

Spirituality and Comparative Religion

IN SEARCH OF THE LOST HEART: EXPLORATION IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT. By William C. Chittick (Edited by M. Rustom, A. Khalil, and K. Murata). Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012. Pp. 397. ISBN: 978 1438439365.

William Chittick, the author of the book under review, is a professor of religious studies at the State University of New York. He is a renowned expert on Islamic thought and his contributions have, in many ways, helped to reposition the appreciation and understanding of the intellectual and spiritual worldview of Islam. He is a highly skilled translator possessing 'a rigorous analytical mind and a rare ability to explain some of the most difficult ideas in a remarkable lucid fashion' (p. xi). No wonder then that his works have had a wide appeal in diverse fields of Islamic civilisation, comparative philosophy and religious studies and translated into many languages.

The editors have brought together a wide selection of 26 seminal pieces penned by the professor between 1975 and 2011. According to them, most of these are not readily available in Chittick's works, although some are accessible online. In this collection, the editors have attempted to harvest essays and articles on key themes and figures in Islamic thought to explore the underlying worldview of Islam. Having been updated and thoroughly edited, the book is divided into four categories with unequal chapters: Sufism and the Islamic Tradition (7), Ibn al-'Arabī and His Influence (9), Islamic Philosophy (6) and Reflections on Contemporary Issues (4).

Essays in the first category, 'Sufism and the Islamic Tradition', investigate the general theoretical and practical dimensions of Sufism and highlight its relationship with Islamic law and theology, scriptural hermeneutics and religious pluralism.

In category two, the influence of Ibn al-'Arabī on later Islamic thought is detailed, which the author contends are only known to a handful of specialists. Essentially, this part seeks to demonstrate the extent of his legacy with reference to several key Indian representatives of Ibn al-'Arabī school such as 'Abd al-Jalīl Ilāhābādī (d.1043/1633-1634), Shaykh Maḥmūd Khush-Dahān (d.1026/1617) and Khwāja Khurd (b.1010/1601), the son of Bāqī Billāh - the master of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī. During the reigns of Akbar and Jahāngīr (963-1037/1556-1628), numerous Indian Sufis wrote books and treatises that one might classify as belonging to the school of 'Arabī. According to the author, a major reason

why these Indian Sufis remain unstudied is that modern scholars have focused on social and political history and have had little interest in the goals and intentions of the Sufi authors themselves.

The third category, 'Islamic Philosophy', provides a glimpse into the worldview of the Islamic philosophical tradition by covering its main themes, such as ontology, psychology, cosmology, and eschatology. Several of these essays bring the concerns of Islamic philosophy and theoretical Sufism into perspective, demonstrating how these two traditions agree on a number of crucial points.

The essays under the fourth category which the editors have labelled, 'Reflections on Contemporary Issues', present a coherent picture of the least-known aspect of Chittick's writings.

Chittick has passionately plucked flowers from the writings of great luminaries Ibn 'Arabī, Rūmī, Qunawī (d.673/1274), Farghānī (d.699/1300), Mullā Ṣadrā (d.1050/1640) and others. To his credit, he has not confined his gardens to these eras, but has picked flowers from less known gardens too. He engages in a plethora of topics such as the nature of being and knowledge, the circle of life, harmony with the cosmos and the theoretical and practical dimensions of Islam. In fact, he has ventured beyond these Islamic gardens by comparing Confucianism and the Islamic tradition. The title of the book, *In Search of the Lost Heart*, is inspired by a famous Confucius sage, Mencius (d.289 BCE), who, it is claimed, pronounced that: 'the way to learning is nothing other than to seek for the lost heart' (p. 313). One might be led to think that Chittick is infatuated with pre-modern civilisational history and fascinated with intellectualising the ideas and mysteries of the past, especially of classical Islamic thought. Far from it, in these writings, he seems prepared to utilise the Islamic heritage and the heritages of others to bear on contemporary times and seek solutions to issues such as the metaphysical roots of war and peace (p. 277), the ecological crisis (p. 291), the phenomenon of religious diversity (p. 299) and the precedence of mercy (p. 307).

Chittick successfully addresses the dichotomy of divergent discourses within the Islamic disciplines. Unsurprisingly, his first chapter, 'Islam in Three Dimensions', lays the foundation for the rest of the book. He brilliantly uses the *ḥadīth* of Gabriel to expose and demonstrate the coherence within Islamic theology, philosophy and spirituality.

