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DHEEN MOHAMED

Muslim intellectuals have consistently complained over the past decades of the 20th century against the Western attitude towards Islam, especially against the works of Western Islamists and Orientalists dealing with Islam as a religion or/and a civilisation. Genuine though these complaints are from the Muslims' perspective, there has been no substantial change or improvement in the essential Western attitudes. A prominent orientalist like W.C. Smith once stated that "anything I say about Islam as a living faith is valid only in so far as Muslims can say Amen to it"¹. Although this statement is nothing short of a landmark, when it comes to the study of 'the other' not much has been achieved. Despite all the development in information technology and the increasing first hand knowledge about Islam, especially because of the presence of a large number of Muslims in the Western world, the treatment that Islam has been meted out at the hands of the Orientalists and Islamists remains, by far and large, unpalatable for Muslims. Similarly, there have been counter complaints — genuine once again — from the Westerners. They claim that the Muslims have not done enough; in fact they have failed to introduce Islam effectively to the Western world. This complaint too has a core of truth that cannot be brushed aside.

Notwithstanding the complaints and counter complaints and notwithstanding all that can be said for or against the Western scholarship of Islam, there is little doubt that by the end of the 20th century Western

¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?" in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 43.

scholarship had accumulated a tremendous amount of data about the various religions of the world, including Islam. While this data is very valuable, its treatment by Western scholars leaves much to be desired. In short, despite some improvement, the Western scholars have, on the whole, failed to do the needful to remove the causes which had led to the complaints expressed by Muslims.

One of the areas of study that has been subjected to quite unjust treatment is Sufism, the Islamic spiritual quest that has usually been termed "Muslim Mysticism", "Islamic Mysticism", "Muhammadan Mysticism", "Mystical Islam" and finally Sufism. Until almost towards the end of the 20th century, the Western studies of Sufism have been marred by several misconceptions, even biases, which have prevented the Western scholars from having a better understanding of the nature of *Taşawwuf* with its various dimensions.

The main concern of these scholars was centred on tracing the origins of Muslim spirituality in Christianity and other religious traditions like Hinduism and Buddhism. The result was that the studies which were supposed to explore the inner dimensions of Muslim spirituality, ended up, in most cases, by denying Islam those dimensions of faith that form its core and reflect, in a balanced manner, the meeting of soul and mind, of reason and revelation, of body and spirit, of theory and practice alongside assisting human beings in realizing their ultimate goal — nearness to their Compassionate and Merciful Lord.

It is this aspect of things concerning the studies of *Taşawwuf* which prompts the scholars of this branch of knowledge, and those associated with or interested in it, to pay particular attention to the contemporary American Islamist William C. Chittick's recent book titled *Sufism: A Short Introduction*.

Professor William C. Chittick is well known to scholars in the field of Islamic Studies, specially *Taşawwuf*. He is considered an authority on Muḥyī 'l-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. 'Alī ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240) and his school of thought. His works on Ibn al-'Arabī and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) are highly regarded by scholars of Sufism both in the East and the West. Having mastered two of the very essential languages of Islam, Arabic and Persian, Professor Chittick has displayed profundity of knowledge and depth of insight as regards the teachings of the Muslim Ṣūfīs as well as their writings and practices through his several original works which are written in a scholarly, albeit lucid style. All this is eminently borne out by *Sufism: A Short Introduction* which is the fruit of more than thirty years of the author's hard work in the field. Indeed, it is an important landmark in the 20th century Western scholarship on *Taşawwuf*.

A major characteristic of this book is that it is based primarily on the original sources. It is recourse to the secondary sources which had often led even Muslims studying *Taşawwuf* to a great deal of confusion, inconsistency and superficiality. Professor Chittick goes beyond all that in exploring the Islamic spiritual tradition in its various dimensions from the writings and practices of the original and authoritative exponents of *Taşawwuf* in addition to his reliance on the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. 'Alī ibn 'Uthmān al-Hajwīrī (d. 465/1072) and Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309) and 'Alī ibn Aḥmad Bushanjī (ca. the fifth century of *Hijrah*), Ibn al-'Arabī and Rūmī, Farīd al-Dīn al-'Aṭṭār (d. ca. 617/1220) and Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 234/874) are some of the distinguished authorities of *Taşawwuf* who feature prominently in this work wherein the author attempts to elaborate the concepts and analyse the experiences of different Ṣūfīs. The statement of the publishers of the book on the back-page of the cover in this regard is not at all exaggerated: "After a general overview of the tradition he draws upon the works of some of the great sufi writers to give a fresh and revealing perspective on the teachings and beliefs of sufism and its proponents".

