

ESCHATOLOGY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HOPE IN THE LIGHT OF
JÜRGEN MOLTMANN AND SAID NURSI

by

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis explores the theological arguments of the two theologians Jürgen Moltmann and Said Nursi for a belief in eschatology. Both of them have written extensively on the themes of eschatology, resurrection and hope. Both of them shared the time period between 1926, when Moltmann was born, until 1960, when Nursi passed away. Both scholars have had an experience of war, and the experience of being prisoners of war. Keeping in mind, that every author's life will more or less reflect his/her writings, it might be interesting to see what the driving force for these two authors has been to write on these theological matters.

Jürgen Moltmann gives special attention to hope, promise and in connection to that, to Jesus' resurrection. Nursi concentrates on multiple evidences of a life after death, and on a journey starting from the outer world, the universe, moving into the inner world by covering the faculties of humanity. In this thesis, the reader will be able to see how both thinkers esteem hope; how both share the idea that God will not turn away from His promise; how both explain that God is able to create anything He wills. One feels both authors' quite similar concerns about their own religion.

Furthermore, this thesis seeks to show that the two world religions, Christianity and Islam, are not so fundamentally far from each other. Elementary concepts such as hope, love, fear, faith, promise, death, life and the bodily resurrection of humanity are on both sides discussed and thought upon. Here, just two of those scholars have been chosen

and their works compared. It is a comparative work in order to demonstrate the differences and commonalities regarding these mentioned concepts within the two religions.

The reader will be able to understand how Moltmann and Nursi differ in certain topics, as well. For instance do they have different approaches to the idea that the universal experience of existence of the world is “threatened by death” and “subject to vanity;” or to the problem of theodicy. Furthermore their approach to death seems to be fundamentally different. All these communalities and differences will help the reader to learn about the other religion and to understand that, on an intellectual and theological level, the concerns are humanities’ concerns and the solutions offered by the different theologians should be, therefore, appreciated.

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INTRODUCTION

Eschatology has always been one of the doctrines in Islam which influence people's life deeply. The belief in this doctrine helps many people throughout their lives to trust in God and to accept certain incidents as they are. Part of this belief is that life is short and that everything that comes from God is under His control and is good, no matter what it is. Hereby, being in the state between fear and hope is always the goal. Hope, especially, plays a tremendous role, since it is a psychological buttress and a tool for rehabilitation. People trust that even in the situation of big disappointments in one's life, hope can be a soft and smooth medium for recovery.

People nowadays live in a post-modern society. It seems as if time passes more quickly every day and people have no time for religion. The increase of all kinds of necessities and the addiction to all sorts of things seem to multiply the number of gods. Personal lives of Stars, TV-channels, shopping areas, and so on are just some of the 'gods' one can count. Death does not really happen in front of people's eyes any more. People mostly die either in hospitals, or lonely in their homes, and are delivered quickly to the morgue. Graveyards have been moved mostly outside the cities; hence, people do not really encounter death. Sometimes there is even no time to properly grieve for our loved ones. Every day, hundreds of thousands of people are dying all over the world; however, if a larger group of people dies at a certain place, for example due to a natural

disaster, people immediately question the Existence or Mercy of God. One of the reasons for this might be that people have stopped thinking seriously about death and have become more and more people of the apparent rather than people of wisdom.

The third aspect might be contrary to the second. That is that wo/man has been immunized to the reality of death. It does not make her/him think about death anymore because s/he sees it every day on the news. Technological development has brought death right into our living rooms and people are basically raised up with these pictures; hence, one becomes used to it and stops thinking about it. Just as one is used to the sunrise every morning and never thinks about whether or not the rising of the sun every single morning is really that normal. People have grown to see death as something belonging to or concerning the other, rather than oneself.

The last aspect is the importance of interreligious learning and teaching. As Prof. Bünyamin Duran says in his paper *Cooperation in Interreligious Learning and Teaching, based on common Abrahamic Principles*, interreligious learning may create a new religious environment in its own area representing human souls. This area is an area of pluralism and post-modernity. We live in a world that becomes smaller every day and people of all different colors, nationalities and religious backgrounds live – or try to live – together. Pluralism in this context is not simply tolerance, relativism and syncretism. It is active engagement with each other. It does require commitment to one's own tradition and community while honoring and respecting the opinions and traditions of the other, even if they are quite different. In order to be able to compete with the destructive challenges of post-modernism, believers must join hands and must share their spiritual energies, economic possibilities and intellectual capacities. Regarding eschatology, the

German Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann and the Turkish Muslim scholar Said Nursi would have much to share intellectually as well as spiritually.¹

The following Figure will give an outline of what the reader may expect.

	General meaning of Eschatology	Jurgen Moltmann's view on Eschatology	Said Nursi's view on Eschatology
	Chapter II	Chapter III	Chapter IV
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediation of the basics of Eschatology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more specific explanation of Eschatology within Jurgen Moltmann's framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more specific explanation of Eschatology within Said Nursi's framework
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a general outline of Eschatology and explains its general meaning within the Christian and Islamic traditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning and importance of Hope and Promise • The role of Hope and the meaning of Revelation • Christian identity and the eschatological meaning of the resurrection of Christ • Double outcome of Judgment versus Universalism • Eschatology's importance in society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning of Death from the perspective of the Mercy, Bounty, Existence and Oneness of God • Why there must be a Life after Death • Eschatology in the midst of our lives • Eschatology's importance in society

Figure 1: Outline of the Thesis

As is outlined in the figure above, this thesis will first give some general definitions of eschatology and its idea within Christianity and Islam.

¹ Bünyamin Duran, "Cooperation in Interreligious learning and teaching based on common Abrahamic principles" <http://www.bduran.nl/EN/artikelen_en.htm> (cited 8 Mach 2008).

In the third Chapter a more specific explanation of the understanding of eschatology will be given in the view of Jürgen Moltmann, who is a Protestant Christian. Jürgen Moltmann ascribes eschatology a new meaning by tying it strongly with hope and promise. Hope and promise, furthermore, are deeply connected with the death and resurrection of Christ; hence this chapter aims also to look behind the meaning of the Easter story. Additionally, its goal is to elaborate on the “double outcome of judgment” and “universalism,” which is often discussed within Christianity. In order not to keep the doctrine of eschatology on a merely theoretical level, Moltmann’s view on the importance of eschatology within Christian life will be more closely examined.

Chapter four is reserved for Nursi’s view on eschatology. Different from many other Islamic Scholars, Nursi’s approach to the understanding of death seems to be more positive and appealing than scary and fearful. Furthermore, this chapter tries to explain the necessity of a life after death, especially and foremost for human beings. It seems to be steadily a challenge to keep the balance of “present” and “far-future.” Here, by “present” this world, and by “far-future” the eternal life is meant, which awaits us once we have died. If we compare both of them, “far-future” seems to be more important than the “present,” for the former is eternal, whereas the latter becomes history and hence dead with every passing second. Said Nursi tries to emphasize that resurrection happens every day, every month, and every year in us and in our environment. Lastly, as in Moltmann’s case, the importance of eschatology in people’s social life will be looked at from different angles. Through comparative works, Christians as well as Muslims can learn from each other and can see that there are many issues within theology that Muslims and Christians are equally concerned with for the sake of humanity’s future.

CHAPTER I

GENERAL MEANING OF ESCHATOLOGY

In this chapter, the meaning of eschatology will be analyzed and afterwards its importance in Christian and Islamic theologies will be explained.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the term eschatology comes from the Greek word *eschatos*, meaning the last, farthest. It is a belief concerning death, the end of the world, or the ultimate destiny of humankind; specifically: any of various Christian doctrines concerning the second coming, the resurrection of the dead, or the last judgment.²

Parallel to its conceptual meaning, it has philosophical as well as theological dimensions. The problem of death and resurrection is a vital issue within philosophy and theology. Without diving into the philosophical aspect, one could state that Saint Augustine has been one of the most famous eschatological thinkers, followed by Hegel. The Encyclopedia Britannica makes a distinction between mythological and historical eschatology. While it counts Hinduism under the category of mythical eschatology, it places Judaism, Christianity and Islam under historical eschatology.³ Hence one might

² Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eschatology>> (cited 14 Feb 2008).

³ Answers.com, <<http://www.answers.com/topic/eschatology>> (cited 6 March 2008).

assume that eschatology within the Abrahamic religions is deeply connected with history and that a similar understanding of eschatology can be found in all three religions.

Eschatology in Christian Tradition

As a monotheistic religion, Christianity has obviously given importance to eschatology. Many Christian theologians have expressed their views on this very essential topic. Within Christianity, there has been a wide scholarly consensus that Jesus can be interpreted correctly only in terms of the eschatological beliefs and expectations current in the Judaism of his time. The idea of eschatology has been taken up as the essence of the Christian message, though interpreting it in a less literal-historical and more spiritual or existential manner.⁴

As a basic introduction and a general outline, one view of eschatology will be given here, which has been developed by Keith Ward. In his book Christianity, A short Introduction, he explains eternal life through three different views: A literal interpretation, a metaphorical interpretation and a realist and non-literal interpretation.

According to the literal interpretation, and the Protestant version, there will come a time when Jesus returns to this world and fights against Satan and other forces of evil. At the Day of Judgment, God will resurrect all the dead with their bodies and they will face the judgment of God for their deeds. Here we can see a double outcome of judgment. The evil ones will end up forever in Hellfire whereas the good – or those who believe in Jesus Christ will go to Heaven where they will live forever and enjoy the presence of God. The Catholic view is a little bit different. According to them, only the soul of

⁴ Mircea Eliade, "Eschatology," The Encyclopedia of Religion vol.5 (New York: Machmillan and Free Press, 1987).

humans continues to exist. While the souls of the Saints enter Heaven, where they continue to pray for those still on earth, the souls of the wicked enter into Hell. Those, who are neither saints, nor wicked, let's say the souls of the faithful – since they are too imperfect to enter directly into the presence of God –are purified in purgatory, an intermediate state. After those souls are purified, Christ returns to the earth and the last judgment follows. Here, we also have a belief in a double outcome of judgment. After receiving back their bodies, their final destination is given; that is, either the presence of God, or separation from God forever.⁵

Within the metaphorical interpretation, the idea of many paintings, as well as the Biblical language, is to shape the Christian imagination. This goes even as far as the resurrection of Jesus, for according to this understanding, the resurrection is new life with God, obtained by taking up one's cross to follow Jesus, rather than the revival of a corpse. As the German Theologian Hans Küng states, "...death is not countermanded but definitely conquered. According to the New Testament, the risen one has death – this ultimate frontier – definitely behind him. He has entered into a wholly different heavenly life: into the life of God, for which very diverse expressions and ideas were used already in the New Testament."⁶ The battle with the Satan is interpreted as an inner war between love and hatred, between goodness and selfish desire. The outcome is believed to be one human community, with peace and justice and without evil and suffering. Some Christians, therefore, will say that it is all about becoming one human body or presence of Christ in *this* physical cosmos. Hell is not seen as Hellfire in a literal sense, but rather

⁵ Keith Ward, Christianity, A Short Introduction (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 168-169.

⁶ Hans Küng, Eternal Life? Life After Death as a Medical, Philosophical, and Theological Problem (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 112-113.

as placing oneself outside the realm of God by rejecting Him and pushing oneself into the self destroying flames of selfish desire. On the other hand, paradise is seen as the acceptance of God through giving up of the self to God which is the entrance into eternal life. This eternal life lies before one at every moment of one's life. Nevertheless, Ward does not hesitate to state at this point that there are also Christians who believe that there is a form of human existence which transcends earthly life. It seems to be unclear, what this eternal timelessness of God looks like. Here we find Heaven and Hell, but this is rather an eternal state where each person is either accepted into the eternal reality of the divine life, or is excluded from it.⁷

The third and last interpretation of Ward is the realist and non-literal interpretation. This interpretation emerged because many Christians hold that talk of life after death cannot be all metaphorical. At some point these metaphors must stand for some kind of literal statement. Here, too, a final judgment day will come wherein all responsible agents who ever existed in this universe will be resurrected. This Judgment Day will be the place where everyone makes the ultimate decision, either to accept God, or to refuse Him. Those who deny the love of God will receive 'eternal punishment' which is not unending torture but a final separation from God – a punishment in the eyes of those who know and love God. Ward emphasizes that God will forgive everyone under the condition that s/he repents. He points out that salvation is by faith, not works, which means that all who sincerely turn to God will be brought into the divine presence forever.⁸ After introducing also the state of purgatory as an intermediate place where those who have done evil must suffer in themselves what they have inflicted on others,

⁷ Ward, 170-172.

