

ISLAMIC COSMOGONY ACCORDING TO SŪRAH AL-ḤASHR VERSE 24: “HE IS ALLĀH, THE CREATOR, THE ORIGINATOR, THE FASHIONER OF FORMS”

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Abstract

Sūrah al-Ḥashr verse 24 states: “He is Allāh, the Creator, the Originator, the Fashioner of Forms.” The corresponding canonical terms in Arabic are *Al-Khāliq*, *Al-Bārī*, and *Al-Muṣawwir* although their meanings are quite richer than the English transliterations suggest. By taking up those meanings this paper offers insights into Islam’s theory of the universe’s origin and development with implications for both Islamic theology and its philosophy of science. It enquires into the meaning of this *āyah* in light of *tafsir* (exegesis) on the three divine names in order to establish a theological basis for Islamic cosmogony. It presents *Al-Khāliq* as the creative power of the divine intellect, *Al-Bārī* as the creative agency of the divine will, and *Al-Muṣawwir* as the creative action of the divine wisdom. This contextualization is further developed by identifying *Al-Khāliq* with the *causa prima* of creation, the supposed *creatio ex nihilo* (out of nothing), and both *Al-Bārī* and *Al-Muṣawwir* as the *causa secunda* of a *creatio ex materia sed semper noviter* (out of matter though always anew). Conclusions reached will assert that Sūrah al-Ḥashr verse 24 is Islam’s own “theological statement” regarding the world’s origin and continued creation. It presents creation as both an event and a process, and unfolding in time, the basis and quintessence of Islam’s unique cosmogony.

Keywords: Islamic cosmogony, Creator, Originator, Fashioner of Forms

Introduction:

The statement that “God is the Creator of all things” contributes nothing new to the human understanding of the nature of God.⁷⁷ It says little about what divine creation actually means or how the universe came into being. Moreover, it is simply inadequate to found a comprehensive cosmogony on such a statement of little value. To venture beyond this declaration is, however, a precarious theological endeavour, nonetheless, the purpose of this discussion. Written not for the general public, but only for experts in the field of theological inquiry, or scholars of mutual interest in such a topic, it enquires into how the world may have been created in light of a multifaceted qur’ānic statement: “He is Allāh, the Creator, the Originator, the Fashioner of Forms.”⁷⁸ By considering the meaning of this *āyah* and the nexus of relationships among the three specified terms—“The Creator” (*Al-Khāliq*), “The Originator” (*Al-Bārī*), and “The Fashioner of Forms” (*Al-Muṣawwir*)—a more profound understanding regarding the nature of God as Creator, the origin of the universe, and the world’s mode of continuous re-creation, may be ascertained.

This inquiry aims at elucidating Islam’s unique cosmogony by investigating the identity and interconnectedness of each divine name. It presents the creative capacities of *Al-Khāliq* as

⁷⁷ Q.13:16. English transliterations of Qur’ānic verses, unless stated otherwise, are made by C. E. Longhurst and taken from the translation of the Qur’ān by M. Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Quran*. Hyderabad-Deccan: Government Central Press, 1938.

⁷⁸ Sūrah al-Ḥashr, verse 24; henceforth referred to as Q.59:24.

divine knowledge, *Al-Bārī'* as divine will; and *Al-Muṣawwir* as divine wisdom. The first designation will distinguish divine knowledge as the impetus of the creative event and the basis for the idea of creation. The second will designate God as the evolver of that idea; and the third will indicate a kind of hypostasis of God through which creation is simultaneously complete yet recurring continuously in time.⁷⁹ By taking up the idea of a threefold distinction in Islam's Creator-God the respective operations of these three individual yet intimately connected names will establish a reasonable Islamic cosmogony sympathetic to contemporary scientific theories regarding theistic evolution. Utmost respect towards the Islamic principle of *tawḥīd al-asma' wa'l-sifāt* (belief in the oneness of the names and the attributes of God) will be given throughout this discussion.