In his note on the sources Professor Chittick himself clearly states that:

I will be citing the Koran, the Hadith (the corpus of sayings attributed to Muhammad) and many sufi teachers from earliest times down to Jami in the fifteenth century. I have not forgotten that the sufi tradition has continued to flourish into modern times and that other Islamic languages also have much to offer. But limits have to be drawn somewhere and the Sufis whom I will be quoting represent the classical formulation of teachings that have permanently colored the tradition (p. ix).

This in fact goes with the author's important methodological assumption, which is ignored to a great extent by many modern scholars but which the author clearly spells out and stresses in his introduction:

I have provided a relatively large amount of translation from primary texts because any attempt to understand Sufism in its own context demands looking at its own ways of expressing itself, not simply at interpretations made in contemporary terms. My goal throughout is to let the tradition speak for itself. Although the task is almost impossible, the attempt may help set this book apart from other introductory works available in English (p. viii).

Another important feature that should not miss our attention is that the author is not under any illusion whatsoever about the present practical state of *Taşawwuf*. His quotation of 'Alī ibn Aḥmad Bushanjī's saying: "Today sufism

is a name without a reality but it used to be a reality without a name" (p. 1) at the very outset of his book is significant. It is a saying that has echoed in many early Sūfī writings such as Abū Bakr al-Kalābādī (d. 380/990), Abū Nu'aym al-Ḥafḥānī (d. 428/1037), Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūṣī (d. 378/988), Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) and many others and shows that a sympathetic treatment of *Taṣawwuf* is not inconsistent with seeing things as they are. Moreover, by this quotation, especially through the second part of it, the author paves the way, whether knowingly or otherwise, to what he will conclude while discussing the nature and the essence of *Taṣawwuf*, namely, that *Taṣawwuf* is the realisation of truth manifested in the *shahādah* in all its dimensions and is thus the epitome of human perfection. It is the "invisible spiritual presence that animates all authentic expressions of Islam" (p. 9) that have been always present at the heart of Islamic faith and practice and conceptualised in *iḥsān*.

After a brief but lucid elucidation of the tripartite division of Islam into *islām*, *imān* and *iḥsān* — a division derived from the famous *ḥadīth* of Jibrīl — Chittick says:

All three dimensions of Islam have been present wherever there have been Muslims. People cannot take their religion seriously without engaging their bodies, their minds, and their hearts; or their activity, their thinking, and their being. But these dimensions became historically differentiated in many forms, the diversity of which has all sorts of causes, about which historians have written no end of books. After all, we are talking about how Muslims practice their religion, how they conceptualize their faith and their understanding of things, and how they express their quest to be near to God. We are talking about various branches of Islamic law and institutions of government, diverse schools of thought investigating the nature of God and the human soul, and multifarious organizations that guide people on the path of spiritual aspiration and give focus to their vastly different experiences of God's presence.

These diverse expressions of Islam, which have undergone tremendous historical and regional variation, have been given many names over Islamic history. The whole situation has become much more complex because of the investigations of modern scholars, who have had their own programs, agendas, and goals and who have employed diverse interpretative schemes in their attempts to make sense of Islamic history in contemporary terms (p. 8).

It is important to note Chittick's analytical reading of Bushanji's quote when he remarks:

As Islam gradually assumed its specific historical forms through the codification of various teachings and practices and the establishment of social institutions, the

three dimensions designated by the Hadith of Gabriel came to be reflected within society as relatively distinct, though thoroughly interrelated, aspects of Islamic civilization. However, doing the beautiful remained an intangible inner sanctum. On the individual level, this third dimension has been found in the heart of all Muslims who practice their religion for God's sake alone. In the social sphere it has been given its clearest expression in the life of those whom I would like to call the "Sufis," even though many who claimed this label for themselves did not live up to the ideal, and many who did in fact live up to it did not want the name.