⁸ Ibid., 173-177.

and where those who have been faithful should find a happiness that may have been denied them on earth, Ward introduces the understanding of Universalism. So, in the very last judgment, after every opportunity has been given to them, Ward states, “Yet it may well seem that a loving God would not allow anyone to continue an existence in misery forever, so the idea of an everlasting Hell should be renounced, as a misinterpretation of the gospel sayings about the gravity and destructiveness of sin. What awaits any who finally reject God is final destruction.”⁹

After this general overview on Christian eschatology, which Ward explains in a simple, yet insightful way, we shall say a few words about the understanding of eschatology in Islam.

Eschatology in Muslim Tradition

Within the monotheistic scriptures, special tensions arose in the handling of death and eschatology has become very complex. Of the monotheistic faiths, however, Islam had perhaps the richest backdrop since the pioneers of Islam worked within a larger monotheistic environment. Some entered Islam from Judaism or Christianity.¹⁰

The Qur’anic Foundation

It is not difficult to find passages in the Qur’an talking about life after death. Almost every verse (*surah*) refers to eschatology, particularly to the rewards and punishments of heaven and hell. The Qur’an explains the Day of Judgment and the residence of Hell and Heaven very explicitly. It makes little mention of the intermediate

⁹ Ibid., 178.

¹⁰ Eliade, “Eschatology,” The Encyclopedia of Religion vol.5.

state between death and resurrection.¹¹ Certainly, one can find the element of fear within the Qur'an. Yet, this fear is different from a pure pessimism in which there is no alternative to the destruction of individual existence. In contrast, hope plays a very important role in the Qur'anic references, where one can find the promise for eternal existence and felicity to those who have faith and manifest the fruits of that faith.¹² In other words, hope and fear goes hand in hand as it is mentioned mostly side by side, one immediately following the other. Furthermore, it is stated in the Hadith (the saying of the Messenger of God, Muhammed (pbuh)) that God's Mercy predominates His Wrath.¹³

In Islamic understanding, all existence is through its being a proof for God's existence and the mortality of all existence and their death, on the other hand, is evidence for the existence of a life in another "world." That means that existence has two different faces: the first faces God, the second faces life after death.

In the Qur'an, God has made very clear why the world has been created and what humanity needs to do to overcome its selfishness. The belief in a life after death belongs to the essentials of Islam. One third of the Qur'an comprises the hereafter as its main theme.

God says in the Qur'an

Oh Children of Adam, when Messengers from your own people come to you reciting to you My Verses – then those who fear God and mend their ways have nothing to fear, and they will not grieve. But those who deny Our Revelations and reject them arrogantly – those are the people of the Fire; therein they shall abide forever. Indeed, those who have denied Our Revelations and rejected them arrogantly – the gates of heaven shall not be opened for them and they shall not enter Paradise until the camel

¹¹ Jane Idleman Smith; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), xi.

¹² Ibid., 3.

¹³ Muslim, Translation of Sahih Muslim, Book 37, Nr. 6626 <<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/037.smt.html>>, last access Feb 14th, 2008.

passes through the eye of the needle. Thus we punish the wicked sinners. Hell shall be their couch and over them shall be canopies [of fire]. Thus we punish the wrongdoers. As to those who believe and do the good deeds, We do not charge any soul except with what is within its power. Those are the people of Paradise, abiding therein forever. And We shall remove all rancor from their hearts; and under them rivers will flow. They will say: "Praise be to Allah Who guided us to this; we would never have been guided, had not Allah guided us. The Messengers of our Lord came with the truth." Then a voice will cry out to them: "This is indeed the Paradise which you have been made to inherit for what [good] you used to do." And the people of the Paradise will call out to the people of the Fire: "We have found what our Lord promised us to be true; so, have you found what your Lord promised to be true?" They will say: "Yes." Thereupon a caller from their midst shall call out: "May Allah's curse be upon the wrongdoers; who bar [others] from Allah's Way and desire it to be crooked; and they disbelieve in the Hereafter."¹⁴

In this verse, one can clearly see how detailed Hell and Heaven are described in the Qur'an. It reminds the reader, who the ones are who deserve Heaven and Hell, and it warns the reader of not being one of those people of the Fire. It is remarkable that even dialogues between people of Heaven and Hell are explained. One of the reasons, why those two destinations are described in such a detail might be that in describing Hell in its detail, God wants to warn His servants out of his Compassion and Love, not to do wrong, by explaining what bad place this is to be. Heaven, on the other hand, is described also in such a detail because God wants his servants to dwell in there. Hence He explains it in detail in order to awaken the desire of His servants to achieve this destiny.

What distinguishes Islam from Christianity is that no soul takes the burden of the other¹⁵ as it is believed in Christianity with Jesus having died for the sins of humanity. Everybody is responsible for one's own deeds and will be taken into account for this. Another difference that should be mentioned at this point is that God is the one who is

¹⁴ Qur'an, 7:35-36; 40-45.

¹⁵ Ibid., 35:18.

going to Judge, not (Jesus) Christ. It is very important to emphasize this since in many occasions within the Qur'an God indicates this very fact:

The God-fearing will score a victory, gardens and vineyards, and round-breasted mates, and a brim-full cup. Therein, they do not hear any idle talk or denunciation. A rewards from your Lord, a sufficient gift; the Lord of the heavens and the earth and what lies between them; the Compassionate to Whom they do not have the power to speak. The day when the Spirit [meaning Gabriel] and the angels shall stand in line; none shall speak except him whom the Compassionate has allowed and has spoken the truth. That will be the True Day; he who wishes will return unto his Lord penitently.¹⁶

In this verse, God announces his sovereignty over all things and that it is He Who will be judging. Interestingly, He describes Himself as the Compassionate here, which indicates, that He will judge with His Compassion and Mercy.

According to Mehmet Pacaci, Professor of the Theological Faculty at the University of Ankara, this verse shows that between the relationship of God and humans, the authority lies definitely in the hands of God and that humans submit to this authority.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., 78:31-39.

¹⁷ Mehmet Pacaci, Kutsal Kitaplarda Ölüm Ötesi (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayinlari, 2001), 68.

CHAPTER II

JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN'S VIEW ON ESCHATOLOGY

Short Biography of Jürgen Moltmann

Jürgen Moltmann (April 8, 1926 -) is a German theologian and Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen, Germany. He was born in Hamburg, Germany and grew up in a secular home, without considerable Christian influence. When he was young, he wanted to study science and mathematics. Yet, in 1943, his education was broken up when he had to join the German army. Obviously, he does not have positive thoughts about this time of his life, at all; hence, when his father came to visit him, he told him about the mass murder of Jews and that he had seen the mass graves with his own eyes. This incident, states Moltmann, stopped his willingness to serve in the war; He saw that the war was lost, and what was going on was to be merely a cover for crimes.¹⁸

His war experience had a very powerful impact on his life and Moltmann reflects in the following:

In July 1943, Operation Gomorrah was launched...Helplessly we looked on as St. George's began to burn, and then the city hall and finally Hamburg's churches, which flared up like torches...an explosive bomb hit the platform where we were standing...the mass of splinters...tore apart my friend Gerhard Schopper, who was

¹⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, A Broad Place. An Autobiography, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 20.

standing next to me. ... During this night I cried out to God for the first time in my life and put my life in His hands. ... My question was not ‘why does God allow this to happen?’ but ‘My God, where are you?’ and ‘Why am I alive and not dead, too, like the friend at my side?’¹⁹

From 1945 to 1948, Moltmann was confined as prisoner of war by the British. During this time, his mother was told that he was ‘missing,’ which meant dead. Four months later he was allowed to send home one postcard and he received one response saying that his family survived the end of the war, yet his father was a prisoner of war by the French. Although in May 8, 1945 the war ended, Moltmann was not sent back home. Instead he was sent from one camp to another.

As said before, Moltmann did not have a religious upbringing. In the Scottish camp one day, he was given a Bible by a chaplain. As he was reading through it, the passage he recalls - which did not all of a sudden illuminate him but was sort of echoing from his own soul - was Psalm 39:

I dump and must eat up my suffering within myself. My life is nothing before thee. Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry. Hold not thou thy peace at my tears, for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.

This may have been his first introduction to Christian theology.

As the years passed by, Moltmann states, “after almost sixty years, I am certain that then, in 1945, and there, in the Scottish prisoner of war camp, in the dark pit of my soul, Jesus sought me and found me.”²⁰

In 1948 Moltmann returned back to Hamburg, with an interest in Christian theology. He studied at the University of Göttingen until 1952 under teachers who where

¹⁹ Ibid., 16-17.

²⁰ Ibid., 30.

strongly influenced by Barth; hence, he absorbed thoroughly the theology of Karl Barth and became a great master of dialectical theology. In order to provide answers to political possibilities and cultural challenges of the post-war period, he decided to move beyond the narrow understanding of Barth. He became highly critical of Barth's neglect of the historical nature of reality, while remaining indebted to Barth. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* helped him out of the dilemma and developed his concern for social ethics and the church's involvement in society. Furthermore, he was influenced by Luther and Hegel through Hans Joachim Iwand. Hegel and Iwand actually helped him to develop the dialectical interpretation of the cross and the resurrection.²¹

During this time at the university in Göttingen, he met the feminist theologian Elizabeth Wendel, student at the same University, who would become his wife later on, in 1952. From this year until 1957, Moltmann was the pastor of the Evangelical Church of Bremen-Wasserhorst.²²

In 1958 Moltmann was invited to Wuppertal and became a teacher at the Church Seminary. In 1963 the faculty in Bonn invited Moltmann to take up the chair for systematic and social ethics.²³ In 1967, while he was in Bonn, he received an invitation to the chair of systematic theology in the Protestant theological faculty of the Eberhard-Karls University in Tübingen, which he accepted. He stayed there until his retirement in 1994.

²¹ Kim Hyung-Kon, "Jürgen Moltmann (1926-)," updated 1999, <http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_855_moltmann.htm> (cited 3 March 2008).

²² Jürgen Moltmann, Gifford Lectures, <<http://www.giffordlectures.org/Author.asp?AuthorID=217>> (cited 28 Feb 2008).

²³ Moltmann, *A Broad Place*, 93.

Moltmann has contributed more than twenty books to the field of theology, including Theology of Hope (1964) and The Crucified God (1972), just to name the first two.

The Theology of Hope literally hit the academic and Christian environments at exactly the right time: The ‘God is Dead’ viewpoint was still in the air, the Roman Catholic Church opened itself to the paradigm of the modern world with the Second Vatican Council, the civil rights movement in the USA reached its climax with The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for the liberation of the oppressed black people. In Czechoslovakia, a democratization of the Stalinist dictatorship emerged, and in Latin America, a Christian Revolutionary Spirit was in sight. Although the Second World War was behind them, the Germans started not earlier than in the 1960s to detach themselves from the Nazi past and to address it consciously, with Willy Brandt as a new start.²⁴ In the midst of all those new beginnings throughout the world, Moltmann published Theology of Hope, which “linked the forward-looking hope in history with eschatological expectations, which went beyond historical possibilities and human powers.”²⁵

In a prominent German magazine, Moltmann’s “Postscript” to the collection is compared to the neo-Marxist prophets and agitators: It says that, like them, Moltmann pillories present day society as “repressive” like them, he challenges society to be intolerant of the powers and spokesman of the status quo; like them he advises to demonstrate for the oppressed so that a “human society” can develop. The article puts the

²⁴ Ibid., 99-100.

²⁵ Ibid.

following words into Moltmann's mouth: "Christians should join the protestors and become the 'children of protest'."²⁶

Moltmann's method

The article in *Der Spiegel* already gives some hints about Jürgen Moltmann's method. Unlike some other theologians, he did not start from the creation-in-the-beginning (Genesis 1) when talking about apocalyptic eschatology. The reason was obviously humanity's circumstances and Moltmann's own background; for according to him, man at that time was rather terrorized by the horrors of human history and fascinated by their potentialities. "Hope in the field of human history was the theme;" Moltmann states, "we were not yet able to formulate hope in the field of nature."²⁷ His theological method was to see "the whole of theology in a single focus."²⁸ The historical and eschatological notes, in other words, the cross and resurrection of Jesus, are a significant proclamation in the eyes of Moltmann; for he thinks that this occurrence contains a "continuity in radical discontinuity."²⁹ Eschatology, according to Moltmann, is not merely the end of times, the last Judgment or the ultimate destiny of humankind. It is more than that; it is the beginning of something new. We could, therefore, say that Moltmann defines certain terms like eschatology, Christian hope, Easter story, resurrection anew and looks at them from a different perspective.

