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### In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought

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# Review

**In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought**, William Chittick, edited by Mohammed Rustom, Atif Khalil, and Kazuyo Murata, Albany: SUNY Press, 2012, ISBN 978-1-4384-3935-8, ix, 397 pp.

*In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought* is a collection of essays written by William C. Chittick, which relate various expressions of Islamic intellectuality to the foundational principles of Islam. The text includes Chittick's translations of treatises, passages, and poetry by authors from virtually every corner of the Islamic intellectual universe, which speaks to the diverse range of his scholarship. The editors have selected for this book a number of essays written by Chittick between 1975 and 2011 which are not widely accessible and not included in his other works. Although the essays are able to stand alone as valuable sources on their respective subjects, the editors have presented them in such a way that they collectively convey the book's central message. The use of numerous Quranic references and sayings from hadith literature tie Chittick's commentaries on ideas and texts in Islamic thought to the tenets of Islamic belief. He continuously demonstrates for the non-expert Arabist or Persianist how the subtle nuances of language affect the way we as readers understand what is at stake in a given text. The extensive notes, indices, and bibliography are themselves a rich resource for student and scholar alike.

Throughout the text, Chittick grapples with the idea of learning from the perspective of Muslim thinkers, whose idea of what it means to be human is rooted in their

belief in God and the human relationship to the Divine, and deeply concerned with the human soul and the afterlife. Since for these thinkers learning means “learning to be human in the truest sense,” the book presents various possible answers to the questions: why must we learn; what should we seek to learn; and how does learning take place?

The first section of the book presents a number of articles related to Sufism and its wider significance within the Islamic tradition. Chittick examines Sufism’s relationship to Islamic law and belief (chapter 1), the metaphysical and symbolic significance of the bodily gestures of the daily prayers (chapter 2), and the role of love as a hermeneutic tool when reading scripture, namely, the Quran (chapter 7). In the third chapter, where Chittick surveys the role of weeping in Sufism and Islam, he first engages the historical role of weeping and its importance in a variety of texts and authors. Then he moves on to address the complicated theological dimensions of weeping, and why it is that various hadiths describe God as laughing and never as crying, whereas the Islamic tradition encourages people to weep more and laugh less. In chapters 4 and 6 Chittick speaks about the role of Sufism as a source of reconciliation between competing perspectives in Islam, and here he also discusses particular cases in Islamic history when it has served this function.

The second section surveys the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī and the influence of his ideas on Islamic thought. In the first chapter in this section, Chittick discusses the popular term *wahdat al-wujūd* or “the Oneness of Being,” which although Ibn al-‘Arabī never himself used it, has come to characterize his worldview. Chittick then explores the various historical personalities closely related to Ibn al-‘Arabī, and outlines his influence upon the development of theoretical Sufism. For example, his expositions of Farghānī and Jāmī (chapters 13 and 14) show how the implications of philosophical principles such as the *wahdat al-wujūd* are understood in the context of learned discussions concerning the nature of God and how to attain human perfection. Chittick also highlights those of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s followers who were exposed to other streams of philosophy, such as Qūnawī (chapter 11). This both enhances the portrait of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s place in the Islamic tradition and creates space for comparisons between the aims of knowledge in Islam and in ancient Western philosophy. Chittick even displays how Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ideas helped speak to many important but relatively unknown Sufis from the Indian subcontinent; here we learn that he inspired both theoretical and practical treatises on Sufism (chapters 14–16).

In the third section, Chittick explores some major questions in the field of Islamic philosophy with a focus upon traditional epistemology. He surveys the complex theories of life and death in Islamic thought in a discussion devoted to Islamic eschatology (chapter 20), and also relates the course of divine “Self-Knowledge” to human nature and the human search for self-understanding (chapters 21 and 22). In his examination of what Rūmī called the “partial intellect” and “Universal Intellect,” Chittick examines Rūmī’s views on the limitations of reason as a means to achieve sapiential knowledge (chapter 17). Here he clarifies the value of a character like Rūmī, who although portrayed by contemporary translators as exclusively a love-mystic, is a source from whom we can learn a great deal of traditional metaphysics.

In his chapter on Bābā Afḍal's psychology (chapter 18), which describes humans as microcosms of the universe, Chittick explains why this thinker emphasized the importance of seeking knowledge of oneself. Pointing toward the salvific telos of knowledge in Islam, he states that "The soul is a tree whose fruit is intelligence and intelligence is a tree whose fruit is encounter with God" (p. 219). For Bābā Afḍal there is a correlation between seeking knowledge of oneself, and seeking the kind of knowledge of God which is a source of deliverance. Through a discussion of Mullā Ṣadrā's views on perception (chapter 19), Chittick urges readers to contemplate what the implications of God's Oneness and the multiplicity of things might be in determining the modes of knowledge and perception available to human beings as knowing subjects. Chittick connects the ideas and advice of Bābā Afḍal to Mullā Ṣadrā and his notion of perception through an analysis of the "intellect," where he explains that for both figures, perception takes place in the "intellect," but then also strengthens the "intellective form" of the soul and the body. Thus we can see how "finding oneself" or "knowing oneself" is something Bābā Afḍal might have encouraged because it means to integrate all the levels of a human being into its highest faculty of knowledge, thereby causing human beings to see their outer form in the light of their innermost Self.

Bringing together the ideas from the previous sections, the fourth and final section of the book addresses contemporary issues. Chittick brings to life through the language of Islamic theology how particular attributes of God, namely mercy and wrath, prefigure "war" or strife into the nature of existence. At the same time he argues that the metaphysical precedence of peace and harmony above conflict and difference means that in the end divine mercy is always (and will always) overcome the plight of wrath (chapter 23). Chittick goes on to discuss the role of human beings in the cosmos (chapter 24), where he shows that according to Islam the environment is not only a sign of God but is itself a sacred and supernatural place. Addressing the environmental crisis, Chittick points to the Qur'anic view of man as God's vicegerent on earth, highlighting that this status includes an obligation upon humanity to be the caretakers and guardians of the cosmos. He then connects this to the deep-seated reasons why people should seek to live in conformity rather than in conflict with nature.

Moreover, Chittick approaches the issue of religious pluralism by exploring how the fundamental principles of Islam as expressed in the *Shahādah* provides a space for inclusiveness as well as particularity. Here, Chittick presents the metaphysical roots of Islam's theological dimensions and shows the importance of bringing complex cognate discussions back to the basic sources of the Islamic tradition, of course, without oversimplifying the significance of first principles.

The book culminates in a final chapter devoted to learning, where Chittick calls attention to a statement from Mencius to the effect that, "the way of learning is nothing other than to seek for the lost heart" (p. 313). Here, the author displays some expressions from Chinese Islam that explain the objective of the religion in terms of a primordial state needed to be recovered, and he contends that the wisdom of these traditions can draw humanity back into a natural path of living,

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which accords both with the metaphysical reality of the human being and its relation to God, and which can be a source of loving compassion in the world.

Written in the style of scholarship for which William C. Chittick is well known, this text relates seemingly disparate concepts and presents complex metaphysical ideas in simple, accessible language. The diversity amongst the sources translated in this text, and the manner in which Chittick puts them into conversation with major philosophical debates will prove interesting to readers with a variety of intellectual interests. Needless to say, *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought* is a significant contribution to the scholarship on Islamic thought.

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