Sufism in this understanding can be viewed as an invisible spiritual presence that animates all authentic expressions of Islam. The various historical forms in which it has appeared serve to demonstrate that this dimension of the religion has remained an ideal of fundamental importance. Nonetheless, the difficulty of achieving human perfection has meant that the individuals and institutions historically connected with the name cannot necessarily be held up as expressions of Sufism's true nature. The Sufis themselves have always been aware of the danger of degeneration and corruption inherent in attempting to adapt social institutions to ideals that can only be fully actualized by rare individuals. When Bushanji said that Sufism is now a name without a reality, he was referring to these inadequate attempts to codify and institutionalize the heart of the tradition (p. 9).

Still another important feature of the book is that unlike most Western and many Muslim scholars, its author does not look at *Taṣawwuf* as something external to Islam. He does not approach it, to begin with, as a separate entity and an independent phenomenon whereafter he comes looking for its place in Islam. For such an approach to *Taṣawwuf* has caused much confusion and has given rise to many unwarranted and highly questionable notions regarding the various concepts and practices of *Taṣawwuf*. At the same time, it has prevented scholars from understanding the real nature of the inner dimension of Islamic faith. Professor Chittick, however, tries to approach it from within the Islamic tradition as a reality residing at the heart of the tradition itself, irrespective of its different manifestations. Of course his was not the pioneering role in this regard. Seyyed Hossein Nasr has ably and forcefully demonstrated this in many of his writings. In *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, for instance, he says:

As far as Sufism is concerned, strictly speaking, it should not be classified along with other integral traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, because Sufism is itself a part of Islam and not an independent tradition. Islam can be spoken of as a tradition in the same way as one speaks of Christianity or Buddhism. This rather obvious point needs to be laboured because often today in certain circles

Sufism is taken out of its Islamic context with particular motives in mind and then discussed along with other Oriental or Occidental traditions.

Sufism is actually like the flower of the tree of Islam, or in another sense, the sap of that tree. Or it can be called the jewel in the crown of the Islamic tradition. But whatever image is used, there remains the undeniable fact that, taken out of the context of Islam, Sufism cannot be fully understood, and its methods, of course, can never be practised efficaciously, to say the least. Nor can one do justice to the wholeness of the Islamic tradition and its immensely rich spiritual possibilities by putting aside its inner dimension. In speaking about Sufism, therefore, in reality we shall be speaking about the Islamic tradition itself in its most inward and universal aspect.²

This statement of Professor Nasr does not seem to have attracted the due attention of the majority of the scholars even in the Muslim world. But Chittick's *Sufism: A Short Introduction* comes to represent the culmination of the scientifically required methodology and objectively demanded approach, bringing his treatment in harmony with the tradition as championed by its exponents.

The book comprises a preface, 10 chapters, a brief note on sources, highly informative notes, and a useful list of suggested readings containing authoritative sources, both classical and modern. All this is bound together in one volume with an index to make 180 pages of awe-inspiring and interesting reading for the students of *Taşawwuf*, both lay and scholars.

The first three chapters titled "The Sufi Path", "The Sufi Tradition", and "Name and Reality" successfully explain the meaning of *Taşawwuf*, its nature, reality and its place at the heart of the Islamic tradition and as a dimension of the whole that is Islam, as a revealed truth contained in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace be on him). The important features of these first three chapters lie in the following:

1. In explaining the nature of *Taşawwuf* and exploring its dimensions the author depends on the famous tradition of the Prophet known as *Hadith* Jibril where the classification — *islām*, *imān* and *ihsān* — is clearly expressed. Professor Chittick, in his own way, sees these three dimensions of the message of the Prophet (peace be on him) as corresponding to Islam's body, mind and *fiṭrah* (the original human disposition). If on the most extended level *islām* tells people what to do and what not to do and at a deeper level it teaches them how to understand the world and themselves, it also teaches people, at the deepest level, how to transform themselves so that they may come into harmony with the ground of all being:

² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (New York: Longman, 1957), 49.