²⁶Jürgen Moltmann, "Kinder des Protestes," updated 22 January 1968, <<http://wissen.spiegel.de/wissen/dokument/dokument.html?id=45465313&top=SPIEGEL>>, (cited 29 Feb 2008).

²⁷Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 11.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 199.

One could say that Moltmann's Christology falls within the broad tradition represented by Barth; they are both evangelical and retain close ties to the reformers.³⁰ Moltmann works within the framework of evangelical language, however, as a political theologian he is considerate of the social dimension of salvation³¹ which we will talk about in more detail in the coming chapters.

In the following pages, Moltmann's view on hope and promise, death, and resurrection will be examined.

Hope and Promise

Moltmann tries to bring hope back to the center of Christianity. Eschatology means the doctrine of the Christian hope, he states, and holds both, the object hoped for and the hope inspired by it.³² He defines hope as action, and transforming the present, as forward looking and forward moving. The reason why hope is so important and should be in the very center of Christianity is because Christian faith is based on the raising of the crucified Christ and basically lives from it. This, on the other hand, points to the promises of the universal future of Christ. Together with the understanding of hope, Moltmann shifts eschatology back to the heart of Christianity. Eschatology cannot remain as only one of the doctrines of Christianity, he says, since it is a part of all Christian proclamation, of every Christian existence and of the whole Church.³³

³⁰Roger Haight, Jesus Symbol of God (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 318.

³¹Ibid., 320.

³²Moltmann, Theology of Hope, 16.

³³Ibid.

The Problem of Future

The problem Moltmann addresses is the problem of the future. Along with hopes and promises, which all stand in relation to the future, nobody can really say anything definite, since future means speculation and talking about something that is not yet. Christian eschatology announces the power of history over the future. For there is only one future and that is Jesus Christ's future which is promised and hoped for. What is very important in Moltmann's view is that present experience and hope must stand in contradiction to each other in Christian eschatology.

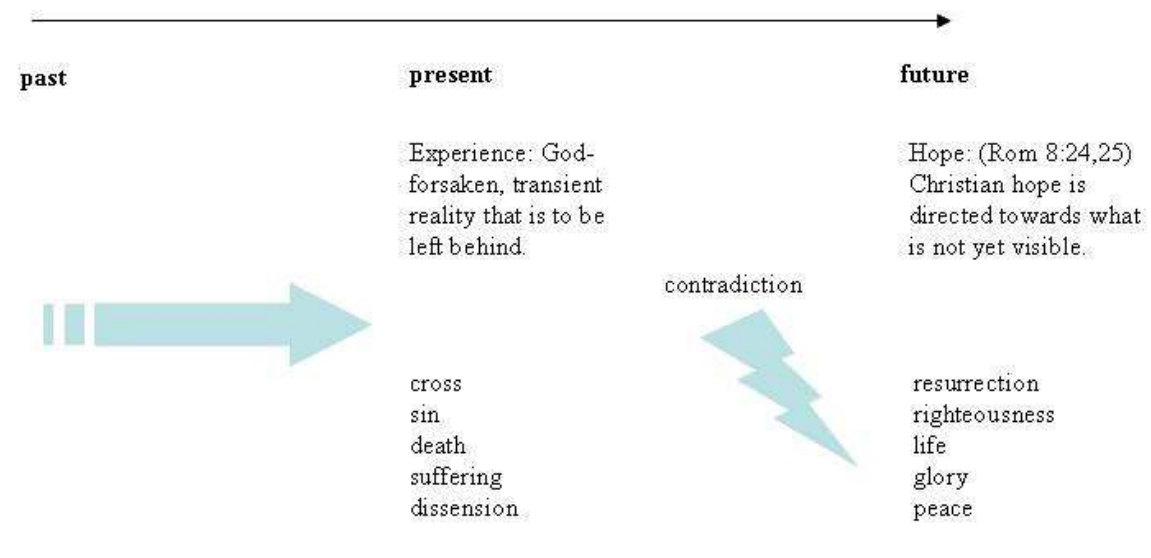


Figure 2: Experience and Hope

And within this contradiction, hope has to prove its power over experience.³⁴ Furthermore, hope is so essential, that if it is taken away, faith goes with it. Because faith contains promises by God, and hope is the expectation of these promises Moltmann draws the following comparison/relationship between hope and faith:

³⁴ Ibid., 18-19.

Faith	Hope
Believes God to be true	Truth shall be manifested
He is our Father	He will ever show himself to be a Father toward us
Eternal life has been given to us	Eternal life will sometime reveal

Faith is the foundation upon which hope rests; hope nourishes and sustains faith.

Figure 3: The interrelation of faith and hope

As one can clearly see, there is a deep connection between faith and hope.

Moltmann makes this very clear:

... Thus, in the Christian life faith has the priority, but hope the primacy. Without faith's knowledge of Christ, hope becomes a utopia and remains hanging in the air. But without hope, faith falls to pieces, becomes a fainthearted and ultimately a dead faith.³⁵

Hope, faith and the knowledge of Christ are deeply connected with each other.

Faith is very important, because it makes one believe in the most important thing in Christianity; the knowledge of Christ. However, hope has to come first for hope nourishes faith. If there is no hope, there cannot be faith. One could compare this with a plant. If faith is the flower, soil is hope. Therefore, maybe one could say, faith is the result of hope, and the knowledge of Christ is the result of faith.

³⁵ Ibid., 20.

Hope and Reality of Life

Moltmann emphasizes that hope for the promised does not mean escapism; neither does it mean resignation from this world. To the contrary, one who hopes will never be able to reconcile himself with the laws and constraints of this earth or with the evil that constantly bears further evil. Here, the meaning of resurrection is hidden: it is “the protest of the divine promise *against* suffering”³⁶ If this argument is turned the other way around, Moltmann claims that hopelessness and being fearful is the biggest sin. The fearful even are mentioned before the unbelievers, idolaters, murders and the rest, states Moltmann and adds: it is not because they do evil; it is because they do not do good; not their misdeeds, but their omissions that accuse them.³⁷

Another problem Moltmann addresses when it comes to hope is her/his mind, which distinguishes her/him from all nature. Because memory binds to the past and hope towards the future, that is not yet. That means, wo/man lives in the past, which is gone or in the future which did not come, hence, one could say, wo/man actually does not live, love and think. Because none of these happens in the present, all of them are either related with the past, or the future. This, however, seems to be contradictory with the whole concept of the Theology of Hope. To solve this problem Moltmann first borrows the idea of “moment” from Kierkegaard’s treatise *The Concept of Dread*. According to this theory, “the present is not a concept of time. The ‘moment’ characterizes the present as a thing that has no past and no future. The moment is an atom of eternity. It is the first reflection of eternity in time, its first attempt as it were to halt time.”³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., 21.

³⁷ Ibid., 23.

³⁸ Ibid., 29.

Ferdinand Ebner, whom Moltmann also cites in his work, explains this concept further. According to Ebner, one could say that wo/man's present is nothing else but the presence of God. Since for the eternal God, past, present and future are one, faith and love become timeless acts which remove us out of time.³⁹

Moltmann himself, however, goes far beyond that. In his view, God, who promises His presence and the kingdom, has a future, indeed. God is a God "with future as His essential nature" and His name is a name of promise that discloses a new future. Hence, Moltmann says:

... He is therefore, as Paul says, the God who raises the dead and calls into being the things that are not (Rom. 4:17)... When we have a God who calls into being the things that are not, then the things that are not yet, that are future, also become 'thinkable' because they can be hoped for.⁴⁰

Having said this, Moltmann does not think that hope drives one away from the present into the future. It helps one to see both at once. Hope should mobilize and become a driving force of faith's thinking, of its knowledge of, and reflections on, human nature, history and society. And within this, it is promise which leads hope further continuously. Additionally, since hope, promise and faith are so deeply interconnected, one cannot see minor hopes which are directed towards visible changes in human life distinct from eschatological hope. This means that the Christian hope is directed towards a new creation of all things by the God of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This kind of hope opens a broader window embracing all things, including also death.

Christian hope is not about hopes of better human freedom, of successful life, of justice and dignity for our fellow humans. It does not allow reconciling these utopian

³⁹ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

ideas with existence because of its own better promises.⁴¹ Referring to the scripture, Moltmann says, "... because it knows that nothing can be 'very good' until 'all things are become new.'"⁴²

Moltmann concludes by saying that theological concepts should not nail down reality to what it is; rather it should work as a tool to show reality's prospects and its future possibilities. Theological concepts, according to Moltmann, are engaged in a process of movement, and call forth practical movement and change.

The next sector will disclose the connection between hope and eschatology.

The role of Hope in Eschatology

Moltmann's aim is to take eschatology from its shadow-existence back to the center of Christianity. Many authors according to Moltmann, such as Johannes Weiss, Albert Schweitzer, Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Althaus, were not able to discover the connection between eschatology and its relation to the present. Johannes Weiss, for example, saw Jesus because of his eschatological message as someone who has nothing more in common with this world for he has one foot already in the next.⁴³ Schweitzer, on the other hand, had, according to Moltmann, no eschatological sense at all. For according to Schweitzer, the two thousand years of delayed parousia⁴⁴ make eschatology impossible today. Although in the view of Moltmann, Karl Barth came quite close by saying that without eschatology there would remain no relationship whatsoever

⁴¹ Hebrew, 8:6: "But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises."

⁴² Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 38. Originally from Weiss, J. *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*, 49f.

⁴⁴ Parousia meaning the second coming; it refers to the Christian and Islamic belief in the return of Jesus the Messiah to the earth.

between Christianity and Christ, he also was not accurate enough. Bultmann, who saw eschatology in existentialist terms, or Paul Althaus, who understood it axiologically⁴⁵; all of them within these years, states Moltmann, became victims of a transcendental eschatology which obscured rather than developed the discovery of Christian eschatology. Yet, in order to achieve a real understanding of the eschatological message, it is “necessary to obtain an openness and understanding of what promise means in the Old and New Testaments, and how... hope that is determined by promise experiences God, truth, history and human nature.”⁴⁶

Revelation in Christianity

Moltmann states that there is a difference between Christianity and the other religions of revelation. In Christianity, he calls this “the God of the promise” whereas all other religions of revelation are “the gods of the epiphanies.”⁴⁷ So there is a difference in conceiving and speaking of the revelation. Although, with the influence of Greek methods, the revelation of God is witnessed in the biblical scriptures as “epiphany of the eternal present,” the revelation of the risen Christ should be viewed as apocalypse of the promised future of the truth. In terms of the Easter appearances, which include the historical remembrance and the resurrection, the historical Jesus should be combined with the destiny of Jesus. That means that within all the qualitative difference of cross and resurrection, Jesus is the same.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The axiological eschatology of Paul Althaus means to experience final, unconditional values here on earth. According to this, eschatology is experienced already in this life. For further information see Paul Althaus, *Die letzten Dinge* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1960).

⁴⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 41.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

According to Moltmann, revelation has nothing to do with illuminating the existing reality of man and the world; it has the character of promise and is therefore of an eschatological kind. “Promise announces the coming of a not yet existing reality from the future of the truth.”⁴⁹ The aim of promise is not to clarify the coming history. In contrast, it is future, which fulfills and satisfies the promise. According to this theory of Moltmann, future is reality. That is why it is spoken of as the “new creation out of nothing” and “resurrection of the dead,” “kingdom” and “righteousness” of God. If interpreted this way, one stops wondering why, since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, nothing has changed, the promise has not been fulfilled and the world is still a place of evil and death. One should not try to explain this world’s situation in light of the promise of God, because promise contradicts existing reality and discloses its own process concerning the future of Christ for man and the world.⁵⁰ Revelation understood as such makes one accept the suffering and sets one out towards the promised future. This, says Moltmann, does not mean that one should take this world’s realities as superfluous. Yet, the future of the risen Lord is present in promise. It is accepted in a hope that is prepared to suffer and at the same time is grasped by the critical mind that reflects on humans and things in hope. A critical mind and a reflection on things in hope are crucial in the view of Moltmann because the revelation in the appearances of the risen Christ is yet “unfinished” and therefore the future of the risen Lord involves also the expectation of a creative act.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 86.

⁵¹ Ibid., 88.