Islam's Tripartite Cosmogony

In the Islamic tradition creation is appropriated to God's oneness and unity despite diverse meanings regarding the divine names *Al-Khāliq*, *Al-Bārī'* and *Al-Muṣawwir*. To articulate the difference between the divine names, the word "*khalq*" (creation) generally signifies the divine intellect creating; while the word "*bar*" (invention) means God's act of willing things from non-existence into existence,⁸⁰ and the word "*tasweer*" (shaping/imaging) takes on the significance of the divine wisdom giving such material a certain shape or form.⁸¹ From these Arabic roots derive the three names designating God in His creative aptitudes as "The Creator," "The Originator," and "The Fashioner of Forms." Al-Ghazālī states that God "is creator [*khāliq*] inasmuch as He is the planner [*muqaddir*], producer [*bārī'*] inasmuch as

He initiates existence, and fashioner [*muṣawwir*] inasmuch as He arranges the forms of the things invented in the finest way."⁸² Applying these terms and their corresponding names to cosmogonical issues in Islam affords an understanding of God as one who creates though he is uncreated; that in God resides the act whereby the entire world is brought forth into existence; that God is intimately involved in his creative works, in other words, because creation is essentially unifying in Islam according to the principle of "*waḥdat al-wujūd*," it entails a certain immersion of the Creator in his work.⁸³

Various Qur'ānic passages postulate the creative act(s) of God as accounting for the origin of all things though not ending at those temporal moments of creation.⁸⁴ Ibn Abbas upholds this claim in his *tafsir* on Q.59:24: "(He is Allah, the Creator) of sperms in the loins of fathers, (the Shaper out of naught) Who transforms them from one state to another, (the Fashioner) of what is in the wombs."⁸⁵ The *tafsir* of Ibn Kathīr explains God's self-description as "*Al-Khāliq* – He who brings into existence anything He wills; *Al-Bārī'* – He who invents what He brings into existence, and *Al-Muṣawwir* – He who measures and proportions in the shape and form He decides."⁸⁶ Salman al-Oadah mentions that when the

⁷⁹ By "hypostasis" I mean the underlying substance, that is, the fundamental or substantive reality supporting the subject which is, in this case, the existence of God.

⁸⁰ See footnote 28.

⁸¹ The verb *bar* can also mean produce, make, generate, in the wider sense, but it is used in the Qur'ān exclusively of the divine activity. In the Qur'ān it is sometimes associated with the presence of material, out of which God produces something.

⁸² Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God*, trans., David B. Burrell and Nazih Daher (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992), 68.

⁸³ Also called *tawḥīd al-wujūdī* or simply *tawḥīd*. See the works of Ibn Arabi and Ibn Sabin, or S.H. Nasr's *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 156. For Qur'ānic passages attesting to the uncreated nature of God see Q.6:102; Q.13:16; Q.15:87; Q.39:62; Q.45:13; Q.2:117; 6:101. For those citing God's involvement in creation see Q.30:27; 79:27-33; 80:17-42.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*.

⁸⁵ *Tafsir Ibn Abbas Qs Al Hashr 1-24*. Online: <http://www.study-quran.com/2013/02/tafsir-ibn-abbas-qs-al-hashr-1-24.html> (accessed 22/08/2013).

⁸⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Abridged Tafsir Ibn Kathir Volumes 1-10*. Online: <http://www.islamwb.com/books/Tafsir%20Ibn%20Kathir%2010%20Volumes.pdf> (28/12/3012).

three names are revealed together each one conveys a specific meaning: “The attribute of creation refers specifically to Allah’s determination of what He creates, so it comes first. The name al-Bārī’ (the maker) refers to the creative act of bringing about what Allah wills to create. Finally the name al-Musawwir (the Fashioner) refers to giving each created thing its particular form.”⁸⁷ Al-Oadah underscores the progressive nature of creation in light this *āyah* and the primacy of *Al-Khāliq*.

Other commentaries on Q.59:24 describe a trans-temporal aspect of creation which is supernatural in manner of being (*quoad essentiam*), and natural in manner of expression and manifestation (*quoad modum*).⁸⁸ Gerhard Böwering, in his article “Names and Images of God in the Qur’ān” explains the relationship in reference to Q.59:24: “God brings forth and maintains creation, He holds sway over it and renews it.”⁸⁹ The first could be ascribable to *Al-Khāliq* as knowledge, “bringing forth,” and the second to *Al-Bārī’* and *Al-Muṣawwir* as “renewing” and “decorating.”⁹⁰ Islam could therefore permit a conception of creation that is both explicitly revealed and implicitly natural, and this distinction would be best understood through explicating the meanings of the three divine names in Q.59:24, holding each, as Islam does, to convey a precise significance revealing the creative powers and modal acts of the one God.