Neither activity nor understanding nor both together are humanly sufficient. Activity and understanding need to be focused in such a way that they bring about human goodness and perfection. This goodness is inherent and intrinsic to the original human disposition (*fiṭra*) created in God's image. If the first dimension of Islam keeps in view the activities that must be performed because of our relational situation with God and others, and the second our understanding of self and others, the third points the way to achieving nearness to God. For those with any sensitivity to the religious life, the various terms that are employed in discussing the focus of this third dimension are immediately recognisable as the heart of religion. These include sincerity, love, virtue and perfection (pp. 5-6).

2. The author introduces *Fiqh*, *Kalām* and *Taşawwuf* as has been traditionally done by Muslim sages and *imāms* as representative sciences to these three dimensions of Islam, viz. *islām*, *imān* and *ihsān*. This is in conformity with the mainstream Islamic tradition.
3. The author uses terms like *imān*, *ihsān*, *rahmah*, *dhikr* in order to present the essence of *Taşawwuf* in a manner which has made his treatment of the terms Sufism and *Taşawwuf* quite distinctive and unprecedented.

The last paragraph of the third chapter merits being quoted here *in extenso* for it represents the gist of the ideas of the first three chapters:

If Sufism began as a "reality without a name," it was because those Muslims who loved God at the beginning of Islam simply loved God and therefore followed the Prophet, and they in turn were loved by God. They had no need to name what they were doing. They lived in harmony with their Creator by following His designated messenger and guide. But as time passed, people found it more and more difficult to live up to the reality of love, to imitate the Prophet with perfect compliance, and to achieve the state where God was their hearing and their sight, speaking to them about Himself and showing them the signs of His presence in all things. Instead, they spoke more and more about how God's presence was to be achieved, and they named it by a name they themselves devised. The name — whether it be "Sufism" or something else — is perishing and of no real account. The reality, however, is everything (p. 39).

There is no doubt that at the heart of *Taşawwuf* lies *tazkiyat al-naḥs*, that is, purification and augmentation of the *naḥs* or the cultivation of the soul as Chittick would render the term in English, is the basis on which the practice of "Islamisation of self" rests. If, as Chittick puts it, "in order to learn how to see God in oneself and things, one has to learn how to be aware of God constantly. One has to see the shining light of the risen sun in a landscape that others perceive as shrouded in midnight" (p. 40).

It can only be achieved by this very process of "cultivation", *tazkiyah*, for the discussion of which Chittick devotes chapter four of the book titled "Self Help".

One of the outstanding landmarks of this chapter is its profound analysis of the concept of *nafs* (self) which is very well rooted in the Qur'anic wisdom and tradition. It is very interesting to note in Chittick's analysis the emphasis on the idea of *nafas* (breath) in Ṣūfī terminology and the link that Chittick tries to establish between *nafs* and *nafas*. The Ṣūfī aphorism which goes on to say that "the sufi is the child of the moment" has been clearly elaborated in this chapter.

Equally important is Professor Chittick's stress on the unknowability and undefinability of the self and hence the necessity of the prophetic knowledge without which cultivation of the self is impossible. It would not be out of place here to reproduce a paragraph from the book which stresses the need for prophetic knowledge:

From the standpoint of the Sufi tradition, there is nothing more damaging to the well-being of the self than the notion that we know who we are and that we do not need help, or only a little bit of help, or only the help of the imagined "experts," to put our affairs in order. In the Sufi reading, this notion of not needing prophetic help is the fatal defect of the modern world. Modern science, technology, and all the other branches of learning — not to speak of politics — are nothing but ignorance of the self masquerading as knowledge. Attempts to rationalize the world and to use it for our own benefit are doomed to failure, because we cannot possibly know where our benefit lies. This is the ultimate folly of "self-help." The only way we can pretend to know our selves in order to help our selves is to bury our selves in false knowledge, pretending to know what we do not and cannot know. People do this by defining the self in limited terms — biological terms, anthropological terms, psychological terms, historical terms, economic terms, social terms, ideological terms, theological terms, Islamist terms. These failed attempts to understand the self go a long way toward explaining the historically unprecedented blood-letting of the twentieth century (p. 50).