As said before, the revelation of God in the event of promise stands in contradiction with the reality of this world, hence, a critical comparative is needed. If God is not spoken of in relation to wo/man's experience of himself and his world, then, says Moltmann, theology withdraws into a ghetto and the reality wo/man has to deal with is abandoned to godlessness. One could say that Moltmann does not see eschatology as something belonging to the past, but rather one should ask what light it sheds on the humanity of man and the reality of the world. Although the event of promise does not bring him to the heaven of identity, at least it involves him in the tensions and differentiations of hope, of mission and of self-emptying. This means, that s/he does not disregard the negative, but opens her/himself up to pain and patience. In doing so, s/he accepts the form of a servant and through this acceptance attains freedom.

Moltmann asks how one is supposed to experience this world then, for if one believes that there is no possibility of anything new happening and everything is bound to an eternal law, then hope also comes to an end and one stops realizing what one hopes for. Hope can only exist if the belief stays alive that the world can be changed and when it is full of all kinds of possibilities. Moltmann answers this question as follows:

Christian theology has one way in which it can prove its truth by reference to the reality of man and the reality of the world that concerns man – namely by accepting the questionableness of human existence and the questionableness of reality as a whole and taking them up into that eschatological questionableness of human nature and the world which is disclosed by the event of promise. 'Threatened by death' and 'subjected to vanity' – that is the expression of our universal experience of existence of the world. 'In hope' – that is manifestly the way in which Christian theology takes up these questions and directs them to the promised future of God.⁵²

⁵² Ibid., 94.

Here, Moltmann invites people to question the existence of humanity and reality; not to expect and presuppose it to be perfect in every sense but to accept its errors. Once a person is able to accept humanity and reality as such, one will be able to understand the event of promise. After accepting the reality of death of every individual and the world, Christian theology points to the promised future of God.

The next step at this point would be to try to understand the very central idea of the resurrection of Christ and its important role within the idea of Christian eschatology. This shall be examined in the next section.

The Resurrection of Christ and its Importance for Christian Eschatology

Theology of Hope was not enough for Moltmann and needed a complement, namely the remembrance of the crucified Christ. Maybe that is why he wrote The Crucified God.⁵³ In this work, Moltmann talks a lot about the problem of theodicy and how Christians should deal with all the suffering in this world.

Christian Identity

In order to be able to deal with this problem, Christians first need to find their identity. Moltmann states that it is not criticism, social commitment on behalf of the poor and wretched, or rebellion against injustice that makes one a Christian, for all of these are also practiced by others.⁵⁴ When asking the question where the identity of Christian faith lies, Moltmann argues that it does not lie in being a member of a Church, in repeating the formula of the Apostle's Creed, or in having particular experiences of vocation,

⁵³ Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 2f.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

conversion and grace in one's own life; Christian identity for Moltmann is an act of identification with the crucified Christ. Additionally, one has to "accept the proclamation that in him God has identified himself with the godless and those abandoned by God, to whom one belongs oneself."⁵⁵ Identification with the crucified Christ alienates the believer from the religions and ideologies of alienation and the ideologies of revenge. This is why Moltmann states that Christian identification should mean not only to be in solidarity with the oppressed but also to be in solidarity with the misery of the oppressors. If this solidarity is seriously accepted, selflessly and without reserve, says Moltmann, it is in itself an identification with the one who was crucified and "became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich."^{56,57}

Resurrection from the Dead vs. Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Moltmann draws a difference between the resurrection of the dead and the resurrection of Christ. "Resurrection of the dead" means a new life without death and, therefore, cannot be a continuation of this mortal life. The word resurrection is not a further life after death, whether in the idea of an immortal soul or in the idea of the transmigration of souls as many religions speak of, resurrection means the annihilation of death in the victory of the new, eternal life. Life after death, states Moltmann, excludes any idea of a revivification of the dead Jesus.⁵⁸

Moltmann defines the meaning of the "resurrection from the dead" anew in the Christian context. The general belief is that, at the end of times, God will raise the dead

⁵⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁶ II Cor. 8:9 "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

⁵⁷ Moltmann, The Crucified God, 25.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 169f.

and will demonstrate His power over the power of death; however in the Easter proclamation, Jesus has already been raised from the dead. This moves the distant expectation of an uncertain future to a sure hope in a new future of God which has already dawned in that one person Jesus Christ. Moltmann explains this by saying:

...whereas Jewish apocalyptic says that men should wait for 'the resurrection of the dead', Easter faith says that men should believe in 'the resurrection of Jesus from the dead'. ... this one man has been raised before all others and with him the process of the raising of the dead has been set in motion, to the degree that this world of death and the coming world of life are no longer set over against each other like two different periods of the world.⁵⁹

This is an interesting approach to the world, which contains an encouragement not to see this world as simply a place of death. It rather motivates the believers to "live a true life in midst of a false life."⁶⁰ It makes reconciliation possible in the midst of strife; holds up the law of grace in the midst of judgment and builds up creative love in the midst of legalism.⁶¹ Through this powerful explanation, Moltmann draws the connection to a new eschatological understanding of time. If this eschatological consciousness of time does not exist, all the things claimed by the Christian church such as the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation and discipleship in love, become fundamentally impossible.

Reconciliation or Justice?

Moltmann states that universal salvation and double outcome of judgment are both attested biblically. It is difficult or impossible to decide for the one or the other on the ground of scripture.⁶² He does seem to flirt with the idea of universalism, rather than

⁵⁹ Ibid., 171.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Jürgen Moltmann, trans. Margaret Kohl, The Coming of God. Christian Eschatology, 241.

the double outcome of judgment. He asks the question whether to believe in a double outcome would be a symbol of hope and gives the answer: for the unrighteous it is rather a symbol of fear and for the righteous it would be an uncertain hope since no one can say about her/himself for sure that s/he is righteous.

So how should one deal with the question of theodicy then, for instance, with the fact that inhuman men fare so well and their victims fare so badly? Since there is apparently injustice going on in this world, should this injustice not be abrogated by God, if not here, then in the hereafter? Moltmann deals with this question by asking his reader not to only think about why this one man has been raised before all the others but also to ask the question *who* this one man was. According to his people's understanding of the law, states Moltmann, Jesus was a "blasphemer" and was crucified by the Romans as a "rebel." He died dreadfully with every sign of being abandoned by his God and Father. Accordingly, Moltmann states, that "God raised this dishonored man in his coming righteousness and, therefore, in this crucified figure he manifests his true righteousness, the right of the unconditional grace which makes righteous the unrighteous and those without rights."⁶³ This resurrection hope of Christian faith is no longer an uncertain final judgment but rather unequivocally a "joyful hope."

This explanation, however, would raise the question, how one can see Jesus, as being understood by the Romans as a dishonored man and rebel and ultimately being put to death by Pontius Pilate, equal to an oppressor and despot, who punishes and gasses his fellow men cruelly? Should there not be a difference between a righteous man, who is understood by others to be unrighteous, and a really unrighteous person? Would it be fair

⁶³ Moltmann, The Crucified God, 176.

to take the apparent “dishonor” and “rebel” of Jesus as a justification of a universalism of God? In any case, Moltmann states that considering the situation of Jesus, righteousness no longer means the rewarding of the righteous with eternal life and the punishing of the unrighteous with eternal condemnation, but the law of grace for unrighteous and self-righteous alike.⁶⁴

As said in the beginning, since both double outcome and universalism are based on scripture and if one believes that there should be no contradiction in scripture, then states Moltmann, one can try to resolve the contradiction in the sense of the one side or the other. One could for example say that there is indeed damnation; but it is not eternal. It is merely a purifying fire – a corrective punishment.⁶⁵ Furthermore, one could say that God certainly wants all human beings to be helped, but the question would be whether they all really want themselves to be helped? “God does not save human beings by overpowering them but by convincing them.”⁶⁶

To sum up, one could say that on one side, God is so dependent on mutuality that He respects the free decision of human beings, their faith and their unfaith, too, and gives them in the Last Judgment whatever they deserved; and on the other hand, universal salvation does not take the decision of faith as seriously as God does and instead stresses the all-embracing totality of divine salvation. This brings the whole question of double outcome versus universalism down to the relationship between divine and human

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Mark 9:49 “Everyone will be salted with fire.”

⁶⁶ Moltmann, The Coming of God, 244.

decision. Universalism, states Moltmann, bears a tremendous confidence in God whereas double outcome of judgment stands for self-confidence on the part of human beings.⁶⁷

Having said all of this, how does such a belief influence the personal and social life of the individual? This will be examined more closely in the next section.

The Impact of Eschatology on one's Personal and Social life

One of the ways, Moltmann examines the importance of Christianity within social life, is in terms of “co-humanity.” The beginning of the industrial revolution and the individualism within communities; as well as the definition of society as artificial, arbitrary, organized arrangement between man for practical and businesslike purposes, has pushed the understanding of community to the background. Community has been defined as idyllic village conditions of pre-modern times.⁶⁸ Moltmann borrows the definition of industrial society from Hans Freyer, who states that industrial society merely rests on the calculation of matter and forces, is based on material values, work quotas, commercial media and mass needs. Freyer also says that the people are the antagonist of industrial society.

Moltmann claims that in the circle of friends, intimate colleagues, neighbors and children, at home, in the choral society and local community wo/man is able to be her/himself; and amongst those little groups the church as a congregation can carry out its function as a place of refuge of the inner life, away from the “soulless” world of affairs.⁶⁹

This would be a place where living relationship between humans would not be

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Moltmann, Theology of Hope, 317.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 320.

challenged and life would be carried on in freedom; however, says Moltmann, this kind of institution would not alter the reality of the human in “society.” In this case, the church would be seen as something “unworldly” and would not be able to become a real partner for the social institutions.

If Christianity has, in the new social conditions, lost its certainty, then it has to consider again why it exists and what its aim is, states Moltmann. For the Church lives by the word of God and the word of God points beyond itself, to future promised events. The proclamations announce the future of truth which one can have only by “confidently waiting for it and wholeheartedly seeking it.”⁷⁰ Christ’s mission which is followed by the Church, and which means being in service of the world, is not carried out within the horizon of expectation provided by the social roles which society concedes to the Church, but within its own horizon of eschatological expectation of the coming Kingdom of God. For this reason, states Moltmann,

...The Church takes up the society with which it lives into its own horizon of expectation of the eschatological fulfillment of justice, life, humanity and sociability, and communicates in its own decisions in history its openness and readiness for the future and its elasticity towards it.⁷¹

Salvation has been understood mostly as the salvation of the soul, individual rescue from the evil world and comfort for the troubled conscience. Too little consideration has been given to salvation understood as the realization of the eschatological hope of justice, the humanizing of man, the socializing of humanity and

⁷⁰ Ibid., 326.

⁷¹ Ibid., 328.

peace for all creation.⁷² This way of thinking is essential, states Moltmann, in order for the society to gain new impulses to shape people's lives in all different areas.

Moltmann concludes by emphasizing that the hope of resurrection must bring a new understanding of the world. As it is stated in idealism, this world is not a heaven of self-realization; neither is it, as in romanticist writings, a hell of self-estrangement. This world, Moltmann points out, is not finished yet and is understood as engaged in history. It is a world of possibilities where one can still serve the future, promised truth and righteousness and peace.

⁷² Ibid., 329.

CHAPTER III

SAID NURSI'S VIEW OF ESCHATOLOGY

Cry not out at misfortune, O wretch, come, trust in God!
For know that crying out compounds the misfortune and is a great error.

* * *

Find misfortune's Sender, and know it is a gift within gift, and pleasure.
So leave crying out and offer thanks; like the nightingale, smile through your tears!

* * *

If you find Him not, know the world is all pain within pain, transience and loss.
So why lament at a small misfortune while upon you is a world full of woe?
Come trust in God!

* * *

Trust in God! Laugh in misfortune's face; it too will laugh.
As it laughs, it will diminish; it will be changed and transformed.

* * *

Know, O arrogant one, happiness in this world is in abandoning it.
To know God is enough. Abandon the world; all things will be for you.

* * *

To be arrogant is total loss; whatever you do, all things will be against you.
So both states demand abandoning the world here.

* * *

Abandoning the world is to regard it as God's property, with His permission,
in His Name...
If you want to do trade, it lies in making this fleeting life eternal.

* * *

If you seek yourself, it is both rotten and without foundation.
If you seek the world outside, the stamp of ephemerality is upon it.

* * *

That means there is no value in taking it; the goods in this market are all rotten.
So pass on... the sound goods are all lined up beyond it...

