In the late 740s/1340s, the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) and the Shāfiʿī chief judge of Damascus Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355) came into conflict over Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 728/1328) arguments for limited chastisement of unbelievers and the annihilation of hell-fire. Ibn al-Qayyim supported Ibn Taymiyya's arguments: Hell is therapeutic and reformative, and God's wise purpose in chastising unbelievers is to make them fit to leave the Fire. Al-Subkī for his part issued a sharp refutation of Ibn Taymiyya, declared assent to the annihilation of the Fire unbelief and reasserted the mainstream Sunni doctrine of eternal hell-fire for unbelievers. Controversy over Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim's arguments continues to the present day with some Muslims such as contemporary scholar Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926) following them through to a doctrine of universal salvation and others rejecting that doctrine as erroneous or heretical.1

This study introduces the uniquely conciliatory and ecumenically-minded voice of Ibn al-Wazīr (d. 840/1436) into this controversy. Ibn al-Wazīr was a Yemeni traditionalist theologian who shifted away from the Muʿtazilī kalām theology espoused by his Zaydi community of origin early in his career. In order to mitigate the conflict over hell-fire, Ibn al-Wazīr withholds judgment on its duration, and he includes both its annihilation and its eternity within the realm of acceptable belief. However, the theological cost to Ibn al-Wazīr in taking this tolerant position is sacrificing explanation why God ultimately punishes unbelievers in Hell.

The following discussion will survey the key arguments of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim and al-Subkī, explain the character and sources of Ibn al-Wazīr's ecumenical and conciliatory spirit, and elaborate his agnosticism on the duration and purpose of chastisement in the Fire. I will argue that Ibn al-Wazīr's conciliatory posture in the controversy over universal salvation probably

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1 For discussion of the arguments and notes on the history of the controversy, see Khalil, Islam and the fate of others 80–109, 126–31; Hoover, Islamic universalism; Hoover, Against Islamic universalism.
Withholding Judgment On Islamic Universalism

derived from the fact that he lived within Zaydi social and political spaces even after abandoning Zaydi doctrine for Sunni theological views. A more contentious and unyielding stance would have made him *persona non grata* among the Zaydis and probably among the Sunni scholars whom he sought out as teachers as well.

1 Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and al-Subkī on Hell-Fire

Ibn Taymiyya reflects on the duration of hell-fire in the last treatise that he wrote before his death in 728/1328, and he seems not to have addressed the question directly before this. The treatise, which I have called *Fanāʾ al-nār*, makes several arguments for limited chastisement of unbelievers in the Fire. The first two arguments are textual. One is Ibn Taymiyya’s citation of a tradition attributed to the second Sunni caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–44), “Even if the People of the Fire stayed in the Fire like the amount of sand of ʿĀlij, they would have, despite that, a day in which they would come out.” ʿĀlij was a large tract of sand outside Mecca, and the sense of the tradition is that those in the Fire will eventually leave, even if only after a very long time. According to Ibn Taymiyya, this clarifies that the statement in the Qurʾan affirming that unbelievers will stay in Hell “for long stretches of time” (*lābithīna fīha aḥqāban*) (Q 78:23) need not mean forever. A second textual argument is based on the Quranic verses, “As for those who are unhappy, they will be in the Fire, sighing and groaning, abiding (*khālidīn*) therein, as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord wills” (Q 11:106–7). The mainstream Sunni tradition took the key term *khālidīn* to mean “everlasting” or “eternal” in an absolute sense, especially as it appears frequently in the Qurʾan without being qualified by the duration of the heavens and the earth or by God’s will. For Ibn Taymiyya, however, the presence of these qualifications or exceptions indicates that *khālidīn* need not mean “forever” absolutely, and the Qurʾan does not therefore preclude universal salvation.

In a third argument in *Fanāʾ al-nār*, perhaps the most pivotal, Ibn Taymiyya rejects all claims that the Muslim community has reached a consensus (*ijmāʿ*) on the eternity of hell-fire for unbelievers. The early Muslims, the Salaf, were not of one mind on this issue, and any alleged consensus of later scholars is of

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2 For a discussion of the origins of this treatise, see Hoover, Islamic universalism 182–5.