Chapter five of the book deals with *dhikr*, "remembrance", a practice that is rooted in the Qur'an and the *Hadīth* and when taken in all its dimensions, is the distinguishing mark of a Ṣūfī Muslim. Here in this chapter one finds a brief but very well articulated presentation of *dhikr* in Islam, and especially in the Ṣūfī tradition. One point that deserves special appreciation is the link Chittick establishes between *dhikr* and *shahādah* which is also commonly called, in a *hadīth*, as "the best *dhikr*" and also between *dhikr* and *mushāhadah* (witnessing God) and *fanā'* (annihilation of self). (See pp. 58–60).

These key ideas and concepts are further elaborated in chapter eight (pp. 97–110) where the author discusses the vision of God, remembrance of God and disclosure of God under the title "Images of Beatitude".

If the author fails to connect *dhikr* with love in his discussion of *dhikr* it is because of the great emphasis he would make on love in the next chapter titled "The Way of Love". The ability of the author to dive deep into the ocean of *Taṣawwuf* after having made himself thoroughly conversant with the Qur'anic and prophetic guidance on the subject and then to come out with those hidden pearls of knowledge found therein is amazing. If I may be allowed to make a personal comment, few modern scholars match him in that regard. The author's famous works *The Sufi Path of Love*³ and *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*⁴ are quite discernible in the background of his analysis.

It is noteworthy that Chittick does not succumb to the myth to which many modern Western scholars as well as their Muslim counterparts on *Taṣawwuf* have succumbed when discussing the so called religion of love, especially in connection with Ibn al-'Arabī, a notion according to which all religions are true for the lovers or Ṣūfis. Here, for the first time, I came across a Western writer who talks about a religion of love, not as union of religions but rather as the essential Islamic way to Allah with all its creativity and its ups and downs in the way of the seeker. The elaboration of love in relation with the Ṣūfī concept of *faqr* is something unprecedented in any modern Western writings that I know of, although that had been quite distinctly analysed in Ṣūfī writings as early as in the 3rd century in the discourse of al-Bisṭāmī, Dhū 'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (ca. 180–245/796–860) and al-Junayd al-Bughdādī (d. 298/910) and the like and then it was very well articulated by Ibn al-'Arabī in the 7th century of *Hijrah*.

The centrality of love in the religious life of Muslims and the vital role it plays in the Ṣūfī path brings the author back to the theme of love time and again. In chapter nine, for instance, he returns to it while talking about what he calls "The Fall of Adam". Keeping aside my reservations regarding the use of this type of language which should better be avoided because of its affinity to a Christian tone and tenor, the author discusses love from different angles, relating it to the very notion of *amānah* (trust) in the Qur'an. Chittick analyses the idea of love with a profound metaphysical and psychological depth, contributing to highlighting the nature of what I would like to call the "spiritual technology" that brings man to the fold of Allah and helps him to

³ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

⁴ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

transform his self and enables him to realise the state of complete surrender to Allah: Islam. Again, the idea of love and its relation to poverty in its deepest meaning as held by the Ṣūfis, features very well in this chapter.

The last chapter of the book, "The Paradox of the Veil", deals with the delicate subject of the veil in its various dimensions. It tries to expound the concept through the most authentic Ṣūfi writings, most notably those of 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Niffārī (d. 359/970), Ibn al-'Arabī, al-Ghazālī and Abū Ibrāhīm Bukhārī Mustamlī (d. 433/1042). The topic is vital to Ṣūfis for it is related to *mushāhadah*: the vision of God, which is undoubtedly the primary goal of the Ṣūfi who would aim at this vision in this world and in the hereafter. The Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace be on him) have talked about God's vision. There is a famous *ḥadīth* in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim which is very often quoted by the Ṣūfis: "God has seventy veils of light and darkness. Were He to remove [the veil of the veils], the glories of His face would burn away everything that the eyesight of His creatures perceives"⁵ hints at this vision.