Short Biography on Said Nursi

Said Nursi (1877 - 1960) was born in the village Nurs, in Bitlis, one of the Eastern Provinces of the Ottoman Empire, which is today a city in eastern Turkey. He was the son of a farmer, both parents were devout Muslims. He started with his studies in 1886 and studied in a series of schools (*medreses*). In contrast to other religious scholars of his time, Nursi studied physical and mathematical sciences, which he concluded with a study in philosophy. He believed strongly that Islamic Theology (*kalam*) could be renewed and could successfully answer the attacks the Qur'an and Islam were subject to, but only through bringing together different educational traditions.⁷³ In a remarkably short time, he was aware of many religious and modern sciences in such a way that he was able to compete with very important savants (*ulama*) at that time. He became a teacher and educational reformer. What makes the figure of Said Nursi so important is the fact that he lived through the time of constitutionalism. During this period he defined and explained the importance of freedom in Eastern Turkey to the people, tribes and religious scholars to make them understand constitutionalism, emphasizing their conformity with the Islamic Shari'ah and the importance of building bridges with the folk. He began to work as a mediator in tribal disputes and traveled among the tribes as a person of religion.

Nursi was deeply involved in public life, and put forward his ideas regarding educational reform, unity, freedom and so on in newspaper articles. He was active in the Ittihad-i Muhammedi (Muhammadan union or society for Muslim Unity).⁷⁴

⁷³Sukran Vahide, "A Chronology of Said Nursi's Life," in Islam at the Crossroads, ed. Ibrahim Abu Rabi (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), xvii.

⁷⁴ Ibid., xviii.

Nursi served as a commander in the military on behalf of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, and during his fight at the front against the Russians he wrote a commentary on the Qur'an called Signs of Miraculousness (*Isharat al-I'jaz*). This was only one of the many commentaries and books he would write in the following years. After spending two years as a prisoner of war in Russia he escaped and came back to Istanbul. In 1922, after repeated invitations from the leaders of the new centre of government, Nursi finally left Istanbul for Ankara. He turned down the offer of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to work in the government of the new Republic of Turkey. In 1925 the Shaykh Said Revolt took place. Although Nursi was invited to join this rebellion against the Ankara government, he strongly advised its leaders to give it up. Nevertheless he was also sent into exile in western Anatolia for the next twenty-five years. During this period Nursi started devoting himself to expounding the Qur'an and writing the *Risale-i Nur* (henceforth referred to as *Risale*), a work of six thousand pages.

It is also important to note what kind of thought influenced Nursi. He belonged to the scholarly tradition and was firmly grounded in classical Islamic scholarship. Despite some views that he might have been largely influenced by and attracted to Sufism, because of the Sufi environment he grew up in, Sukran Vahide states that there is no evidence of its influence in the works of the first period of his life. This, however, does not mean that he did not find guidance from Sufi masters. He attended medreses directed by ulama and Sufi shaykhs during his childhood, the majority of whom were members of the Naqshibandi (Khalidi) order; however, he never joined any of those orders. Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (1563-1624), a Sufi master, was instrumental in his eventual finding

guidance. Nevertheless, all of this did not lead him to Sufism but rather to the Qur'an.⁷⁵

Nursi himself states his standpoint, which is also cited and translated by Sukran Vahide, in the following way:

Through their good works, worship, spiritual journeying, and asceticism, the people of sainthood observed reality and the truths of belief from behind veils. The Risale however has opened up a way to reality within knowledge (*'ilm*) in place of worship; it has opened up a way to the essence of reality through logical proofs and scholarly arguments in place of spiritual journeying and recitations; it has opened up a direct way of 'grater sainthood' within the sciences of *kalam* and '*aqida* and *usul al-din* in place of the sciences of Sufism and the *tariqa* and thus it prevails over the misguided philosophical currents that have defeated the *tariqa* and Sufi movements of this century.⁷⁶

There are some major cornerstones that should be mentioned within the life of Said Nursi. The first cornerstone is his eagerness for reform in *medreses*. He was unsatisfied with the education system and developed new ideas, such as bringing together modern secular schools, religious schools and Sufi *tekkes*, which was a unique idea at that time.⁷⁷ Another turning point in his life happened when he learned from a newspaper that "the British in the person of Gladstone had declared open war on the Qur'an as the chief obstacle to their imperialist ideas."⁷⁸ This was the moment when he decided to take the miraculousness of the Qur'an as his guide and teacher and dedicate his life to its service. His inner journey and spiritual search was set off through his contemplation of death and the overwhelming realization of his own age.

The longest chapter Nursi has written on Life after Death can be found in the Tenth Word of The Words, which is the first treatise that he wrote in the spring of 1926.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 2-4.

⁷⁶ Said Nursi, "Emirdag Lahikasi" in Risale-i Nur Kulliyati vol.2 (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Publications, 1996), 1715-1716.

⁷⁷ Abu-Rabi', Islam at the Crossroads, 7-8.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 5.

This chapter was obviously very important for Nursi, since he refers to this one in so many places in his works – much more than to any other chapter. One can find chapters about life after death in Isharat al-I'caz, the *Twenty-Ninth Word*, and the *Seventh Topic of the Eleventh Ray*, written in Denizli Prison in 1944-1945.

Said Nursi's method

In his works, Nursi uses certain methods to explain verses of the Qur'an in a way that it can be understood by people of various educational levels. His target is neither the 'elite' or the academics, nor is it only the lay people.

First of all, what can be seen throughout his works is that he sees the universe as a book. He uses this metaphor very often and one has to keep this constantly in mind while reading the Risale. The universe needs to be "read" and understood as one of the three evidences of God's existence;⁷⁹ the other two being the Qur'an and the Messenger sent by God. Adopting this approach, one will be able to regard beings for the meaning they signify (*mana-yi harfi*), which also can transform the physical sciences into knowledge of God, and impel them towards their true goal.⁸⁰

Another method Nursi uses in his Risale is the method of allegory and the explanation of unclear and unfamiliar truths in an easily accessible manner. This approach of allegorical comparisons (*kiyas-i temsili*) is essentially Qur'anic, since the Qur'an uses a similar way of communication. Nursi explains this method as follows:

So, the stories or parables in the Words... are sorts of allusions. The truths at the end of the stories are extremely correct, extremely true and conformable to reality; they are the allusive meanings of the stories. Their essential meanings are comparisons that

⁷⁹Said Nursi, Risale-i Nur Kulliyati, vol.1 (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Publications, 1996), 91.

⁸⁰Abu-Rabi', Islam at the Crossroads, 26.

bring distant objects close like a telescope and however they may be it does not damage their veracity and truthfulness. Moreover, all those stories are comparisons or parables. Purely to enable people in general to understand, what is properly communicated without words is put into words, and immaterial and abstract matters are represented in material form.⁸¹

Just as in many places in the Risale, Nursi uses this way of allegory also for the “ten proofs of the resurrection of the dead that are based on such matters as the order in the universe, the wisdom and purposes followed in beings, and the absence of futility and absence of waste.”⁸²

Lastly, what can also be stated here as one of the methods of Nursi is the type of reflective thought (*tefekkur*), which is based on the divine names and a form of deductive reasoning. Through reflective thought one observes the universe and tries to read the divine marks on every single creation.

In the next chapters we shall try to explain how Nursi understands death; how he tries to come up with evidences for the existence of a Life after Death; what kind of evidence he uses; whether or not he thinks that eschatology is merely a matter of future and an incident yet to come; and how the belief in a hereafter may influence the society at large.

The meaning of Death

Nursi talks about death from different point of view which will be elaborated here. For him, death is mercy and bounty. It is not contradictory to the two names of God, namely “The Compassionate” (*al-Rahman*) and the “Giver of Life” (*al-Muhyi*). Death is

⁸¹Said Nursi, *The Words* (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 1998), 644.

⁸²Abu-Rabi', *Islam at the Crossroads*, 16.

just a “changing of place” (*tebdil-i mekan*) wherein the grave should not be seen as a dark well, but rather as a door to enlightened worlds (*alem*). Nursi describes death as “discharge from service” and “alteration of the body.” Death is an evidence for the oneness of God (*tawhid*) and His eternity (*sermediyyet*).

These points will be discussed further in the following paragraphs.

Death being a Mercy on Humankind

Nursi explains the reason of death as a mercy in several places of his works. Mostly using the type of reflective thought (*tefekkur*), as mentioned before, he observed the flowers and the beauty of the spring. All of a sudden, he felt that although his heart wanted to depart to the hereafter to see the relatives and friends, of whom ninety percent were waiting there, his “self” (*nefs*) objected to this idea. For Nursi, the light of belief (*iman*) showed to this objection the real face of the soil. The soil as the material source of life, beauty and mercy, is the veil of an infinite mercy and nothing that enters it is in vain. In fact, it is even better and more worthy of desire to seek refuge under the protective soil and to watch the real and infinite spiritual flowers from there.⁸³ At some other place, Nursi elaborates on this idea of soil following the example of the holy Qur’an, which repeats over and over the resurrection of earth and soil. Just as earth is the heart of this realm, the soil is the heart of earth. The closest way toward the purpose of man (namely God) is through modesty and humbleness, represented by the soil. One could maybe even say that the soil is a much shorter way towards God, than the highest heavens would be. This is because it is soil which is the best mirror of God’s Power, Majesty and the most appropriate for His divine names “the Living” and “the Giver of Life.” Hence, states

⁸³ Nursi, Risale-i Nur Kulliyati, vol.2, 178.

Nursi, Oh Friend, do not be afraid of the soil and of altering to soil, of the grave and of lying in it!⁸⁴

When Nursi talks about life after death in his main treatise, the *Tenth Word*, he takes the following verse of the Qur'an as base: "Behold, then, the marks of Allah's Mercy, how he revives the earth after it was dead. He, indeed, is the One Who revives the dead and He has power over everything."⁸⁵ Ahmet Nazli states in his article on Nursi's understanding of Life after Death, that in this verse, God shows us that the resurrection of creation on this earth is the result of His Mercy. He does this day by day, in front of our eyes. In fact, the reality of death and resurrection on this earth is not God's finite Mercy. It is just a trace of it. We can say that the place of His direct, real and unveiled Mercy is not this earth, but is going to be the hereafter.⁸⁶

Death being considered as bounty from God

The verse "He Who created death and life so as to test you as to whoever of you is fairer in action. He is the All-Mighty, the All-Forgiving"⁸⁷ indicates in the Qur'an that death also is created just like life, and that it is even a bounty. Whereas outwardly death is dissolution, non-existence, decay, the extinction of life, the annihilator of pleasures – so how can it be created and a bounty? Nursi's answer to this question is that just as life is created and determined, death and the departure from this life also is through a creation and determined, through a wise and purposeful direction. In order to bring this reality closer to the mind of the reader, he uses the allegory of a plant. For the apparent decay

⁸⁴ Ibid., 1366.

⁸⁵ Qur'an, 30:50.

⁸⁶ Ahmet Nazli, "Görüntü ve Gerçek," <<http://www.karakalem.net/?article=261>>, (cited 14 Feb 2008).

⁸⁷ Qur'an, 67:2.

and dissolution of seeds and grains under the soil turn out to be life of new shoots. In other words, the death of a seed is the beginning of life for the shoot and this shows that this death is created well-ordered just as is life. After giving several other examples, he compares the death of a plant – the lowest level of life – with the death of a human – the highest level of life. He concludes that if the death of a plant is created and well-ordered, so must be the death of humans.

Regarding the second part of the question, how death can be a bounty, Nursi counts four reasons. The first reason is because death frees man from the duties and obligations of life, which become burdensome and it unites one with the ninety-nine out of hundred friends who are already in the intermediate realm. Secondly, Nursi states, it releases one from the narrow and turbulent prison of this world and unites one with the mercy of the Eternal Beloved One. Thirdly, he states the numerous factors which make life a burden, like old age, and what a calamity life can be and what a bounty death. Fourthly, Nursi compares death with sleep saying that death is like the older brother of sleep. Just as sleep can be a comfort and rest for a sick person, so is death a bounty and mercy for those struck by disaster.⁸⁸

Death does not contradict the Compassion of God

Death might be seen as contradictory to the Compassionate God, the Giver of Life, especially within Christianity. Nursi tries to show that although apparently it seems to contradict, in fact this is not true on the basis of the following verse of the Qur'an: "... and My Mercy encompasses all things..."⁸⁹ Nursi's aim is to make the reader understand

⁸⁸Said Nursi, The Letters, trans. Sukran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2001), 24-25.