Islam recognizes that everything in existence outside of God is, in its entirety, the result of God, and a unified and ordered whole. An Islamic cosmogony would therefore assimilate the temporal and trans-temporal orders of creation and present the universe as, firstly, the realization of the divine ideas outside of time through what may be considered the knowledge of *Al-Khāliq*, and also in time by the creative will and wisdom of *Al-Bārī’* and *Al-Muṣawwir* respectively.⁹¹ Al-Ghazālī states: “[God’s] knowledge of a thing is the cause of that thing’s existence.”⁹² Since the divine ideas are God’s thoughts, it would follow that they are eternal and therefore unchangeable since they are identical with the divine knowledge.⁹³ This would place *Al-Khāliq*’s creative act in the category of divine essence which means that divine knowledge would also “resolve to the essence [of God]” as Al-Ghazālī indicates: “For [God] knows His essence by His Essence; and knowledge, knower, and thing known are one.”⁹⁴ In other words it exists without beginning and end, therefore, without passage from potency to act.⁹⁵ This is why it might be appropriate to identify *Al-Khāliq* as the divine knowledge and origin of all things, and his creative act as the *causa prima* of creation.

From the viewpoint of the divine ideas being realized in time, those ideas would be a projections of the divine knowledge outside of God in actions which would have for their objects finite replicas of the divine perfections from which they derive. This would identify the works of both *Al-Bārī’*—“He who invents what He brings into existence” and *Al-*

⁸⁷ Salman al-Oadah, “Al-Khāliq, Al-Bārī’, al-Musawwir – Allah is Creator, Maker & Fashioner,” online: <http://en.islamtoday.net/artshow-429-3739.htm> (accessed 05/10/2013).

⁸⁸ Cf. Al-Ghazālī, op. cit., 159-162.

⁸⁹ Gerhard Böwering, “Names and Images of God in the Qur’ān,” online: iph.ras.ru/uplfile/smironov/ishraq/1/bowering.pdf (accessed 26/08/2013). Böwering asserts, albeit allegorically, that rather than nothingness or chaos preceding creation: “[...] in the Qur’ānic image, God unstitched the heavens and the earth that were a mass all sewn-up, and fashioned every living thing of water (21:30). He set in the earth firm mountains, lest it would shake with them (21:31) and set up the heaven as “a roof well-protected” (21:32). He created the night and the day, and the sun and the moon, “each swimming in a sky” (21:33).” Ibid. Böwering cites T. O’Shaughnessy, *Creation and the teaching of the Qur’ān* (Rome, 1985).

⁹⁰ Cf. Ibn Kathīr, op. cit.

⁹¹ Cf. Q.21:30; Q.23:14; Q.6:96; Q.55:3-9; Q.21:33, 41:37; Q.10:5.

⁹² Al-Ghazālī, op. cit., 164.

⁹³ In the Qur’ān the meaning of *Al-Khāliq* is intimately associated with God’s knowledge which identifies the Islamic God as one who creates according to his divine ideas. Cf. Q.6:96; 65:12.

⁹⁴ Al-Ghazālī, op. cit., 164, 163-5.

⁹⁵ Al-Ghazālī, op. cit., 164, 163-5.

Muṣawwir—“He who measures and proportions in the shape and form He decides” as perfect and mutable according to the divine will in time.⁹⁶