The author discusses some important key issues in this regard namely, how light, knowledge and ignorance can be a veil. In his discussion he does not fail to relate these to issues of *wujūd* (absolute being), *mumkin* (possible being) and *tanzīh* (God's incomparability). He goes further to discuss very eloquently the veil as "face", rooting them firmly in the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions and also in the opinions of the theologians. By the time one arrives at the end of the chapter, it becomes evident that the author has very rightly named the chapter "The Paradox of the Veil".

Now I come to the seventh chapter of the book, "Never-ending Dance" which I had so far deliberately abstained from discussing. The contents of the chapter are very much consistent with the Ṣūfi tradition and concern some cardinal issues such as "divine names", "the ascent of the soul", "human perfection" and other related issues. Nevertheless, such is the language of the chapter that it leaves the Muslim reader in a state of discomfort. It must be said straight away that Islam is very sensitive to the linguistic style and expressions in matters related to Allah and the Prophet (peace be on him), for these expressions carry serious religious and theological implications. The Christian milieu in which the author lives might possibly not allow him to see things fully as Muslims see them. But surely in the Islamic context, utmost care must be exercised in the choice of words. The expression "never ending dance" conveys to the Muslim reader quite a profane image.

Although the author discusses in this chapter issues which has nothing that is related to dance as such and he uses the term metaphorically to signify

⁵ See Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb fī qawlihi: innā 'llāh lā yanām wa fī qawlihi: ḥijābuhu al-nūr.

the continuous movement of the soul, a negative impression is conveyed to the minds and the hearts of readers from the design of the front cover of the book which portrays the Mevlevi dervishes in their whirling dance. *Samā'* has been, from the very beginning, a part of spiritual discipline among the Ṣūfis.⁶ It had its roots, according to the Ṣūfis, in the practice of the Prophet (peace be on him), although the stress and style have developed gradually and changed enormously with the passage of time. Nevertheless, Ṣūfis never let these developments go without check. From the very beginning they have been conscious both of the developments that were taking place around them and of their implications. Sarrāj and others have written extensively on the subject. However, there is no denying of the fact that dance has been a peculiar characteristic of the Mevlevi and it is one of their living traditions; one that attracts many people. Nevertheless, it would not be consistent with a man of Chittick's stature to treat the whole issue with an element of indifference, giving the impression as if the dance of the Mevlevi is an integral part of *Taṣawwuf*. It was not at all appropriate to bring that image on the front cover which, in the eyes of many Muslims, would present Sufism as a cultic tradition, an impression that the book was otherwise successful in dispelling.

Another negative aspect of the book is its overemphasis on what it called "drunken Sufism" as opposed to "sober Sufism". Although Western scholarship has been fond of this division throughout its intellectual encounter with Sufism, especially from the late 19th century onward, it was surprising to see Chittick, who is well versed in the Ṣūfi tradition, to have succumbed to the same mistake (although his handling of the topic considerably differs from that of other Western scholars). Anyone who is well acquainted with the writings and practices of the Ṣūfis will observe that the manner in which this distinction between these two states of the Ṣūfi path is being highlighted by the present-day scholars is superficial. Even according to Ibn al-'Arabī it is impossible to classify Ṣūfis in this manner for there is no independent existence of any of these two in any Ṣūfi experience.⁷

The book contains several sayings ascribed to the Prophet (peace be on him) and all of them are – no doubt – found in Muslim sources. It would, however, have been more appropriate had the author taken the trouble of authenticating these sayings. Although in my view a great many of these

⁶ See Abū 'l-Faḍl Muḥammad ibn al-Qaysarānī, *Kitāb al-Samā'*, ed., Abū 'l-Wafā' al-Marāghī (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A'lā li 'l-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1970). See also Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Tūṣī, *Kitāb al-Luma'*, ed., 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Ṭahā 'Abd al-Bāqī Surūr (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Diniyyah, 1960), 338-74.

