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Editor
Prof. Shohrat Bokhari

IQBAL ACADEMY PAKISTAN
LAHORE

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**ESCHATOLOGY AS
PORTRAYED IN *FI ZILALI'L-*
QUR'AN OF SAYYID QUTB**

I.O. OLOYEDE

INTRODUCTION

One of articles of faith in Islam is the belief in the hereafter. Through this belief a Muslim is aware of the ephemeral nature of the present life and the reality that life does not terminate with death; rather death is the transitory stage between the present life and the last life since death is considered, in Islam, as a means to an end. The Qur'an lays title stress on what transpired between the time of death and the day of resurrection. This day of reckoning is the end of the journey and it is described vividly by various verses of the Qur'an.

This day of reckoning is known by various names among which are *'al-Yamu 'l-Akhir* - the last day,¹ or the last abode (*ad-daru 'l-'Aakhirah*),² *alyawmul-Qiyamah* - the day of rising; *as-sa'ah* - the hour; *Yawmu'd-din* the day of Requital; *Yawmu'l-fasl* the day of decision or *Yawmu'l-hisab* - the day of reckoning. From these names, the purpose of the day is distinctively apparent i.e. to decide man's fate in accordance with his deeds before his death.

*Al-Mufasssirun*³ have no option but to express their opinions, in human terms, about the day because no less than two hundred verses mentioned and described the day. Thus the last day is one of the topical Qur'anic issues over which every Qur'anic commentator has to express his own understanding. Sayyid Qutb⁴ is one of such Qur'anic commentators.

Hardly can one find two Qur'anic Chapters without a complete description of this most dreadful day; therefore an essay on "the last day" which is to be based on twenty chapters - 10 to 29 - of the Qur'an cannot, in any way, cover all relevant verses within the chapters concerned.

It is equally important to note that Sayyid Qutb who spent his life, seeking the comfort of the hereafter, waging a complete "campaign of struggle"⁵ against giving preference to this world over the hereafter, could not have surrendered his present life for

brutal termination without his having a clear picture of the "life after death" which he must have considered more rewarding than this present life. This is strengthened by the fact that he was said⁶ to have written a book entitled "*Mushahidatu 'l-Qiyamah Fi-Qur'an: (The Day of Resurrection in the Qur'an,)*", a book which would have been of immense value but on which, regrettably, the present writer was unable to lay his hand.

The topic shall be viewed from the dimensions of Qutb's view on verses that give warning about the imperativeness of the day; the description of the day; justice which shall be maintained on the day, the atmosphere of the day, description of the consequences of the day and lessons which the author teaches through the Qur'anic verses concerning the day.

SAYYID QUTB AND HIS FI ZILALI 'L-QUR'AN⁷

Sayyid Qutb, the great Islamic scholar of the twentieth century, has been briefly and captivantly introduced as:

"....a foremost Muslim thinker of the latter half of this century. Born in 1906, he came from a deeply religious Egyptian Background. He started his career as a literary man, and progressed to become one of the most original thinkers of the contemporary Islamic movement. He wrote with a profound sense of conviction....."⁸

Sayyid Qutb who wrote a number of books, believed that revolutionary education is as important, if not more important than the Islamic law. He said:

No renaissance of Islamic life can be effected purely by the law or statute, or by the establishment of a social system on the basis of the Islamic philosophy. Such a step is only one of the two pillars on which Islam must always stand..... The other is a production of a state of mind imbued with the Islamic theory of life, to give permanence to external forces leading to this form of life and to give coherence to all the social, religious and civil legislation.....

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And the natural method of establishing that
philosophy is by education....⁹

This concept is vividly demonstrated in the opinions of Qutb in *fi zilali 'l-Qur'an*, on Qura'nic verses. He, as one would expect, ran into conflict with the Egyptian authorities and was sentenced, along with other members of the Ikhwanu 'l-Muslimin, to fifteen years imprisonment, and he spent his period of incarceration to write most parts of the *fi - zilali 'l-Qur'an*. No wonder, every line of his, in the work reflects his antagonism to the temporal rulers of Egypt and in fact all despots all over the world. He was released in 1964 only to be sentenced to death and executed in 1966 by the government of Jamalu-deen Abdul Naser.