***Al-Khāliq* as Divine Intellect**

In distinguishing between the divine attributes considered essential (*as-sifah an-nafsiyyah*), intrinsic to the divine essence, and those of action (*as-sifaat al-ma'nawiyyah*), extraneous to the divine essence, *Al-Khāliq* may be beyond a mere attribute of action. Al-Tamimi asserts: “it is only the Creator whose essence is essential”⁹⁷ therefore he associates this term with the divine essence.⁹⁸ If in Islam creation were to come into existence out of nothing other than the divine intellect,⁹⁹ it would seem reasonable to maintain that God’s primary creative power would be an eternal knowing and, consequently, an essential attribute of the divinity.¹⁰⁰ In that case *Al-Khāliq* and the divine knowledge would be hypostatically the same, connected through the creative work of the divine intellect in its own creative sphere *ad intra*.¹⁰¹ This position is upheld by the “Brethren of Purity” (*akhvān al-sfā*) in their argument that the first intention of the Creator cannot lie outside of his own self.¹⁰² Titus Burckhardt makes a similar point: “The world is essentially the manifestation of God to Himself,” a belief which establishes the idea of creation in relation to divine knowledge.¹⁰³ This self-manifestation denotes the essence of a God whose existence is his self-knowledge. It also specifies divine creation as an expression of that self-knowledge, therefore, it would be fitting to consider *Al-Khāliq* as the God who creates the universe *ex nihilo*, however not out of nothing properly speaking, implying out of no existence, but out of the source of his own ideas.¹⁰⁴ Given that no compelling proof from reason exists for the impossibility of the world’s timeless creation, and the Qur’ān presents little or no reason to suppose that creation is from nothing, the belief that the universe is created in time and out of nothing is, therefore, purely a statement of faith.

⁹⁶ Ibn Kathīr, op. cit.

⁹⁷ Muḥammad Ibn Khalifah Al-Tamimi, *Tawḥīd of Allah’s Most Beautiful Names & Lofty Attributes: The Belief Ahl at-Sunnah wal-Jamā’ah*, trans. Abu Safwan Farid Haibatani (<http://www.islamhouse.com>, downloaded 04/08/2013), 118, note 225. Al-Tamimi identifies the name *Al-Khāliq* as part of *tawḥīd al-rubriyyah* and explains that such a name pertains to God in matters of lordship. Ibid. 61.

⁹⁸ It is important to note that Islamic theology makes a distinction between the attributes of God and the divine essence. In addressing the divine attributes, Islam divides these into those of essence (*as-sifah an-nafsiyyah*), and those of action (*as-sifaat al-ma'nawiyyah*). The first are identical with God’s essence. The second depend upon an external factor since they pertain to God after the act of creation has taken place, such as creator, omnipotent, giver of life, sustainer, etc. God as “Creator,” according to Al-Ghazālī, is an attribute conceived after the act of creation, therefore one of action. Cf. Al-Ghazālī, op. cit., 159-162. See also Gerhard Böwering, “God and his Attributes.” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*. General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC: Brill, 2007.

⁹⁹ Divine creation *ex nihilo* is only implied in the Qur’ān. Some scholars maintain that it is not necessary to uphold his belief.

¹⁰⁰ See Al-Ghazālī’s distinction between “essential divine attributes” and “attributes of action” for further explanation. Cf. Al-Ghazālī, op. cit.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Q.36:81 “Is not He who created the heavens and the earth able to create the likes of them? Yes; and He is the Knowing Creator.”

¹⁰² Cf. The *Encyclopaedia of the Brethren of Purity (Rasa’il ikhwān aṣ-ṣafā’)*. To date no complete English translation of the whole *Rasa’il* encyclopaedia exists although a variety of Arabic editions are available: Calcutta, 1812; Bombay, 1887–1889; the edition of Khayr al-Din al-Zirikli, Cairo, 1928; and the Beirut Sadir edition by Butrus Bustani in 1957 and the version set by ‘Arif Tamir in Beirut in 1995.

¹⁰³ Burckhardt, op. cit., 50.

¹⁰⁴ This statement acknowledges that there is a certain kind of existence out of which creation originates, whether it be divine substance (ideas), or pre-existing matter which simply receives the form given to it through God’s creative act). According to Ibn Rushd the literal meaning of creation in the Qur’ān suggests the latter. Cf. Ibn Rushd, *Kitab faṣl al-maqāl (On the Harmony of Religions and Philosophy)*, trans. George F. Hourani (London: Luzac & Co., 1961), 56-7.

***Al-Bārī*' as Divine Will**

Creation in Islam logically and inevitably conforms to the purpose of God's will and to the realization of God's works with their own intrinsic goodness and perfection. In other words, Islam holds that the effective cause of the world is the free will of God, a supremely and fully sovereign will, thereby all natural processes and events are fully contingent on the divine will as act.¹⁰⁵ Consequently the name *Al-Bārī*', understood as "The Originator," may be specified by God creating what he wills. It would seem reasonable to consider that this name is an attribute of essence and not action, however, such an assertion cannot be established through human reason either but only on the basis of divine revelation. It is generally held instead that the name *Al-Bārī*' is a divine attribute of action.¹⁰⁶ Given the temporal aspect of this creative power it would seem appropriately associated with action and not essence.