⁷ See Muḥyī 'l-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1998), 2: 536. See also *ibid.*, 533-37.

sayings do not play any essential role in the book as a whole, it does not justify the author's attitude of treating the task of authenticating *ahādīth* with an element of indifference.

Apart from these minor shortcomings, the book has to its credit many points that are unparalleled in most of the modern writings on Sufism.

1. The book is a useful introduction to Sufism as the title suggests and gives a comprehensive and lucid account of what Sufism is.
2. The language is clear, simple and forceful and eminently succeeds in articulating the dynamics of *Taṣawwuf* and its vitality in human life.
3. The book shows Sufism to be an integral part of Islam, a part which, in fact, is the very heart of Islam and gives it its dynamism and vitality.
4. The presentation of the subject is well grounded in the basic sources of Islam, the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*, apart from being well rooted in the authentic writings of the Ṣūfīs.
5. The author has taken pains to analyse the key concepts and Qur'ānic terms in accordance with the Ṣūfī tradition.
6. Finally, the strength of the book lies in its depiction of *Taṣawwuf* as a living force which has not only inspired and shaped the lives of people in the days bygone but does so with equal vigour even today.

In my considered view, here is a book to be read by all seekers of the truth and I am sure it will occupy a prominent position in the modern literature on Sufism. The book is an immense source of knowledge and inspiration for all those who are eager to be acquainted with the path of Islam's intellectual and spiritual life. In view of the author's deep insight into the subject and his ability to forcefully articulate his thoughts, one only wishes that the author would continue to produce similar works of excellence and merit.



Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001. Pp. 245. Hardbound. ISBN 0674-00477-9. No Price given.

At a moment in history when relations between Christianity and Islam are strained in many parts of the world, notes Tarif Khalidi in the introduction to his book on Jesus, it is important to remember other times when these two

traditions were more open to each other, and better able to benefit and learn from the each other's witness. It is the great merit of *The Muslim Jesus* to have opened up a window of commonality that provides a refreshing alternative to theological argumentation and political divisiveness.

Professor Khalidi offers a number of translations from a corpus of Islamic texts that he refers to as the "Muslim gospel". The collection is formed from references to, and stories about, the Prophet Jesus as found in popular devotional literature, mystical and historical writings. In these excerpts the Christian reader will recognize a figure who is neither the replication of the Jesus of the New Testament nor the repetition of the Qur'ānic figure of Jesus, but who draws from and reflects the nature and the teachings of both. To be sure, he is an Islamic Jesus, a beloved prophet who recites Qur'ān, prays in an Islamic way and goes on pilgrimage to Makkah. But he is also a figure whose development is clearly influenced by Christian scriptural and pietistic tradition, a teacher of asceticism and devotion and a prophet of healing, miracle-working, and ministry. Above all, he was the source of exemplary ethical teachings. As Khalidi expresses it, this is a Jesus who is clearly a Muslim creation and yet is able to maintain a certain distance from the orthodoxy of the very folks who created him.

The sayings and stories are presented in 303 segments. Each segment contains a translation and a short commentary. Khalidi clarifies at the beginning of his excellent and very helpful introduction that he is not the first scholar to have presented this material. The collections of his predecessors David Margoliouth and Migel Asiny Palacios, however, were less complete and did not take into full account either the literary aspects of the material or its changing role and definition in the general evolution of Islamic piety. The sayings and stories contained in this collection are translated into fluid and easily digestible English, and are both instructive and moving. Some are even humorous, and present an image of a Jesus who is at home with his people and who does not hesitate to help them to learn and understand. Khalidi stresses that Jesus of the Muslim Gospel undergoes a transition over time from asceticism to lordship over nature to healer and miracle worker to social and ethical model. It is clear from reading the texts and stories that the Jesus of the "Muslim gospel" is, above all, a moral exemplar whose struggles with the demonic forces that lead the human soul astray are much in keeping with the New Testament portrayal of Jesus having successfully resisted the temptations of Satan in the wilderness.

Was this healer/teacher whose portrayal developed through the centuries the "real" Jesus? Khalidi readily acknowledges that the image(s) of Jesus