

IMMORTALITY

BETWEEN SCIENCE AND REVELATION

Prof. dr. Robbert Bipat & Imtiaz Hoeseni, MBA

"Death is not annihilation, but transformation: it lifts the veil of physical limitation, sharpens our vision, and reveals the reality we shaped on Earth."

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Foreword

Human beings have long reflected on whether death constitutes the definitive end of existence. Across civilizations, the aspiration toward immortality has therefore found expression in myth, religion, philosophy and, in the modern period, science and technology. Whereas earlier societies often associated immortality primarily with divine or semi-divine figures, contemporary discourse increasingly entertains the possibility that medical progress may substantially extend the limits of human mortality.

This booklet examines whether the notion of permanent physical life remains defensible when both biological knowledge and religious revelation are seriously considered. It does not set science and faith against one another; instead, it argues that each illuminates a distinct dimension of human reality and that, as this booklet demonstrates, they may ultimately converge in a shared conclusion.

The chapters address, in sequence, the limits of the body, the Islamic understanding of consciousness after death, and the position of Prophet Jesus (as) within debates concerning mortality, resurrection and elevation.

1: The illusion of the body

The Historical Projection of Immortality

Across civilizations, the reality of death has prompted human communities to examine existence beyond earthly life. In ancient religions and mythological traditions, immortality was frequently attributed to divine beings. Rulers and elites, in turn, sometimes sought to participate in this condition symbolically or ritually. Egyptian mummification, for example, may be interpreted as an attempt to preserve the body in anticipation of survival after death. From a historical and theological perspective, such representations may be understood as expressions of a profound human desire for continued existence.

The Qur'an reorients this desire by emphasizing that all created beings are impermanent and cannot possess immortality in themselves. In this way, attention is shifted from a material conception of immortality to the relationship between Creator and creation.

"And those whom they call on besides Allah created nothing, while they are themselves created. Dead (are they), not living. And they do not know when they will be raised." (16:20-21).

The central implication of this approach is that immortality cannot be conclusively located in the created self if that creation remains subject to time, change, and dissolution. The religious argument that follows from this is that the pursuit of absolute continuity of the body is based on a confusion of categories: it confuses temporal materiality with ultimate permanence.

The Modern Promise: Technology as a New Religion

In the contemporary period, technology has, for many, assumed the role once occupied by earlier expectations of immortality. The hope for radical life extension is reflected in research on regenerative medicine, organ replacement, genetic intervention and transhumanist thought. Such developments are medically significant and may offer genuine benefits. However, they often carry the implicit assumption that technology could ultimately deliver human beings from mortality itself.

A clear example of current medical progress is xenotransplantation: the transplantation of an animal organ into a human.

In 2022, a 57-year-old patient with severe heart failure at the University of Maryland received a genetically modified pig heart. A later report in the *New England Journal of Medicine* noted that the organ initially functioned without clear signs of immediate rejection; however, serious complications developed around day 49, and the patient died on day 60.

Scientifically, this was an important step, because it demonstrated that an animal organ can temporarily function in a human body. At the same time, this case also made it clear that replacing one organ does not remove the vulnerability of the entire body. Even if organ replacement continues to improve, aging, inflammation, immune responses, and damage in other body systems remain a limit.

A similar challenge arises regarding the concept of cloning. Even if it is possible to make a genetically almost identical copy of someone, that does not guarantee that memories, self-awareness or personal identity are transferred. Replicating a biological body is distinct from continuing personal identity. From both a philosophical and religious point of view, the two therefore do not coincide.

Physiological reality: the wall of biology

Modern cell biology helps explain why the concept of an indefinitely living body is difficult to sustain. The human body consists of specialized cells and tissues that can repair or renew themselves only within certain limits. Some cells retain considerable regenerative capacity, whereas others possess little or none. Consequently, damage, functional decline and the accumulation of defects cannot be absorbed indefinitely. Moreover, many bodily cells can divide only a limited number of times. Research on the Hayflick limit and telomeres indicates that ageing is not merely accidental but is connected to the structure and function of cells themselves. Genetic damage, declining tissue reserves and cellular senescence are among the best-established processes that constrain bodily continuity. From this perspective, the body is a temporary and fragile system rather than a vehicle of limitless self-renewal. When these biological observations are aligned with religious revelation, no inherent contradiction arises; instead, a distinct convergence emerges. In this context, the Qur'anic statements about the universal character of mortality can be read as religious formulations of a reality that also becomes visible in empirical biology: all living things on earth are subject to finitude, transformation and decay.

"Every soul must taste of death." (3:185)

"Everyone on it passes away." (55:26)

The conclusion of this chapter is therefore that any conception of immortality based solely on preserving the present body is difficult to defend, both biologically and theologically. If human continuity transcends death, that continuity must be located in a dimension other than mere material preservation.