The extent to which the author is concerned with attention to detail and his grasp of linguistic nuances and his familiarity with source materials are such that the reader notices several instances of his discontent with some of the translations and renditions into English. For example, with some trepidation,

with reference to eight other translations, he has preferred God-weariness for *taqwā*. In so doing, he maintains that it brings out the implications of being aware and mindful, and avoids the negative and sentimental undertones of words such as 'piety', 'dutifulness', and 'righteousness' (p. 13f.). He contends that a major problem in understanding *wujūd* in *wahdat al-wujūd* is the term *wujūd*. In addition to its etymology, it is also problematic because, for him, there is no satisfactory equivalent for it in English. Thus he avoids translating it in 'A History of the Term *Wahdat al-Wujūd*' (p. 74). The popularity of Rūmī's poetry and 'the widespread habit of misinterpreting' his teachings, prompted Chittick to reflect on the role of 'reason' in Rūmī's thought. When he is asked about the quality of these translations, as scholar of Islamic studies, his response is that 'most of them – although not all – are inaccurate and inept' (p. 201).

The chapters, according to the editors, have been organised in such a way that they flow naturally and avoid awkward breaks or repetitions. In other words, they sought coherence. It looks like this is also one way through which Chittick has attempted to represent unity in Islamic thought as he has fused disparate ideas, sophisticated understandings and scriptural hermeneutics.

The style adopted by the author is lucid and simple yet scholarly, and occasionally, purely philosophical. There is considerable diversity in the contents to appeal to readers both with intellectual curiosity and spiritual inclination. In 'Eschatology in Islamic Thought', he allows ample space for the Qur'ān to speak for itself. According to the author, the work of Bābā Afḍal (d.606/1210), a contemporary of Suhrawardī, Averroes and Ibn 'Arabī, is relevant to contemporary times as it was written for a dedicated group of students without specialised training in the discipline (pp. xii,211). Chittick's brilliance, as an author, is evident in his ability to express sophisticated and detailed content with considerable brevity. Thus, for example, a series of shorter essays illuminate topics such as, 'The Bodily Gestures of the Ṣalāt'. These show not only his mastery of the subject but also his comprehensive grasp of Islamic thought.

Another floret appears in 'The Koran as the Lover's Mirror', in which Chittick asserts that Sufism places a premium on love, but Western observers rarely associate love with Islam itself. According to him, this assists in explaining 'the tendency to see Sufism as somehow tangential to the tradition' (p. 57). He argues that love of God is every bit as central to the Islamic perspective as it is to a tradition like Christianity. The rationale for following the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, is none other than loving God (Qur'ān, 3:31).

In chapter 6, 'The Real Shams-i Tabrīzī', he brings into balance the likes of Rāzī, and Zangī and Shams, and demonstrates that the criteria for all of them was ultimately to follow the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, demonstrating therefore a unity of purpose but multiplicity of paths.

On the matter of *wahdat al-wujūd*, through an analysis of the frequency and usage of the term, he states that 'The term is not found in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabī', which may surprise many and delight others (p. 85). Thus, he brings the pendulum to the centre. He also notes the role of earlier Orientalists in complicating the matter of discerning the meaning of *wahdat al-wujūd*. Following a review of the history of the term and without being exhaustive, he finally proposes seven different ways in which the term has been understood.

Another fascinating read is his chapter on 'The Question of Ibn al-'Arabī's "influence" on Rūmī'. One could but marvel at the grasp of the intricacies of these two great masters as depicted by Chittick. As an offshoot of this endeavour, he brings Nicholson to task and exposes some of his scholarly weaknesses (p. 93ff.).

Other interesting pieces are chapters 10 and 13. In the former, he considers Ibn al-'Arabī's positioning of *'ilm* as the broader and higher term than *ma'rifah* and the benefits of knowledge. In the latter, Chittick proposes that Jāmī's (d.898/1492) 'originality' lies in the fact that he summarises a whole school of thought and brings it to its climax. Jāmī's language, he says, is clearer, more eloquent and beautiful than that of his predecessors and, importantly, readily accessible to a larger audience. According to Jāmī, the three major aspects of the 'Perfect Man' are: the Perfect man as the locus of manifestation of the names Allah; as the goal of creation and as God's vicegerent.

Three appendices are offered in the book: a chronological list of historical figures cited, a list of chapter sources, and a list of books authored by Chittick. There is also an extensive bibliography which is followed by an index of Qur'ānic passages and an index of *Ḥadīth* and Sayings. The book ends with an index of names and technical terms.

Some essays can be used as standalone discussion material with students, whereas others are more intense for more erudite scholars. This is a significant contribution to scholarship and research for those interested in Islamic philosophy and Sufism and Muslim intellectual history in general.

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