogation of the verses of the Quran by other verses. That is based on the Arabic word for 'sign', *āyah*, which is also used to refer to a single verse of the Quran. Some translators even directly have rendered *āyah* as 'revelation'. For example, "None of Our revelations do We abrogate", though, it is well-known that the Quran refers to multiple phenomena as signs of God. If one takes into account that the Messiah is also called a sign, as the previous examples have demonstrated, it is also possible to regard it as a direct indication of *naskh* (substitution) of the sign. As has been noted in the Study Quran, by putting an alternative vowel for the Arabic word for 'forget', it could be also rendered as 'postpone, delay, defer', which makes the verse more compatible with this notion. In that case the verse could be read: "No sign do We substitute or postpone it, but that We bring better than it or like unto it." This indicates then that the reincarnation in the Bible and in the Quran is only ascending and within human species.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Evaluation in two Paradigms

This study demonstrates that the conception of the afterlife in Abrahamic religions has developed and changed considerably throughout history. It also points out that although the mainstream tendency holds to ‘resurrection’, a minority adheres to reincarnation. Furthermore, it demonstrates that both groups refer to the Scripture in order to justify their outlook. Such an endeavor is a matter of hermeneutics, not history.²⁶⁸ In a hermeneutical approach, one goes to the text with one’s prejudices and then projects meaning onto the text. Therefore, texts can mean almost anything that an interpretive community desires.²⁶⁹ In other words, the text becomes not only a window into the intended meanings of the author, but also a mirror of what the interpreter looks for.

Ultimately, one would ask whether the Bible and the Quran originally intended to indicate reincarnation or resurrection. It might be reasonable to say that the Bible and the Quran have intended to indicate both on two different levels. Certainly, on a literal level resurrection is indicated. However, a holistic hermeneutical approach indicates that resurrection has been used as an allusion to reincarnation. From this perspective, they have not intended to reveal reincarnation explicitly and instantly. The drastic symbolic language which has been used to allude to reincarnation indicates an intentional equivocation through a bi-level text. A comparative study of the Bible and the Quran readily reveals that the concept of the afterlife has been subjected to a gradual increase in emphasis, which has culminated in the Quran. This gradual increase and development of the afterlife in Abrahamic religions has adapted the contemporaneous worldview and language of its audiences, while simultaneously formed their view of the afterlife. If one asks why this strategy has been chosen, a reasonable answer as proposed also by Christiane Karrer-Grube in discussing multiplicity of meaning and religious truth is that:

“Biblical texts are expected to provide existential meaning for 20 centuries to people of different cultures in countries all over the world, to different social groups, to various religious communities....This is possible because the biblical texts have that rich field of

²⁶⁸ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 614.

²⁶⁹ Fish, S., 1980. *Is There a Text in This Class? : the authority of interpretive communities*, Cambridge, Mass. [etc.]: Harvard University Press.

meaning. The multiplicity of meaning of most biblical texts is a precondition of functioning as 'holy' text with existential authority in most divergent situations."²⁷⁰

One may still ask how could an author who did not know or did not believe in reincarnation could have concealed it or have implied it. Such an objection should be considered from two perspectives. Either one considers the Bible and Quran as revelation and as a supernatural phenomenon, or one considers them as the products of mundane individuals who projected their own thought and tradition into the texts. It is clear that in the first case, the objection is not valid, because one cannot claim the transcendent source had no knowledge of reincarnation. In this paradigm, one may consider an end in the prophecy, but not an end in the interpretation of it. Therefore, it is always acceptable to discover new meanings in the text. In the second case, which represents the view of the secular scholars, the objection is valid, but only in terms of the intention of its author. From a hermeneutical point of view the Bible and the Quran could be approached – as the text explicitly demonstrates – as a record of visions and dreams, something that Alan Segal calls 'religiously interpreted state of consciousness'.²⁷¹ In that case, the interpretation of the text also can reveal substance beyond the conscious mind and intention of the author.

It could be also added that, from a secular point of view, the religious authority of the author is not higher than the lay reader, simply because, if there is neither God, nor revelation, there is neither an authoritative prophet who reveals what is the fate of human after death. What will remain, in this perspective, is just a tradition, and since the afterlife concept has been under a constant development and change, there will be no valid argument to reject reincarnation from a religious point of view. In other words, just as one day the notion of resurrection has been introduced to Judaism, the next day the notion of reincarnation has gained some adherents. Both notions could be considered as a part of the development of the afterlife in Abrahamic religions.