2: The Spiritual Evolution: From Matter to Consciousness

If the body is not the basis of human survival, the question becomes what, if anything, endures beyond it. In Islam, the human being is not understood merely as a biological organism, but also as a being who passes through successive phases of existence. From this perspective, death is not an absolute termination, but a transition to another mode of existence in which consciousness and moral responsibility continue.

The Holy Qur'an describes human as a processing through three fundamental stages that parallel biological growth:

- 1) The stage of the earth: Man as potential in the dust.
- 2) The stage of the uterus: The human being as an embryo.
- 3) The stage of the world: Man as a born individual.

In this interpretation, human development is presented as a multilayered process. Qur'anic references to origin from earth and development in the womb may be read not only biologically, but also metaphorically.

They indicate that earthly life constitutes only one phase within a broader order of existence (23:12-16). From this standpoint, death may be understood as a transition to an intermediate state in which the human person continues to exist, though in a transformed manner.

The Barzakh as an in-between state: the waiting room of the soul

In the Islamic tradition, the term *Barzakh* refers to an intermediate state between earthly life and the eventual resurrection.

In this state, the individual had died physically but has not yet entered the final state following the resurrection. The *Barzakh* is therefore central for Islamic theology regarding death, consciousness and responsibility.

Comparison with embryonic development can help clarify this concept. Just as an embryo develops capacities that only fully manifest outside the womb, theology suggests that earthly life prepares the human being for a mode of existence disclosed only after death (23:12-16). This comparison is not intended as scientific proof, but as an explanatory analogy for growth, transition and unfolding.

In the Qur'anic portrayal of death, the human being is shown to gain, after death, a clearer awareness of the moral meaning of earthly life. Passages referring to regret,

the desire to return, or the removal of a veil are often understood in Islamic thought as signs that death does not end consciousness, but changes how truth and responsibility are perceived.

***"My Lord, send me back, that I may do good in that which I have left."
(23:99-100)***

These passages suggest that death does not destroy consciousness but rather sharpens it. In religious language, the veil of material limitation is removed, as Allah says:

"You were indeed heedless of this, but now We have removed from you your veil, so your sight is sharp this day." (50:22).

Spiritual experience: happiness and suffering

In Islamic tradition, happiness and suffering in the *Barzakh* are generally not understood as ordinary bodily experiences. Rather, they reflect the soul's encounter with the consequences of earthly life, indicating that human actions already bear significance before the final resurrection.

The soul of the righteous experiences peace and receives a foretaste of Paradise. As the Qur'an states regarding the martyrs:

"And do not think of those who are killed in Allah's way as dead. Rather, they are alive being provided sustenance from their Lord." (3:169)

Qur'anic passages concerning those who are "alive" with their Lord are commonly understood in this context as indications of a real, though non-earthly, existence. Consequently, these passages support the view that, from a religious perspective, death is not the cessation of consciousness but a transition to another form of existence. Immortality is consequently not conceived as the extension of bodily processes, but as the continuation of consciousness within a different order of reality.

3: The Exception and the Rule – The Death of Jesus

The dogma of physical ascension

Within Islamic thought, Prophet Jesus (as) occupies a distinctive position in discussions of mortality, elevation and the end of time. In significant strands of later tradition, the view emerged that Prophet Jesus did not die but was physically raised to heaven and remains there until his return.

This conviction remains influential in popular representations, but it warrants renewed examination when assessed in relation to Qur'anic language, historical reasoning and biological plausibility.

In this discussion, reference is often made to the Qur'anic verse that Abu Bakr (ra) recited after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (saw). In that verse it is emphasized that previous messengers have passed away before him. Many theologians see this as confirmation that prophets are mortal. Consequently, any proposed exception for a single prophet must be carefully weighed against the broader pattern in the Holy Qur'an.

"And Muhammad is but a messenger — messengers have already passed away before him." (3:144)

In this reading, the verse supports the view that previous prophets, including Prophet Jesus (as), have walked the road of death.

Biological and philosophical impossibility

From a biological perspective, the claim that a human body could continue to exist physically for centuries raises significant questions. A body dependent on metabolism, energy, environmental conditions and continuous tissue renewal cannot readily be conceived as stable over such an extended period. This does not exhaust the theological question, but it does indicate that literal permanent physical preservation lies outside the established frameworks of natural science.

It also follows that spatial representations of a physical body outside the ordinary conditions of human viability can only be formulated within the framework of miraculous intervention.

When such a claim is presented as a literal description of a permanent physical state, tension arises with elementary knowledge about physiology, environment and survival conditions.