As Islam holds that creation is not the product of any necessity, or an act of fate or chance, there could be no such thing in Islam as a random event or something happening against the divine will. It would be fitting, therefore, to consider *Al-Bārī*' as God who stipulates with his will and conserves what is created. This act involves the unfolding or originating of a plan in conformity with the proper end of the work produced.¹⁰⁷ It also introduces an insight into the moral nature of the universe. *Al-Bārī*'s creation may therefore be considered as intermediary or completed without motion, a kind of mediate progressive creation.

The position of the name *Al-Bārī*' after *Al-Khāliq* in Q.59:24—surely no arbitrary assignment—could symbolize the second stage of creation, or a subsequent creative action implying that God's creative works are not completed by *Al-Khāliq*. They are perfect or perfected according to their own nature *in statu viae* (a temporal state) towards an ultimate perfection still to be attained.¹⁰⁸

***Al-Muṣawwir* as Divine Wisdom**

Islam holds that God also creates according to his wisdom.¹⁰⁹ As divine wisdom is known through the patterns and variation in nature resulting from divine purpose it seems appropriate to ascribe this quality to *Al-Muṣawwir*. Such creative acts involve the shaping of things, sequentially and progressively, the variety and beauty witnessed in nature when regular

¹⁰⁵ Q.24:45 "Allāh creates what He wills." Q.82:8 "In whatever form He willed, He put you together."

¹⁰⁶ Shi'ism considers the divine will in its literal meaning as an attribute of action. Most Sunni theologians consider it as implying divine knowledge and thereby interpret it as an attribute of essence. Shaykh Faraz Rabbani discusses this association at length in his lecture "Allah's Names of Creating: al-Khaliq, al-Bari', and al-Musawwir," online: <http://seekershub.org/programs> (accessed 12/06/2013). Whether or not the divine name *Al-Bārī*' is an essential attributes of God (*naḥsiyyah*), insofar as it qualifies the divine essence without adding anything to it, remains a disputed question in Islam. Islamic scholar Robert Casper clarifies the meaning of this in His discussion on the distinctions between the divine essence and the divine names. Cf. Robert Casper, *Islamic Theology II Doctrines*, op. cit., 65. This question cross-examines the designation of these divine names as "attributes of action" (*as-sifaat al-ma'nawiyyah*) only. Their categorization as "essential attributes" (*as-sifah an-naḥsiyyah*) may be implied by the statement "And Allah was indeed a Creator in pre-eternity even though He had not yet created." Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, "Abu Hanifa, Salafis, al-Fiqh al-Akbar and The Truth," online: http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ust_abd/fiqh_al_akbar.htm (accessed 26/08/2013). Perhaps an affirmative answer may also be obtained by the claim that "[Allah] has always been) Creator by His creative-will" and "the creative-will has been an attribute since pre-eternity," although the issue of oneness of the names and the attributes of God, and distinctions among them, remains complex. It is worth noting that

¹⁰⁷ The Qur'ān stipulates that the end to which this work tends is pure goodness: "He formed you and made your forms good." Q.40:64; "It is Allāh who created everything in the best of forms [...] it is He Who created and perfected all things." Q.32:7 and 87:2—thus the foundation of Islamic belief in creation as good.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Al-Tamimi, op. cit., 32.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Q.30:27. See also Shaykh Faraz Rabbani, op. cit.

processes come to completion in time according to their natural courses.¹¹⁰ Unquestionably those processes coincide with divine activity *ad extra*. There should be, therefore, no speculation as to whether or not this name is an attribute of action.

The ascription of wisdom to the creative work of *Al-Muṣawwir* is demonstrable by the fact that nature possesses both regularity and purposefulness, and that it never acts unintentionally though always towards an end. *Al-Muṣawwir* is, then, the terminal action in time of a sequential process of divine creativity, or creation in motion, that is, the formation of all things living.¹¹¹ As all divine action *ad extra* is really identical with the divine essence, it could follow that God's creative power, in its entirety, is constituted in the work of *Al-Muṣawwir*.