7.2. Relevance of the Study

In the introduction it was claimed that reincarnation might contribute positively to a better understanding of the Bible and the Quran and relationship of Abrahamic religions. Consequently, it might also affect political problems with a religious background. To elucidate the matter of these phenomena first the hermeneutical consequences will be explained.

²⁷⁰ Karrer-Grube, Ch., Lamarque's Theory of Interpretation and the Practice of Interpreting Biblical Texts: The Case for Semi-generic Interpretation. In Grube, D.-M., 2016. *Interpretation and Meaning in Philosophy and Religion*. P. 172.

²⁷¹ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. Pp. 323-329.

If the case of reincarnation in Abrahamic religion is considered, the interpretation of the Bible and the Quran will enter into a new era, which is actually a paradigm shift. So far, Jews, Christians, and Muslims have approached their Scripture isolated from the other traditions. Jews interpret the Hebrew Bible only in the narrative context of the Old Testament, Christians ignore the Quran, and Muslims cut off the Quran from its Biblical background. If these pieces of literature are read as existing in a connected paradigm, then many issues will be understood entirely in different contexts with different interpretations.

A good example is the mainstream interpretation of the women in the Quran. A conspicuous aspect of the Quran is that it only names one woman, Maryam (Maria). In all other instances when it refers to different women, it refrains to name any. This has significant meaning if the Quran would be connected to its Biblical background. The Hebrew Bible often uses the metaphor of a female for a nation such as Amos 5:2 the virgin of Israel, Zech. 2:7 the daughter of Babylon. The Quran keeps in line with this symbolism and alludes for instance to Jews, Christians, and Muslims via this metaphor. From this perspective, when the Quran refers to a woman in general or to some of the wives of the prophet in particular, it has an allegorical value that points to several communities which the Messiah has been their husband in his different reincarnations. This sheds new lights on a controversial verse such as Q. 4:34 (that in traditional interpretation is considered as a ruling between a husband and a wife), because from this perspective it is just a ruling between the Messiah and his community. It also explains why the Quran proposes exceptional ruling for the marriages of Muhammad.

As Hans Schwarz maintains: “Eschatology also is determined by and determines our understanding of humanity, of body and soul, and of value systems and worldviews. Eschatology always influences and shapes the conduct of life and vice versa.”²⁷² It is thus reasonable to expect a major change in the conduct of the adherents of Abrahamic religions under a new eschatological concept. For example, there would be no more place for an exclusivist claim to the salvation for any followers of Abrahamic religions. From a reincarnationist point of view, the chance for salvation not only becomes equal for all followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but also equally available to all humanity.

Needless to say, when at least some of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims realize that they have the same God and the same Messiah, they will have other perceptions of their own religion and others' religions. This is because according to the hermeneutic circle not only can a hermeneutical approach to the Scripture support a reincarnationist interpretation, but also a reincarnationist approach to the Scripture supports a hermeneutical interpretation. In effect, for example, the fight of Jews and Muslims over the Holy Land will have no justification. On the one hand neither Jews nor Muslims are the only selected people with special favor, while on the other hand no physical land is really the Holy Land, but such a land is just a metaphor for the fundament of faith. Thus it becomes who is more pious, is more settled in the Holy Land. This would not only affect the relation between different traditions, but also the relations within each community itself. For

²⁷² Schwarz, H., 2000. *Eschatology*, Grand Rapids, MI [etc.]: Eerdmans. P. 26.

instance, the Islamic validity of Shari'a and Sunnah would be entirely different in a reincarnationist paradigm.

In the end it should be mentioned that as Ivan Strenski argues, in everyday life politics cannot be freed from religion.²⁷³ Similarly regarding modern tragedies of terror and conflict, Alan Segal points out "Like the Islamic extremists, the Israelites settlers have innovated on traditional views of the afterlife to give meaning to their own political purposes. Therefore the relationship between the afterlife visions and social agendas have a significant importance beyond scholarly community."²⁷⁴ This obviously points to the social and political importance of this study, which hopefully will be continued in the future.

²⁷³ Strenski, I., 2010. *Why Politics Can't Be Freed From Religion*, Oxford [etc.]: Wiley-Blackwell.

²⁷⁴ Segal, A.F., 2004. *Life After Death : a history of the afterlife in the religions of the West*, New York [etc.]: Doubleday. P. 2.

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