⁸⁹ Qur'an, 7:156.

that this world is like a prison compared to the hereafter and that this world has two faces in which it has to be observed. God turns the eyes of humans to the second face of this world in order to prepare them for death. With the season of old age God shows wo/man the transience and decline of all beautiful things in this world in order to establish the desire for a permanent beloved in place of the transient. Furthermore, God increases the longing for all the beloved friends and kindred who already passed away. This awakens, according to Nursi, a feeling of joy. In many different ways, God makes wo/man realize the infinite weakness and impotence in oneself and makes them wish to rest and sincerely wish to go to another world. Through listening to the Qur'an, humans understand that to love the world and attachment to it is quite meaningless. This dis-attachment, the way Nursi understands it, however, is different from the understanding of e.g. Buddhism.

For him, the universe is a book of the Eternally Besought One. Every creation within this universe does not point to itself, but to the One Who is manifest in them with His attributes and divine Names. Nursi asks the reader to learn and grasp its meaning and not to hang around its decorations. The world consists of continuously passing mirrors – hence the aim of humans should be to love the One they signify and to cease the attachment for the fragments of glass which is doomed to be broken and to perish. He invites the reader to see this world as a temporary exhibition. “Pay attention not to its apparent, ugly face,” says Nursi, “but to its hidden, beautiful face which looks to the Eternal All-Beautiful One. Go for a pleasant and beneficial promenade, then return, and do not weep like a silly child at the disappearance of scenes displaying fine views and showing beautiful things, and do not be anxious!”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Nursi, The Words, 220-221.

Death is a pointer to God's Existence and Oneness (*Tawhid*)

On the basis of another verse in the Qur'an, namely "Do not call, besides God, upon any other god. There is no god but He. Everything will perish save His Face. His is the Judgment, and unto Him you shall all be returned,"⁹¹ Nursi aims to prove the existence and *tawhid* of God. It might be possible that Nursi borrowed this idea from al-Ghazali's *Durra*, which Smith and Haddad talk about in The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection. There it is stated that death is necessary for God's *tawhid* to be manifested; and, a resurrection is necessary for His Justice and Mercy to be demonstrated.⁹² Nursi's approach to explaining this idea is in the same way as he delivers proofs of God's existence through creation and life, especially in the *Twenty-Second Word*; he claims that death and the demise of creation is an evidence of God's existence and *tawhid*, as well. For in the *Twenty-Second Word*, after referring the reader's attention to the world from various different views, such as the seeds; the valleys; the trees with their fruits; humans; the soil in spring and fall; the sun; the nutrition of the weak; the mutual support of every creation; the mines and minerals; the sun and the moon; and so on, he states:

...And so, my friend! There is a sign of oneness, a stamp of unity, in this country, that is, this magnificent palace. For while being the same, certain things are all-encompassing. And while being numerous, some display a unity or similarity, since they resemble one another and are found everywhere. As for unity, it shows One of Unity. That means that its maker, owner, lord, and fashioner has to be one and the same.⁹³

⁹¹ Qur'an, 28:88.

⁹² Smith; Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, 72.

⁹³ Nursi, The Words, 294.

Just as one can see the stamp of God as the Creator on one single flower, all flowers of a big garden carry God's stamp of Creation, as well. This is the difference of God being *Ehad (Ehadiyyah)* and God being *Vahid (Vahidiyyah)*. Both mean the Oneness of God but they refer to different aspects of creation; and all in all creation refers to the *tawhid* of God.

A few chapters further, Nursi states that just as the living face of the earth, their death also bears witness to the eternity and unity of an Ever-Living and Self-Subsistent One. In wintertime, for instance, when the white snow has covered everything and the earth appears to be dead, one's attention is driven away from all the causes and reasons, and one's gaze moves behind the corpse of that departing spring. Because, when it departs, spring takes with it all the apparent causes and shows that it is tied together with those causes, and can be seen in a broader view. So, each time when winter arrives, one turns her/his eyes to the coming spring, without doubting its approach. Looking from a much wider perspective, the constant resurrection of creation after winter shows the necessary existence, unity, everlastingness and eternity of an All-Glorious Maker, an All-Powerful One, and an Ever-Living Eternal One.⁹⁴

Nursi's understanding of death is going to be helpful to grasp some of the aspects he states about Life after Death. This will be discussed in the coming chapter.

Evidence of a Life after Death

In the *Tenth Word*, Nursi elaborates on one of the main doctrines in Islam: Life after Death. As mentioned before, one third of the Qur'an talks about the hereafter. Since

⁹⁴ Ibid., 708.

the works of Nursi are a Qur'anic exegesis, they also emphasize this theme. In many places, Nursi refers to the hereafter, such as the *Twenty-Fifth*, *Twenty-Ninth*, and *Thirty-Third Word*. He always points out that it should not be seen as something to come in the far-future, but rather as something that happens in the midst of our lives. This will be more elaborated in the coming chapter. Here, the evidences of Life after Death shall be discussed. Again, Nursi uses the method of allegory in order to bring the truth closer to the readers mind. He claims to prove in twelve points that there is a Life after Death and that there is going to be a place of reward as well as a place of punishment. Hereby he compares continuously what is missing or unfulfilled in this life and is going to be fulfilled, or so to say “completed,” in the next life. With the influence of Said Nursi's theology, Ahmet Nazli defines eschatology in one sentence as follows: “eschatology is an arena where appearances are transformed into reality.”⁹⁵

Explanation of Life after Death through the Attributes of God

In each of these twelve points, Nursi counts the numerous Attributes of God and what the outcome of those should be. One is able to understand that in view of the fact that, all of those Attributes of God are infinite, the outcome in this world is a very small part of what is possible. For this reason, Nursi argues, there must be some other place where these Attributes can find their maximal outcome. To clarify this point, just two examples will be given. Nursi says:

...The ruler of this kingdom must possess, then, great generosity and all-embracing compassion, as well as, at the same time, great dignity, exalted awesomeness and honour. Now generosity requires liberality; compassion cannot dispense with beneficence; and awesomeness and honour make it imperative that the discourteous be chastised. But not even a thousandth part of what that generosity and awesomeness

⁹⁵ Nazli, “Görüntü ve Gerçek,” <<http://www.karakalem.net/?article=261>> (cited 23 Feb 2008).

require is to be seen in this realm. The oppressor retains his power, and the oppressed, his humiliation, as they both depart and migrate from this realm. Their affairs are, then, left to the same Supreme Tribunal of which we speak.⁹⁶

As one can clearly see, Nursi's starting point is the attributes of God. For Nursi, these attributes exist in the essence of God and are therefore infinite. So Nursi concludes from this, that one who possesses these attributes requires things to be in a certain way. If it is not, there must be some other place, where these conditions are fulfilled.

In the *Third Aspect*, Nursi states:

...For eternal beauty can never be content with a transient admirer; moreover, an admirer destined to perish without hope of return will find his love turning to enmity whenever he imagines his death, and his admiration and respect will yield to contempt. It is in man's nature to hate the unknown and the unaccustomed. Now everyone leaves the hospice of this realm very quickly and vanishes, having seen only a light or a shadow of the perfection and beauty for no more than a moment, without in any way being satiated. Hence, it is necessary that he should go towards an eternal realm where he will contemplate the Divine beauty and perfection.⁹⁷

The idea is that only something infinite can stand in front of some other infinite. Just as the infinite love that one has in her/his heart will never be satisfied by loving finite things - for they will not stay with her/him but leave; so can an eternal beauty like the Most Beautiful never be content with a transient admirer. This shows that there must be a place where the two infinities come together, infinite love with the infinite beloved and infinite beauties with infinite admirers and so on. Following the same method, Nursi illustrates many other aspects.

⁹⁶ Nursi, *The Words*, 61.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

Explanation of Life after Death through the Names of God

After the Attributes, he goes on to the Names of God. According to this idea, every name of God refers to the hereafter and is an evidence for this. With the terms of generosity, mercy, wisdom and justice, giving and beauty, tenderness and servitude of Muhammed (pbuh), majesty and infinity, memorization and guardianship, promise, vivification, putting to death, grace, humanness, prophethood and reduction Nursi opens the gates to the Names the Lord (*al-Rab*), the Bountiful (*al-Karim*), the Merciful (*al-Rahim*), the Judge (*al-Hakim*), the Just (*al-Adl*), the very Generous (*al-Jevvad*), the Beautiful (*al-Jamil*), the Responsive (*al-Mujib*), the Beneficent (*al-Jalil*), the Everlasting (*al-Baqi*), the Preserver (*al-Hafiz*), the Watcher (*al-Raqib*), the Self-Subsisting (*al-Qayyum*), the Restorer (*al-Muhyi*), the Destroyer (*al-Mumit*), the Truth (*al-Haqq*) of God.⁹⁸ To him, all these names, and the fact that we have a glimpse of all of these in this world, notify us that there is going to be a hereafter. Hence, Ahmet Naz states in his article, God created this world in order to show and to explain to wo/man what the hereafter is like. One can find examples of the hereafter in this life, and if one is eager to understand the hereafter, s/he should read this universe carefully.⁹⁹

In another book, Nursi summarizes the evidences for a Life after Death. Since there is nothing futile and no waste in creation, the repeated resurrection in most things (even days and years), humanity's innate disposition and infinite hopes and desires, God's mercy, the Messenger's truthful and explicit statements, and the Qur'an's testimony such as "Although, He created you in stages,"¹⁰⁰ and "...Your Lord is not

⁹⁸ Ibid., 74-102.

⁹⁹ Nazli, "Görüntü ve Gerçek," <<http://www.karakalem.net/?article=261>> (cited 24 Feb 2008).

¹⁰⁰ Qur'an, 71:14.

unjust to His servants”¹⁰¹ are clear evidences for the hereafter. Nursi elaborates these points by stating “ten proofs.” One of those proofs points to God’s Mercy and Compassion. According to Nursi, these two attributes of God necessitate eternal felicity. For what makes humans and the universe mourn is eternal separation, which transforms bounty and mercy into affliction and misfortune. Nursi asks himself and the reader to first consider the finest works of divine mercy, namely affection, compassion and love; then, to consult the own conscience, what it would be like to receive this compassion and love with a state of eternal separation and unending parting. Certainly, one’s conscience, imagination and soul would suffer and this compassion and love, while being the sweetest bounty, would transform into an enormous calamity and trouble.¹⁰²

Belief in a Hereafter and belief in a Resurrection

Nursi understands eschatology as twofold; while one is to believe in a hereafter, the other is to believe that God is capable and will destroy this world and everything and will eventually resurrect and unite all humanity. This means, that belief in a hereafter and belief in the resurrection are two different things. Regarding resurrection, he does not fail to give several examples as well. For instance, does he let wo/man think of the timeframe one lives in. Time, consisting of past, present and future, is like a lane, a page, or a book written by the pen of destiny. Present, from past all the way back to the beginning of creation, consists thereby of occurrences, whereas the future consists of contingencies. Nursi argues, that if those chains of time are compared with each other, the Being who created the past with all its creatures, is also capable of creating the future. The One who

¹⁰¹ Qur’an, 41:46.

¹⁰² Said Nursi, Signs of Miraculousness, trans. Sukran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözlür Publications, 2004), 62-63.

creates today is able to create the day of resurrection; so too, is the One who is capable of creating the spring, able to create resurrection. With Nursi's words

The one who affixes all the worlds of past time to the ribbon of time and displays them there in utmost wisdom and order, is without doubt capable of attaching other beings to the ribbon of the future and displaying them there... the one who cannot create everything cannot create anything, and the one who can fashion one thing, can fashion everything. Also, if the creation of everything is entrusted to a single being, the creation of all things becomes as easy as the creation of a single thing; thus facility arises...¹⁰³

In light of the following verse of the Qur'an "He did not create you or resuscitate you but as a single soul"¹⁰⁴ Nursi aims to prove the resurrection. He does this by expounding four secrets; the mystery of transparency, wherein a transparent particle can receive as much reflection of the sun as a whole ocean; the mystery of order, wherein the overturning of a huge battleship is as easy as a child turning over his toy boat with his finger; the mystery of obedience, wherein one same word is sufficient to cause a vast army to move, just as a commander makes a single infantryman move; and the mystery of equilibrium wherein this balance is so incredibly sensitive that if one would place two walnuts, one on each side, the balance would feel it equally as if one would place two suns, one on each pan. And, it would be the same ease for the power who lifts one sun up to the heavens, as if this same power lifts the walnut. Through these four secrets little and much, small and great, numerous and infinite will be equal in the sign of the possessor of absolute power and He will be able to bring together all wo/man to resurrection with a single blast on the trumpet, just as if they were one person.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Nursi, The Words, 90.

¹⁰⁴ Qur'an 31:28.

¹⁰⁵ Nursi, The Words, 103-104.