Specific Correlation Between *Al-Bārī'* and *Al-Muṣawwir*

In Islam it would seem that the objective purpose of creation, its *finis operis*, which is the revelation of the divine perfections, is perceivable in the works of both *Al-Bārī'* and *Al-Muṣawwir*. This is seen, for instance, in the creation of the human person, in cloud and mountain formation, in the seasonal cycles, in the natures of all living organisms, and even in the self-proliferation of vegetative life-forms.¹¹² Such works are interpretable as creative processes *ad extra* and *ex materia* since they are outside the divine essence and since, for example, the human person is originally created from the earth and comes to perfection through subsequent potencies, and clouds and mountains are in a temporal state cooperating in the continued creation of the world.¹¹³ This is why, in Islam, God is never "done," so to speak, with his work. This statement can only be made from a temporal perspective, yet there is no time or change for one who is outside of time.

In the creative processes of both *Al-Bārī'* and *Al-Muṣawwir* the succession from prime matter to complex material organisms comprises both works of division and works of adornment. The works of division would parallel the first three days of the six day creation narrative in the Bible and the works of adornment would parallel the second three days.¹¹⁴ In Islam the first three days seem attributable to *Al-Bārī'* as capabilities of originating and evolving, while the second, to *Al-Muṣawwir*, as aptitudes of giving form, colour, shape and tone. The first implies a division of immovable matter and the second implies the decoration of matter that is living. Through this binary process it may be held that God directs the course of events in the universe by acting through intermediaries such as secondary causes or natural processes. *Al-Bārī'* would be the one who evolves previously existent matter according to his will, and *Al-Muṣawwir* would be the designer and donor of forms and colours to the works of *Al-Bārī'*. The creative process from *Al-Bārī'* to *Al-Muṣawwir* would admit of allowing accidental change as, for example, in the case when a child grows, receives sense-impressions, and develops cognitive faculties; there is no substantial change during this

¹¹⁰ Cf. Richard Owen, *On the Anatomy of Vertebrates* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1866-68). Owen proposes that species have an inherent propensity to change in ways that resulted in variety and beauty revealing creative purpose, a reality not only particular to the human species, but to all living organisms and vegetation.

¹¹¹ Even though the Ash'arites deny intermediary causes, as Norreddin Mahammed explains, in order to uphold the idea of divine omnipotence "[the Ash'arites] consider that matter is indivisible, and reduce its multiple differentiations to a transcendent principle, which is God the Creator," therefore, "the idea of the indivisibility of matter leads to the recurrence of creation." Norreddin Mahammed, "In the Beginning... The Qur'ān and Muslim Thinkers on Creation" in: *The UNESCO Courier*, May 1990.

¹¹² Respectively: Q.95:4 "We have created the human being upon the best of forms"; Q.27:82-93 "And you see the mountains, thinking them rigid, while they will pass as the passing of clouds. [It is] the work of Allah, who perfected all things."

¹¹³ Cf. Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of God*, op. cit., 68. See also "99 Names of Allah – Tumblr, Al-Bari -The Maker," online: 99namesofallah.tumblr.com/post/4046447507 (accessed 28/08/2013); and "Library - The Holy Qur'ān - Asma ul Husna - Al Bari" online: <http://www.qul.org.au/Asma/13.htm> (accessed 28/08/2013).

¹¹⁴ Cf. Q.7:54; 10:3; 11:9; 25:60; 32:3; 41:19-22.

process as all divine activity necessarily implies that created substances cannot change their kinds.¹¹⁵ Ultimately the terminal act in *Al-Muṣawwir* is one that is never final because creation is an uninterrupted process, a re-creation *semper noviter*, or perhaps it is in one of final stages of adornment, a period of time, “*yum*” (day), in which humanity may find itself today.¹¹⁶

