WILLIAM C. CHITTICK: *Imaginal worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the problem of religious diversity.* vii, 208 pp. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994. $18.95.

This volume contains an introduction and ten studies which draw on and present Professor Chittick's model for the understanding of Ibn al-'Arabi. Published previously, the studies have been largely rewritten, and adorned with extra passages of translation. They are presented here in three parts. Part 1 explores the basic components of IA's ontology; Part 2 the ontological status and significance of the world of imagination (*khayāl*); and Part 3 the nature of faith and religious diversity. The result has been recognized as 'an excellent summary and a solid interpretation of IA's teachings' (Gerhard Böwering, on the dustjacket).

Each of the four studies of Part 1 is an exploration of the fundamental paradox which Chittick locates at the heart of IA's theology: the paradox of he/not he. Since all available structures of religious thought were pressed by IA into the service of his vision, that simple paradox found varied expression. Ch. i focuses on the term *wujūd* which designates, variously, absolute and non-manifest being, all that is not God (meaning the cosmos), and man (because *wujūd* attains to its full phenomenal manifestation only in perfect human beings', p. 23). These are slippery thoughts and they lead, in this section, to an accumulation of verbal paradox: 'in one sense the universe is other than God ... in another sense the universe is identical with God'; 'each entity in the cosmos is identical with *wujūd* and differs from *wujūd* at the same time' (p. 24). Further variations on these themes are explored in ch. ii (focusing on the terminology of microcosm, macrocosm, and the perfect man) and ch. iv (structured round the term *fiṭra*). The dominant organizational and presentational technique (which recurs throughout the book) depends on the exploration of terminological bundles which derive meaning from and give meaning to the grand cosmological conceit, he/not he. Chapter iii, on IA's ethics, seems out of place until his ethics, too, is discovered to be an aspect of ontology. The mode of human perfection is the actualization of divine attributes, achieved through 'surrendering the illusion of selfhood' and 'submission to *wujūd*', etc. The highest achievement is eventually a paradox: the station of no station, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the bringing together of opposite qualities in undifferentiation. It is all 'utterly inaccessible to ordinary language' (p. 64).

The three chapters of Part 2 focus on the plane of imagination. This is an ontological realm which lies between the realm of sensible experience and the realms of spiritual entities. Because its nature is intermediate and liminal, it has familiar qualities: not securely of one world or the other. By exploration of this concept, Chittick explains IA's magical world of 'Meetings with imaginal men' (ch. vi), a world where God, angels, jinn, demons and human beings may all acquire imaginal form and become object of imaginal perception.

Likewise, in ch. vii on 'Death and the afterlife', the familiar paraphernalia of Muslim eschatology 'can be explained by reference to the power of imaginalisation possessed by *wujūd*' (p. 118). In ch. v, 'Revelation and poetic imagery', Chittick argues that IA has a theory of dreams, prophecy and poetic form which depends also, centrally, upon imaginalization.

Part 3 contains three studies which focus on the theme of religious diversity. Chapter viii contains a translation of chapter 66 of the *Futūhāt*, which Chittick characterizes as a 'myth of origins'. Chittick's concern is with the multifold manifestation of truth implied by this myth, which tells how messengers were sent 'according to the diversity of the times and the variety of the situations' (p. 134). Chapter ix continues the theme: all religions point to a single *wujūd* and can be accounted for in terms of divine self-manifestation which is itself diverse, and can be related to a circle of diversities (155–60). Chittick's final chapter draws together the terms *fiṭra, wujūd, 'aql* and various forms of the root '-*q-d* (faith/belief, translated, nicely, to reflect IA's word play, as 'knots' and 'knotting') so as to elaborate a theory of relative perfection in human experience of and verbalization of the divine. The book ends with a characteristic appeal to duty and paradox, the need to embrace two opposites, 'both the perspective of eliminating gods and knots and that of affirming gods and tying knots' (p. 176). God and knotting: a summation, of a kind, of IA's vision.

Chittick does not offer a philosophical analysis of IA's thought (for that it is better to go to T. Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1983), nor does he set himself a strictly academic task (a study of structure, or argument, or language). His work has apologetic and polemical aspects (most marked in the ungenerosity that characterizes his references to Western culture or non-mystical Muslim culture). It is in fact a personal vision, built from immersion in and loyalty to IA's theological and mystical system. This is both a strength and a weakness. A notable sign of its weakness is that IA's system is provided with no historical or cultural context. The end product of centuries of mystical thinking, that system draws broadly on terms, ideas and structures that had been developed earlier. Its social and intellectual context was normative Islam. This last drew primarily upon a notion of divine self-manifestation which was community based. The *sharī'a*, God's primary gift to man, was realized as a network of social rules: it articulated man in community. IA's system focuses on the individual and has almost nothing to say about community (and therefore, *puce* Chittick, has a very limited moral or ethical content). Historically, the two approaches developed in parallel, and are complementary. The nature, the power, and the historical success of IA's vision can best be understood in relation to the social and historical context in which it was elaborated: it was a vital part (but only a part) of Muslim self-expression. Chittick's work testifies to its vitality, but not to its incompleteness.

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