This work of his - *Fi zilali 'l-Qur'an* - contains a lot of revolutionary ideas into which sufficient insight is yet to be given to the English audience, except for a translation of one thirtieth of the work which was styled volume thirty.¹⁰

Attempt is here being made to call the attention of the English audience to another important section of the book.

WARNING AGAINST THE DAY

The Holy Qur'an chapter 22 verses 5-7 fore-warns about the day:

"O mankind if you have a doubt about the resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust. Then out of sperm then out of a leach - like clot, then out of a morse of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed in order that We may manifest (Our power to you; And We cause whom We will, to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then do We bring you out as babes, then (foster you) that may reach your age of full strength; and some of you are made to die, while some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that you know nothing after having known (much), And you see the earth barren and lifeless, but when We pour down on it, it is stirred (to life), it

swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth. This is so, because God is the Reality: it is He Who gives life to the dead and it is He Who has power over all things. And surely the hour will come there can be no doubt about it, or about (the fact) that God will raise up all who are in the graves."

This passage provides enough philosophical and scientific arguments to convince man of the reality of the day of judgement. Sayyid Qutb, while commenting on this passage, calls attention to the fact that the raising of the dead "is a simple and non difficult task,"¹¹ and that any one who doubts the day does so in ignorance.¹² He calls attention to a Qur'anic verse which emphasises the fact that God's 'desires' become reality by God's command of "be" and it will be.¹³

Still on this verse, Qutb calls attention to the fact that God, appeals to man's intellect, personal experience, and recalls man's lowly origin to convince man of the ease at which God can make man resurrect after death. Man's initial nothingness, and his being from the dust are used to ring into man's hearing the possibility of his being made to become dust after death. The natural phenomenon of bringing life to dead-land is used to demonstrate God's ability to bring a dead man to life, particularly when it was the same God that brought man into existence out of nothing. God, Who can create man out of nothing would surely find it easier to re-assemble the bones and remnants of a dead man in order to bring him once again into life.¹⁴ Qutb concludes by asserting that reasoning supports the necessity of the day of reckoning. The passage, through man's intellect and experience, establishes not only the possibility but also the reality of "the day."

DESCRIPTION OF THE DAY:

The Qur'an commands: "But warn them of the day of distress when the matter will be determined, for they are negligent and they do not believe."¹⁵ Qutb explains that "the day of distress" is a day which shall appear to man as if it is specially made to be a bundle of regrets and disappointments. And above all no family or friend could bail man out of the regrets of the day.

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OF SAYYID QUTB

The regret, according to Qutb, will be occasioned by the fact that the day shall come sooner than man can imagine, and man shall be made to witness the day while he is still in doubt about the reality of the day. It shall come as a surprise to man.¹⁶

On the day man, according to the Qur'an,¹⁷ shall be subjected to ridicule and shame through man's late realisation of the powerlessness of those "powers" which they relied upon as substitutes to God. Qutb explains that the awfulness of the day shall lie in the fact that man, despite his arrogance denial of the reality of the last day, shall be made to stand in trial before God. On the day, while God shall query man about his denial of the day, man shall "keep quiet in shame"¹⁸ but the believers shall have a free day to make mockery of the unbelievers whose arrogance would have terminated with their being made to witness a day which they laboriously denied while alive in the world. The day shall definitely be unfavourable to the unbelievers.