Adding to the discussion is Christòs Yannaràs’ explanation that the harmony in the cosmos is not identical with the divine willing.¹¹⁷ Yannaràs likens God’s will to the divine essence, though he distinguishes the divinity from the harmony in the world just as “an artist is not identical with his work in which his purpose and inspiration find expression.”¹¹⁸ As the idea in the artist’s mind directs the artist’s will and activity in executing the artwork, so the divine ideas are factually identical with the divine knowing. This interpretation would consider a teleological understanding of creation as *ex materia sed noviter*. It may imply the works of originating, making and evolving attributed to *Al-Bārī*’ on the one hand, and those of shaping, designing, and fashioning forms attributed to *Al-Muṣawwir* on the other.¹¹⁹

As noted, since God is pure act there can be, undeniably, no transition from potency to act in divine creation, and therefore no sequence of individual acts, but one single successionless act which is God’s continuous and constant will and wisdom, an uninterrupted becoming and perpetual presence of God as Creator in the whole of creation. In time, however, extraneous to God’s essence, divine creation or creative potencies assume another context which allows for differentiation, emanation, and progression. This would be the work of *Al-Bārī*’ as divine will and *Al-Muṣawwir* as divine wisdom since both actions proceed *ad extra* from God’s knowledge which is an actuality entirely *ad intra*.¹²⁰

Divine Concurrence in Creative Acts

The co-inherence of each creative power in the others would uphold Islam’s principle of *tawhīd* while accounting for a kind of progression, one could say “evolution,” in creation after the original creative act. This principle underwrites Islam’s cosmogony as both an event and a process of the one God. Salman al-Oadah makes the association among the divine names clear while mentioning their specificity: “So Allah decrees what He creates, brings it into existence, and specifies its particular, unique form.”¹²¹ In such light, if *Al-Khāliq* is associated with God’s Intellect, and *Al-Bārī*’ with divine will, and *Al-Muṣawwir* with divine wisdom, a cosmogonical statement may be made as follows: God creates all things according to his knowledge, develops them according to his will, and perfects them according to his wisdom. A comprehensive rendering of the meaning of Q.59:24 may now be specified along the following lines: He is Allah the Creator (*Al-Khāliq*) who makes (he [*Al-Bārī*’]) and perfects (*Al-Muṣawwir*) his creation. Another rendition would be to consider the divine ideas as *Al-Khāliq*; the advancement of those ideas as the work of *Al-Bārī*’, and the substantiation of those ideas in material forms as the work of *Al-Muṣawwir*. This unifies divine being and divine act which are ultimately two inseparable realities. Al-Ghazālī makes the point more

¹¹⁵ Although this may happen only through the agency of other free beings such as the human, or accidental causes such as chemical reactions where substantial changes do occur.

¹¹⁶ The word “*yum*” as used in the Qur’ān in reference to the six “days” of creation signifies a long period of time, an era or an eon. God, being outside of time, may “see” these periods time as complete, therefore “past” from the human viewpoint, and consequently the linguistic use of the past tense (“created” [*khalaqa*]) in the Qur’ān to describe this divine creative work.

¹¹⁷ Christòs Yannaràs, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God. Heidegger and the Areopagite*, trans. Haralambos Ventis (London: T&T International, 2005), 64.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 64-5. This argument supports the position of Muslim theologians who hold that *Al-Khāliq* is *nafsiyyah* (of the divine essence).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Q.31:27, 46:2, 57:1, and 66:2.

¹²⁰ See footnotes 16 & 17.

¹²¹ Salman al-Oadah, op. cit.

emphatic when he identifies divine knowledge with divine will, and divine will with consequent divine action: “Now His action is something known, and His willing resolves to His knowledge... so ‘willing’ simply means that whatever He knows will be good to exist will be created by Him.”¹²² In this sense a correlation between essence, order, and design exists among the three divine names, and a harmony *in esse* and *in actu* according to the divine nature.

From the viewpoint that all of God’s creation is essentially one act, the acts of “making” and “fashioning of forms” are from the divine ideas of *Al-Khāliq*, the specific form existing as divine knowledge, or in the speculative order, as pure essence.¹²³ The creative actions of *Al-Bārī*’ and *Al-Muṣawwir* operate in the practical order according to the realization of the divine ideas which subsist in *Al-Khāliq*. *Al-Bārī*’ would be a concurrence of pure essence and pure act, while *Al-Muṣawwir* would be pure act alone. In other words, in Islamic cosmogony creation begins with *Al-Khāliq*, it proceeds through *Al-Bārī*’ and it ends with *Al-Muṣawwir*. An Islamic cosmogony can then be articulated in the following: *Al-Muṣawwir* qualifies the work of *Al-Bārī*’ indicating that God has created everything perfectly according to his will and wisdom. The question arises as to how and the answer is given by the works of the all-knowing Creator *Al-Khāliq*, through whom the divine ideas originate in *Al-Bārī*’ and are materialized in *Al-Muṣawwir*. As to where the material comes from, the answer would be *Al-Bārī*’—He who originates creation by materializing the divine ideas and moulding raw materials. As to where it terminates, the answer would be in the acts of *Al-Muṣawwir*—He who projects the divine forms, shapes, colours and patterns from the divine intellect into the raw material.