Philosophically, too, caution is needed in strongly material representations of elevation. If the exaltation of Prophet Jesus is understood as closeness to Allah, then that closeness need not be interpreted literally.

Within Islamic theology, Allah's sublimity is protected against the idea that He would be bound to a physical place. Therefore, a non-literal reading of elevation is more in line with classical views on Allah's transcendence.

The meaning of *tawaffa* and *raf*

A central issue in this discussion is the interpretation of the terms *tawaffa* and *raf* in the Qur'anic passage concerning Prophet Jesus (as). The meaning of these terms is crucial for determining whether the text refers to death followed by spiritual elevation, or to bodily assumption without death. Careful attention to language, context and Qur'anic usage is therefore necessary.

"O Jesus, I will cause you to die and exalt you in My presence." (3:55)

In many Islamic interpretations, *tawaffa*, when God is the acting subject and a human being is the object of the action, is understood primarily as the taking of the soul, and thus as death. While interpretations may vary regarding the exact nuances, linguistically it is crucial to note that the word cannot simply be reduced to a temporary removal or suspension of physical life. Therefore, a distinction must be made between the original meaning of the word and later doctrinal interpretation.

Within the Qur'an, the term *raf* can indicate both literal elevation and elevation in rank or honor, depending on context and subject. In the discussion around Prophet Jesus (as), it is therefore often argued that the term can plausibly be read as an elevation in dignity and divine protection against humiliation. Such an interpretation has the advantage that it is defensible without lapsing into a strictly material representation of ascension.

The historical reality of the crucifixion

In considering the historical question of the end of Prophet Jesus (as), it is important to distinguish between religious conviction and historical probability. Within modern historical research, there is broad agreement that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by the Roman authorities under Pontius Pilate. This judgment rests on several early Christian and non-Christian sources and is regarded as one of the best-attested facts concerning his life in historical scholarship. Religious interpretations of the event may differ, but the historical point itself remains relatively stable.

Final remarks

The central argument of this booklet is that immortality cannot be convincingly understood as the endless extension of the present body. Biology demonstrates that the human body is subject to ageing, deterioration, and dependence. Religious revelation adds that human survival is not grounded in the body itself, but in a broader order of existence.

Within this framework, science discloses the fragility of the body, while Islamic teachings concerning the *Barzakh* and the discussion surrounding Prophet Jesus (as) direct attention to how mortality, consciousness after death and divine elevation may be understood. The purpose of this study is therefore not to oppose science and faith, but to show that both may contribute, in their respective ways, to a deeper understanding of the human being and human finitude.

Summary

What happens to man after death? And how do religious insights relate to what modern science shows us about the body and its limits? This booklet, *Immortality - Between Science and Revelation*, examines these questions by integrating perspectives from biology, theology, and history.

This concise yet comprehensive publication explores:

- why the human body, despite all medical progress, cannot continue to exist indefinitely;
- how the *Barzakh* is understood in Islam as a meaningful intermediate state between death and resurrection;
- what the debate about the death of Prophet Jesus (as) teaches us about mortality, elevation and the interpretation of religious texts.

We hope that this publication will inspire you to further reflect on the big questions of life, death and survival, and at the same time invite a balanced encounter between religious hope and scientific knowledge.

Keyword List (Index)

Barzakh: The transitional state of the soul between death and the Resurrection.

Differentiation (cellular): The process by which cells specialize and often lose their ability to replicate.

Hayflick limit: The biological limit to the number of times a cell can divide.

Resurrection (*Qiyamah*): The final stage of spiritual awareness and accountability.

Raf (Elevation): The spiritual honor and elevation of status by Allah, often confused with physical ascension.

Tawhid: The belief in the absolute oneness of God.

Tawaffa: The Arabic term denoting the extraction of the soul (death).

Scientific source justification

The biological passages in this booklet are based on generally accepted literature on cellular aging and limited division of cells. The classic Hayflick limit refers to the observation that normal human cells in culture only go through a finite number of divisions before reaching senescence. More recent literature has further linked this observation to shortening of telomeres and reactions to damage to the genetic material. For an authoritative review, see, for example, Shay and Wright, *Nature Reviews Molecular Cell Biology* (2000), and more recent literature on telomeres, cellular aging, and aging.

The discussion of limited replacement in nerve cells and skeletal muscle fibers draws on established cell and tissue biology: mature nerve cells generally do not divide, and skeletal muscle fibers rely mainly on progenitor cells for repair rather than dividing freely. The section on xenotransplantation refers to the first clinical transplant of a genetically modified pig heart into a human, reported by Griffith and colleagues in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (2022). This case illustrates both medical progress and the enduring limits imposed by systemic aging and organ interaction.

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