The Holy Qur'an further implores man to fear "the convulsion of the hour" which shall be "very terrible."¹⁹ "A day" according to the Qur'an, "when you shall see that every nursing mother shall forget her suckling-babe, and every pregnant female shall drop her load, when you shall see mankind as if in drunken riot, yet not drunk but dreadful is the wrath of God."²⁰

The passage depicts a picture of confusion and disorderliness which shall prevail on the day. Qutb explains that the word "*Zalalah*"²¹ itself connotes all sorts of confusion which shall include detaching baby from his or her loving mother, inability of man to see, and abnormal reaction of man to the situation which shall make man confused to an extent that fear would intoxicate him to a level of madness. According to Qutb, the "woman and her child" the "premature delivery of foetus and "appearance of drunkenness" are figurative expressions of confusion and pandemonium. The expressions also convey the independent individual responsibility of the day.²²

Qutb here stresses that God uses human experience to explain in a dramatic form the unprecedented confusion of the day.

JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS OF THE TRIAL:

The Qur'an states that despite man's helplessness and God's absolute supremacy on the day, man shall not in any way be unjustly treated. Man's absolute helplessness shall not constitute any hindrance to his being given a fair trial, rather he shall be adjudged according to his performances while on earth.

The Holy Qur'an²³ holds man responsible for the outcome of the day: "Every man's fate, We have fastened to his own neck, on the day of judgement We shall bring out for him a scroll which he will see spread open. (He shall be told): Read your record; sufficient is your soul, this day, to make an account against you. Who ever receives guidance, receives it for his own benefit; who ever goes astray does so to his own loss....."

Here again, Qutb states that the passage contains figurative expressions which picture vividly "man's inability to abandon on the day, his deeds, neither shall he be able to conceal his bad deeds which shall, by then, be glearily obvious."²⁴ The drama, according to Qutb, is apparent when God commands "Read.....", as if it is now being directed at the men, whereas the day is yet to come. Qutb lays emphasis on individual sorrow and calamity of the day in order to buttress his (Qutb's) life-long admission that collectivity should not deceive man to believe that "the sorrow of the day, if at all it comes, shall be shared among many people."

Commenting on Chapter 21 verse 47, the author removes any iota of misplacement of justice on the day. He also emphasised that God, being the absolute controller of the day, shall mercifully consider every man's case and none shall receive but a commensurate result of his deeds.²⁵

GENERAL ATMOSPHERE OF THE DAY:

Qutb emphasises that God uses some terms which are based on human reasoning to explain to man the general atmosphere of the day.²⁶

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For instance, the Qur'an states. "Not the slightest sound will they hear of Hell; what their soul desired, is what they shall dwell in for ever"²⁷ as a means of convincing man that not even the minutest disturbance shall accidentally stray into those who are not found to be due for the disturbance.

"Sound," is used to convey "disturbance," unavoidable but unwarranted suffering.²⁸

The confusion of the day is beautifully dramatised in chapter 21 verse 104 thus".

"The day that we roll up the heavens like a scroll, rolled up for books (completed) - even as we produced the first creation so shall We produce a new one: a promise We have undertaken: Truly shall We fulfil it."

Qutb calls attention to the fact of the rolling of the heavens, and this, according to him, signifies the end of a world, and" thus (we are in) new world and new existence"²⁹ under new dispensation.

Commenting on "The day the heaven shall be rent asunder with clouds, and angels shall be sent down, descending. That day, the dominion, as of right and truth, shall be (wholly) for (God) Most Merciful: it will be a day of due difficulty for the disbelievers"³⁰ Qutb referred to a number of other Qur'anic verses which convey the reversal of the natural sequence of things, he also called attention to the fact that the abnormal occurrences shall affect not only the earth but the whole universe which shall mark the termination of a world of injustice, foul-Play and deceit and the commencement of an era of justice, reality and eternity. The passage according to Qutb provides a vivid "picture of the regret of the unjust who has, gone astray" where an ingrate "shall bite his finger in shame and regret."³¹

Having shown that justice shall prevail on the day despite the prevailing disorganisation of natural phenomenon, it is pertinent to consider the consequences of the judgement of the day: hell and Paradise.