Moreover, to explain God's power over all things, and that no weakness can intervene in this power to create resurrection, Nursi makes use of the degrees of things and the definition of everything through its opposite. The degrees of heat are defined through the intervention of cold, or the degree of beauty is determined through the intervention of ugliness; and, one can understand the stages of light through the interference of darkness. However, if something exists of itself, there can be no gradation. God's power belongs to His essence and has absolute perfection, unlike contingent beings. It is, states Nursi, impossible that its opposite which is impotence, should intervene in it. For this reason it is equally easy for the Lord to create spring or a single flower. It is also as easy to resurrect and gather all humans, as it is to resurrect and gather one.¹⁰⁶

As said before, Nursi gives many examples about the evidence of the hereafter as well as the resurrection throughout his works. It would certainly go beyond the scope of this thesis to demonstrate each example. The aim was foremost to exhibit to the reader the method Nursi uses in proving doctrinal matters which are quite difficult to grasp without examples wo/man can relate to. In the following chapter Nursi's view on eschatology as a matter of future will be further discussed.

Eschatology – a matter of future or already at hand?

Eschatology, according to Nursi, is certainly not something that is situated only in the far future. As discussed before, Nursi sees this matter as twofold; wo/man lives in a world of samples which point to the eschaton. It is a matter of past, present, as well as a

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 104.

matter of future. The mortality of every single creation is to remind humankind of eschatology; for wo/man lives in midst of a universe which is in a constant change. Nothing stays as it is; everything either changes, or dies. Those who die are recreated, being neither the same, nor different from¹⁰⁷ the previous creation. Every second, minute, hour, month, and year that passes is being recreated anew. After every night, day follows and every winter is followed by spring. This is a sign that the world, too, will perish, and be followed by another realm which is much more beautiful and complete in every sense; even if it takes a longer time.

Human as a sign for eschatology

Moreover, humanity does not live only in midst of signs of eschatology, s/he is a sign her/himself. If one takes a closer look at one's own abilities and talents, one will discover unlimited potentialities. Infinite hopes are the reason for one's unbounded conceptions and thoughts. The unrestricted desires are the reason for the infinite hopes, which in turn arise from her/his unlimited abilities. "If wo/man was to swallow the past and the future together with the present," states Nursi, "it would not satisfy her/his hopes."¹⁰⁸ Wo/man's perfection is unlimited and her/his pleasures are continuous, and her/his sufferings constant. Whereas, if compared with other species, "their natures are particular, their values individual, their views limited, their perfection restricted, their pleasures instantaneous, and their suffering fleeting."¹⁰⁹ So, the existence of a sort of resurrection of all these other species should be evidence enough for a general resurrection of the human individual. Additionally, since all desires, hopes, abilities and

¹⁰⁷ Nursi, Risale-i Nuri Kulliyati, vol.2, 1280.

¹⁰⁸ Nursi, Signs of Miraculousness, 62.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

potentialities are infinite and unbounded in this limited and restricted world, there must be some other unrestricted realm, where all these hopes and desires can be fulfilled.

The following verse “Although, He created you in stages,”¹¹⁰ according to Nursi, opens a window for us looking onto the resurrection of the dead through examining our own human bodies. For the human body

...passes from stage to stage, from a sperm to a blood-clot, and from that to an embryo, and from that to flesh and bone, and from that to a new creation...for the body renews its clothes every year, and this occurs through dissolution and reassembling. That is to say, the cells are broken down and repaired with a subtle substance prepared by their Maker in accordance with a particular law, and distributed in appropriate amounts to all the organs.¹¹¹

All these and other laws and systems in the human body show a driving force, an intention and wisdom. Therefore, Nursi concludes, whoever contemplates over the first creation will cease to have any doubts over the second.

Nature as a sign for eschatology

Nursi gives numerous examples of eschatology in the midst of our world. He asks the reader not to close her/his eyes, not just to watch, but to see and recognize what is going on with all the creation around us.

He points to the trees whose fruits are recreated every year. If these fruits would have souls, they would be recreated as exactly the same, but the fact that they do not have souls makes their newcomers very close to the previous, however not identical. Nursi especially refers to the mulberry and apricot, which trees are so dry and nevertheless which have such a sweet and pure taste. An All-Powerful, who is able to create such

¹¹⁰ Qur'an, 71:14.

¹¹¹ Nursi, Signs of Miraculousness, 63.

fruits out of a dry tree, is certainly able to create a general resurrection. Moreover, in front of our eyes we see especially among plants and animals that they constantly die and are replaced but other ones. We can tell that this is not a sign of perishing, but a replacement by their counterparts. For a believer, there is no mourning for their decline and suffering for their separation, but a pleasure for the reunion with their counterparts.

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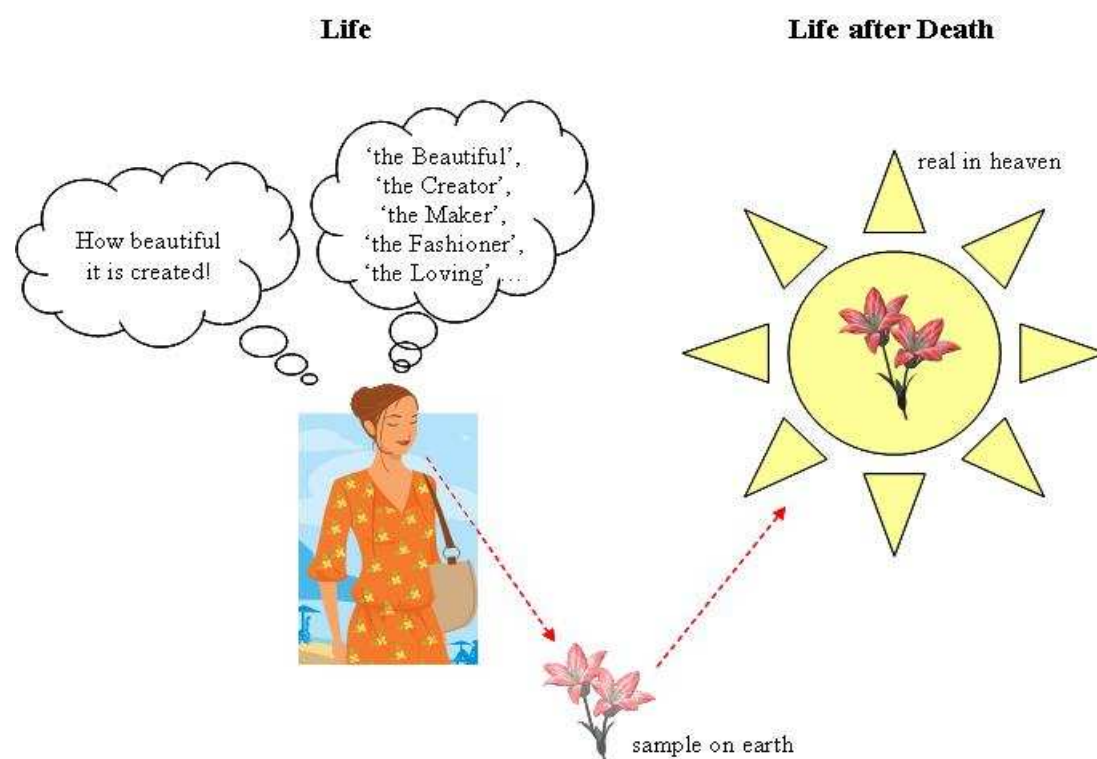


Figure 4: All creation points to the hereafter

That the resurrection is very easy for the Creator is stated by God himself as follows: “Were We wearied by the first creation? No, they are in doubt regarding a new

¹¹² Nursi, Risale-i Nur Kulliyati, vol.2, 1323.

creation.”¹¹³ For Nursi, this verse means that although they believe and bear witness for the first creation, they do see the second creation, which is easier, far away/not doable.

As mentioned before, the *Risale-i Nur* is full of examples of the resurrection in front of our eyes, day by day. What has been said so far can be summarized as follows: all the names of God, through their manifestations in this world, self-evidently necessitate an everlasting realm. God, the All-Wise and the pre-Eternal Power does not allow anything to be vain and purposeless. Every year in spring, everything arises to life with the command of “Be!” and it is. This command not only brings incalculable corpses of the dead trees back to life, it also revivifies three hundred thousand species of plants and animals as thousands of samples of the resurrection of the dead. And for wo/man, whom God created as the most perfect fruit of the universe and its Creator’s most loved creature, who is the most closely concerned with all other creation in the universe; and regarding the fact that wo/man is the one who has intense, unshakeable and constant desires for immortality and who possesses hopes which extend to eternity,¹¹⁴ all this shows that God, being the provider of all the needs even to the smallest needy one, will certainly accept these desires of wo/man as a prayer (prayer of *fitrah*) and will in response to this prayer, create an everlasting, eternal realm and therein satisfy all her/his needs and desires.

Of course it would be unrealistic, as living humans on this earth, just to concentrate on the hereafter and to ignore this life. This is not what God asks people to do. What is expected, though, is to live in this world while being aware of the responsibilities wo/man has towards other human beings, other creatures, the world at

¹¹³ Qur’an, 50:15.

¹¹⁴ Said Nursi, The Flashes Collection, trans. Sukran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 1996), 291.

large and the universe. Keeping up this responsibility, however, seems most possible through the belief in a life after death. What the impact of a belief in the hereafter has on human beings will be analyzed more closely in the next chapter.

The Impact of Eschatology on one's Personal and Social Life

“O you wretched ones! When you journey to the grave do not cry out in despair, ‘Alas! Everything we owned is destroyed, all our efforts wasted; we have left the beautiful broad earth and entered the narrow grave,’ for everything of yours is preserved, all your actions written down, every service you have rendered recorded. One of Glory in Whose hand is all good and Who is able to bring all good to fruition, will reward your service: drawing you to Himself, He will keep you only temporarily under the ground. Later, He will bring you to His presence. What happiness for those of you who have completed their service and duty; your labour is finished, you are going to ease and mercy! Service and toil are over, you are going to receive your wage!”¹¹⁵

Nursi’s approach to the benefits of the belief in a hereafter is manifold. He looks at the benefits of it for children, youth, elderly, the family and social life.

The Impact of Eschatology on Children

Children are weak and delicate beings, Nursi says, for whom death appears to be grievous and frightening; however, with the thought of paradise, they find hope in their vulnerable spirits which are more likely to weep. Out of experience one might say, that the belief in another life, especially if they have been told many stories about the beauty of paradise, will help children to overcome the sorrow of the death of a loved one. This is because their imagination is still fresh, untouched and awake and they are able to picture

¹¹⁵ Nursi, The Letters, 269.

paradise in its full beauty. When our neighbor's youngest child died and the family was in a deep grief and everyone was crying, I started talking to the older sister of the dead child, Rumeysa, who was quite little herself. She said "Omar died and when you die you become a bird and fly into paradise. He is very well and happy there now and sometime later when I die, I shall see him there and shall play with him." Even the heartache around her did not change her mind of her brother being good and living in paradise. If this belief would not exist, states Nursi, the frequent deaths around the child will destroy all their resistance and morale and their spirits, hearts and minds would weep together with their eyes.¹¹⁶

The Impact of Eschatology on Youth

Interestingly enough, when it comes to youth, Nursi mentions Hellfire, which is brought up in the Risale quite rarely. The belief in a place of punishment and the imagination of Hellfire will bridle the turbulent emotions of youths. It functions as a restraint from aggression, oppression and destruction. At a time when those youths tend to act according to their feelings rather than with their minds, being the most vigorous element of society, reminders of such a place might hold them back from doing evil to themselves and others. Without this fear, says Nursi, "in accordance with the rule "Might is right," in pursuing their desires, those drunken youths would turn the worlds of the wretched weak and powerless into Hell..."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Said Nursi, The Rays Collection, trans. Sukran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2002), 203.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 204.