Cosmogonical Verification of Divine Oneness and Unity

It is only by differentiating these three divine names that a comprehensive understanding of Islamic cosmogony becomes intelligible, yet this differentiation is ultimately not real in God. In Islam the divine essence contains all possible perfections in an infinite degree and therefore no real distinction of any kind exists among them.¹²⁴ The human mind distinguishes between these names in order to convey individual divine attributes. According to the principle of *tawhīd al-asma’ wa’l-sifāt* God’s essence must be a totality of all the names in a perfectly united whole in which there is no separation, no differentiation and no composition of any kind.¹²⁵ Since in Islam all the divine names constitute one God, then the nature of their relationship on account of divine oneness and unity is that of a single common principle of creation.¹²⁶ In other words, Islam’s Creator-God is at once all three divine names in one act and in one essence, and much more, which means that the difference among the names is only a logical one and logical distinctions are not objectively real.¹²⁷

¹²² Cf. Al-Ghazālī, op. cit., 164.

¹²³ In Islam, on account of God’s absolute oneness and unity, and the absolute simplicity of his essence there is in God only one single idea. In so far as this idea is reflected in many extra-divine objects, a multiplicity of divine ideas may be understood.

¹²⁴ According to *tawhīd al rubu`biya* distinctions are made between the names, but not in the essence. In other words, the divine names do not belong to the essence or nature of God, but to what Yannaràs calls “the active manifestation of the divine existence, that is to say, to what we call the divine activities.” Yannaràs, op. cit., 64.

¹²⁵ In Islam this divine essence is neither of substance or accidents, of essence and existence, of power and activity, of passivity and activity, of genus and specific difference. The Qur’ān indicates the absolute simplicity of God when it equates the essence of God with his names: “He is God, (the) One, The Self-Sufficient Master.” Q.112:1-4.

¹²⁶ Cf. Al-Ghazālī, op. cit., 163.

¹²⁷ Cf. Robert Casper, op. cit., 67. See also Al-Ghazālī, op. cit., 5-6.

Conclusion:

Q.59:24, as part of Islam's positive historical revelation, reveals God's creative power through three distinct attributes and modalities. Each attribute conveys a precise meaning: *Al-Khāliq* as the divine knowledge in which all creation begins; *Al-Bārī'* as the divine will through which all creation originates and evolves; and *Al-Muṣawwir* as the divine wisdom in which all creation receives its form and reaches its temporal perfection. Islam's idea of creation, therefore, does not so much comprise an event or an action that begins and ends, but rather an on-going relationship between God and what God creates. Q.59:24 implicates divine creation as both an idea *ad intra* outside of time, the *creatio prima* as the immediate work of *Al-Khāliq*, what effectively begins time as it is known; and also an event and a process in time, *ad extra*, the *creatio secunda* as the mediate works of *Al-Bārī'* and *Al-Muṣawwir* as the unfolding and temporal completion of creative activity.

The purpose, therefore, of all this theologizing on the three divine names in Q.59:24 is to demonstrate how Islam upholds a comprehensive understanding of a sequential creative activity that is both natural in its modal expression (*quoad modum*), and supernatural in its origin (*quoad essentiam*), the former according to the operations of the divine will and wisdom, and the latter according to the principle of divine knowledge. This virtual distinction in the real unity and oneness of God is the quintessence of Islam's cosmogony. The question of temporality in divine creation still needs to be further explored. Given that God is essentially outside of time, without beginning or end, and creation implies both beginning and end, the subject of distinguishing and reconciling these differences would be meaningful. That endeavour could be the theme of a future exploration.

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