INHABITANTS OF HELL AND PARADISE:

The Qur'an³² describes the condition of the people of hell as Prone-on their faces, blind, dumb and deaf; their abode will be Hell:

Every time it shows abatement We shall increase for them the fierceness of the fire" and "Verily Hell is the promised abode for them all: To it are seven gates for each of those gates is a (special) class assigned."

On these passages, Qutb emphasises that it is the shame or disgrace of the day, for people of hell, that God conveys to man through the picture of "a blind", "a dumb."³³

The "seven gates" referred to above, is seen not as conveying number or actual physical gates but as different types, grades and intensity of punishment which may depend on different conditions and periods for individual inhabitants of hell in accordance with individual deed or misdeed.³⁴ The "gate," according to Qutb, might be a metaphorical mode of emphasising the reality of the day."

The inhabitants of paradise are described as "the heirs"³⁵ "who will inherit paradise, they will dwell therein for ever."³⁶ Analysing this divine statement Qutb simply says "that is the peak of salvation which God had decreed for the believers, after which there is no other goal for which an eye or imagination may long."³⁷ This conveys the notion of unprecedented enjoyment and undescrivable pleasant situation which include a satisfaction "which man may not even know of, but which God has prepared for his faithful servants."

The flowing of "rivers in the gardens of bliss"³⁸ signifies calmness, coolness and freshness. The Qur'an states that:

"Their call there-in is "Glory to you! O God"; and Peace will be their greeting therein and their last call will be "praise be to God the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds".³⁹

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Qutb, while commenting on the verse explains that, the passage calls attention to the preoccupation of the inhabitants of paradise which shall not be wealth, glory protection nor attainment of any position. They are contented with what they are provided by God, but their duty is glorifying God, thanking Him and exchanging greetings with one another and with the angels".⁴⁰

CONCLUSION:

We have been able to illustrate Sayyid Qutb's opinions about different stages and aspects of the day of reckoning. This we did, in connection with some Qur'anic verses which fall within our area of study.

It is obvious that Qutb's commentary on Qur'anic passages on the last day constantly highlights the fact that the "mighty" ones of the present world shall be powerless on the last day and dependence on them shall not be of any advantage in the hereafter. This lesson was used by Qutb to generate in his audience enough courage to oppose those who appear very powerful in this world, for in the hereafter their power shall be terminated and the oppressed would laugh at.

While showing the awfulness of the day, Qutb emphasises the bliss of the day for those who are able to place high value on the heavenly bliss more than the present ephemeral mundane pleasure. This is probably done by Qutb to generate strong hope and pleasant expectation in his audience. These hopes and expectations would sustain and increase man's devaluation of mundane pleasure and increase his longing for eternal bliss.

Qutb uses scientific and philosophical arguments to prove the reality of the hereafter. He explains how reasonable it is to think that evaluation must come after performance and how ignorance of a thing or situation does not actually remove the existence of such a thing or situation. He challenged the critics of the reality of the last day to prove their point of view.

Qutb considers some Qur'anic expressions about the last day as allegories or metaphors. The mention of some physical objects or some illustration is considered by him as a means of entrenching in the mind of man, certain qualities of the day. For instance river conveys coldness and freshness; food refers to satisfaction and happiness while gates refer to various levels of intensity.

Qutb refers to all the activities after death till eternity as *An-'Nash 'atu 'l-'Aakhirah*. He, unlike some other commentators, avoided the issue of life in the grave before the day of resurrection. A scholar⁴¹ aptly summaries the use to which Sayyid, Qutb puts the Qur'anic passages about the last day thus: He also describes the scenes of the hereafter, because the Qur'an paints these in great detail as they are important means to awaken the religious conscience of man and to establish a dual relationship between Allah and man, based on two strongest and parallel feelings in man, namely, fear and hope."

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