The Impact of Eschatology on the Elderly

When it comes to the elderly, however, Nursi turns immediately back to the idea of paradise. Talking first about the general importance for the elderly of believing in an eternal life, Nursi associates their spirits with the spirits of children. For the elderly are aware that their lives, which they are firmly attached to, will soon come to an end, and they feel closer to the grave as any other healthy person. Only with hope for an eternal life, can they hold the grievous despair that they feel. For those mothers and fathers, who are in need of harmony and peace of mind and deserve compassion, “will otherwise feel a terrible spiritual turmoil and distress in their hearts, and this world will become a dark prison for them, and life even, grievous torment.”¹¹⁸

The Impact of Eschatology on Family and Social Life

Family is another very important establishment in the eyes of Nursi. For the family is a place of refuge, of worldly happiness and a paradise for humans. In fact, Nursi sees the process of happiness in family as a chain. Happiness within a family is possible through genuine, earnest, and loyal respect and true tender and self-sacrificing compassion. Here is the chain. For Nursi, the source for this genuine respect and tenderness of each other is possible if the members of the family have an everlasting companionship, friendship and togetherness that lasts forever, so to say, if they believe that this togetherness will extend far beyond this world and go on in the hereafter. To believe, that one’s wife, for instance, will accompany one not only in this life, but also in the life to come, makes it easier to keep together even if the beauty of the spouse declines over time. And for the sake of that permanent companionship, they will be devoted and

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 203.

kind to each other. Otherwise, if that companionship was to end eternally after an hour or two, this would lead to superficial, temporary and animal-like feelings, false compassion and artificial respect. For in this case, self-interest and other overpowering emotions would prevail over respect and compassion.¹¹⁹

All these individuals discussed above compose society; therefore, one could say that the situation of society is deeply connected with the belief in a Life after Death/resurrection. In terms of every single individual of a society and her/his need for an eternal realm, one could refer again to Nursi's statements about her/his desires, potentialities and hopes. In order not to repeat those statements, we refer at this point to that particular paragraph within this work. According to Nursi, the matter of hereafter is of such utter importance, that he cries out to the sociologists, politicians and moralists who govern humankind and are concerned with its social and moral questions. "They should be aware of this!" he says and asks: "How do they propose to fill this vacuum? With what can they cure these deep wounds?"¹²⁰

In the eyes of Nursi, there needs to be some constant social teaching, a reminder for societies in order to keep them away from doing evil.¹²¹ The Risale is such a social teaching. As an answer to the question of the prosecution, that the place of religion is the conscience and that it cannot be tied to laws and regulations, Nursi states, that religion does not only consist of belief. Its second half is righteous action. According to Nursi,

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 204.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 205.

¹²¹ Doing evil according to Nursi does not necessarily mean to go and harm someone. One can also do evil by not doing anything/through non-existence. For example, man can do evil to himself, his own soul by abandoning prayer. Nursi describes this as follows: "...Because disbelief, rebellion, and evil are destruction and non-existence. However, vast destruction and innumerable instances of non-existence may result from a single theoretical matter and one instance of non-existence. Through the helmsman of a large ship abandoning his duty, the ship may sink and the labour of all those employed on it go for nothing; all those instances of destruction will result from a single instance of non-existence..." (Nursi, *The Words*, 479).

fear of imprisonment and being detected by the government is not sufficient to hinder those who commit various sins which poison society, like murder, adultery, theft, gambling and drinking. For there would have to be a policeman at every one's house or every individual's side in order for obdurate souls to restrain themselves from those acts. "Whereas, in respect of good deeds and belief," states Nursi finally, "the Risale-i Nur places a permanent immaterial 'prohibitive' next to everyone. It easily saves them from bad deeds by recalling the prison of Hell and Divine wrath."¹²²

¹²² Nursi, The Rays Collection, 310.

CONCLUSION

Moltmann and Nursi are two theologians who have had similar experiences of war and of being prisoners of war. Both saw faith as the cure for a peaceful and spiritually healthy society and both took upon themselves the task of revitalizing and animating faith.

The driving force for these two authors to write on theological matters has been different in form, yet in both cases, striking in its social aspect. Moltmann was deeply affected by his friend's death during the Second World War. The question, why his friend next to him died, and he was still alive, made him think about God and, later on, awakened his interest in religion. Nursi's striking moment maybe was the newspaper article where he read that Gladstone had declared open war on the Qur'an as the major obstacle to their imperialist ideas. At that point he decided to take the miraculousness of the Qur'an as his guide and teacher and dedicate his life to its service.

In the case of both theologians, I left out their political and economic ideas and tried to focus on the eschatological aspect of their works. While comparing the two theologians I tried to stay within the framework of the religiously normative. It is important, however, to keep in mind that religion sets the highest norm to which humanity is asked to aspire. When talking about eschatology, both theologians obviously do not talk about unreachable goals, but try to reconcile the reality wo/man lives in, with what religion asks one to believe/do.

Moltmann's Theology of Hope is tremendously important because it opens the doors of hope for everyone, especially for hedonist and egocentric people. As Moltmann

has extensively written, if hope ceases, with it, faith goes down the hill. One could say that hopelessness is the enemy of faith. Furthermore, Moltmann mentions that someone who hopes will never reconcile himself with the laws and constraints of this earth, or with the evil that constantly bears further evil. He states that trying to escape from this world through hopelessness and fearfulness is the biggest sin.

Throughout his works, Nursi follows the same method of giving hope. And one can easily see the parallels between Moltmann and Nursi in this matter. Fear is mostly seen by other faith traditions as well as by some Muslims as the aspect within Islam which stands continuously in the foreground. If, however, one takes a closer look to the word fear (*khawf*), one could say that it means to comprehend one's own weakness and as a result the feeling of fear in her/his heart in front of some other power or force which one may see, hear or feel.¹²³ In this case fear would be the result of understanding one's own weakness.¹²⁴

¹²³ Turgay Gündüz, Kuran'da Korku Motifi (Istanbul: Dusunce Kitap Evi, 2004), 25; taken from Mawdudi, Tefhim, 447.

¹²⁴ For further information about the subject of fear in the Qur'an, see Gündüz, Kuran'da Korku Motifi.

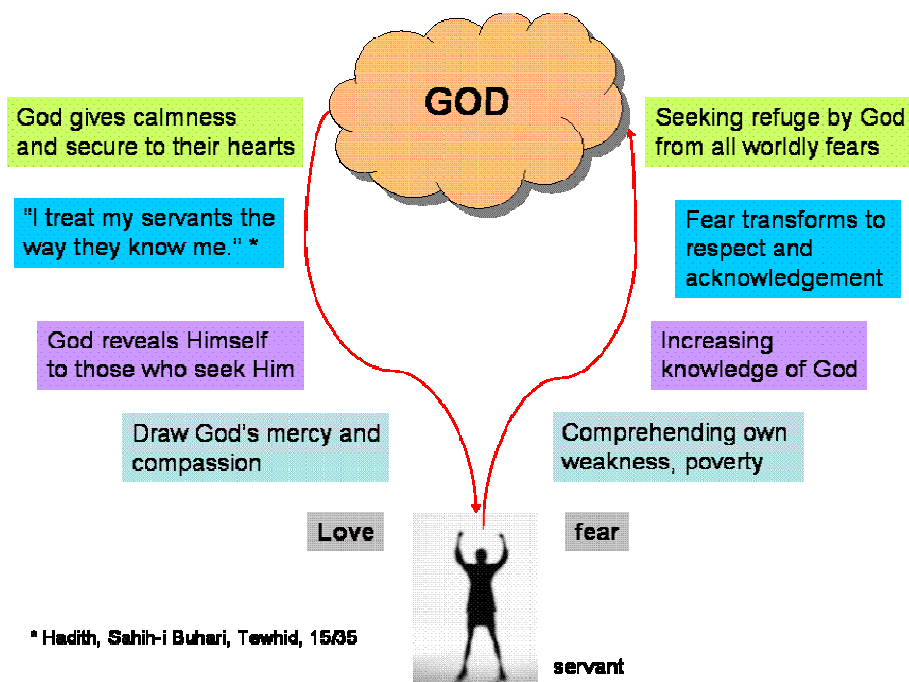


Figure 5: Fear and Love

About love and fear, Nursi says that these are two faculties implemented by God into wo/man's nature. If they are turned towards creatures – in the case of fear and love – it is going to be a grievous affliction in the case of fear, and a calamitous tribulation in the case of love. This is because wo/man will fear those who will neither pity nor accept the pleas of mercy; and s/he will love one who will either not recognize or will depart without bidding farewell. Therefore, states Nursi, one should redirect these two faculties toward God. This is because to fear the Creator means finding a way to His compassionate mercy and taking refuge in it. This shows that there is a supreme pleasure in fearing God. If there is such a great pleasure in fearing God, it is clear what infinite

pleasure it is to love Him.¹²⁵ Both scholars suggest not being fearful and hopeless regarding worldly matters.

Additionally, Moltmann touches several times throughout his works on the issue that God will not turn back from His promise. Nursi also uses this method many times as an evidence for eschatology since God will never cheat and He is the only One who holds up His promises in any case.

One more aspect where the two scholars are quite close to each other is the belief that if God is able to create something that “is not” – then He will be certainly able to create something that “is not yet.” The former indicates a creation out of nothing whereas the latter indicate a “recreation” from something that existed before. While Moltmann describes this matter – based on scripture – as “thinkable;” Nursi uses this concept– also based on scripture – as a certain evidence for the creation of the hereafter.

Hope can only exist if the belief stays alive that the world can be changed and when it is full of all kinds of possibilities, states Moltmann. We have seen in the chapter “Revelation in Christianity” that for Moltmann our universal experience of existence of the world is “threatened by death” and “subject to vanity.” Moltmann sees hope as the answer to these problems who are then directed to the promised future of God. Nursi gives the same attention to the realities of this world; however, he looks at this problem from a different angle. The Preserver (*Al-Hafiz*) is the name of God which plays an important role here. Nothing is wasted; everything that happens on earth is preserved by God. All the deeds of humans, each word coming out of their mouths, every look, anything they listen to, all the tastes and smells... Hence, also the sufferings are

¹²⁵ Nursi, The Words, 367.

preserved and God is All-Knowing and All-Powerful. Actions of individuals to change the world for the better are asked to come out of sincerity (*ikhlas*) and for the sake of God. In front of all these huge disasters and big calamities, the individual often feels helpless and weak. Yet, God asks the individual not to fall into hopelessness, but to trust in God. He asks his servants to believe that everything is preserved and Known by God and that He will judge over people at the end of times.¹²⁶ As we can see in this matter, Moltmann and Nursi both are referring to the promised future of God.

In the section, “Reconciliation or Justice,” Moltmann asks the question how one should deal with theodicy and the fact that inhuman men fare so well and their victims fare so badly. Exactly the same is expressed by Nursi in the chapter “Explanation of Life after Death through the Attributes of God” where he says “The oppressor retains his power, and the oppressed, his humiliation, as they both depart and migrate from this realm.” While Moltmann tries to find the answer to this in Jesus’ crucifixion, wherein God manifests his true righteousness, the right of the unconditional grace, Nursi sees this as one more necessity of a Supreme Tribunal where the weak and oppressed get back their strength and rights and the oppressors have to account for their deeds.

Another point which distinguishes the two authors is their view of death. Moltmann does not seem to like death very much. In his writings, he always talks about ways how to overcome death. The resurrection of Jesus is a major sign of the power of God over the power of death. In Moltmann’s writings, death seems to be the result of sins and all evil, relating back to the idea of the Fall within Christianity. In Nursi’s view, on the other hand, the image of death is not negative, at all. It is a short stopover on

¹²⁶ Ibid., 88-89.

humanity's journey towards their loved ones, with God at first place. It is like a door that opens up to an eternal world. In connection to this, Nursi asks the reader not to be scared of lying under the ground and of becoming one with soil for God has made the soil a source for all life and a showroom for all His Divine Names. Hence, being close to the soil means being close to God; this is why no one should search for God in the heavens for the closest place to God is the soil.

Both theologians have very similar concerns about their own religion. Moltmann tries to prevent the death of Christianity by taking it away from the medieval thoughts of Christianity and by adjusting it into the (post)-modern industrial society. By doing this, he continually remembers and analyzes the standpoint and mindset of such a society. Nursi's aim is to revive theology. He adds ethical, esthetic and emotional aspects to the merely logical and reason-based theology of *kalam*. Using logic in classical *kalam*, he draws people's attention to dignity, freedom, sincerity and earnestness, in first place.

Moltmann's concern is the Christian identity. He defines the Easter story, the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection anew by establishing hope into its center and promise as a main cornerstone of it. He takes the historical Jesus away from just being an historical event and revives it in the minds of his readers as something active rather than passive and utopian.

Nursi is at peace with nature and the whole universe. He sees the universe as a dear friend, a huge book or a long letter which drives him and points towards the Creator. Thereby, he always manages not to cross the very thin line between all creatures being a sign of their Creator, and pantheism on the other side. In his mind, nature is not superior, but rather inferior. Loving nature, according to Nursi, is equal to loving God. Through the

light and teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, he explains many issues within Islam through God's creature.

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