



Sufism

as a Collection
of Rich
Resources for
Interpreting
Tradition:
The Case of
Ibn al-'Arabī

Prof. Syaifaatun Almirzahanah

State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga
Yogyakarta, Indonesia
shafaelmirzana@gmail.com

A Sufi or Mystic is someone who has an opportunity or has access to download more meanings. Using the interpretation, which is adapted by those most stepped in the spiritual tradition of Islam, i.e., Sufism, does not mean that it denies the importance of the other exegetical genres—linguistic, legal, philosophical or theological; each has its place in the overall matrix of interpretation and application. But today we are more urgently in need of a return to the spiritual source of Islam than ever before; thus, special attention should be paid to mystical, spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of the revelation, and to those authorities within the tradition who probe and disclose the depths of meaning within the Scripture. Ibn al-'Arabī is acclaimed to be one of the greatest Sufi masters of all the time. With respect to scriptural hermeneutics, he appears to be convinced in the infinite potential for meaning inherent in the nature of divine revelation, especially in the form of sacred scripture. Such an understanding of the nature of scripture can be invaluable in dialogue to create a peaceful coexistence because it demands that the person of faith not only take a stance of conviction within the teachings of his or her sacred texts, but also that they realize that this conviction—however deep it may be—does not restrict or exhaust in any way the potential meaning of these texts.

Keywords: Sufism, Ibn al-'Arabī, hermeneutics, religious diversity, dialogue,



Introduction

Ibn al-'Arabī, whose full name is Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-'Arabī al-Ṭā'ī al-Ḥātamī, is acclaimed to be one of the greatest Sufi masters of all time. By all informed accounts, he was “a towering figure in human spirituality”⁽¹⁾ and thus came to bear the *laqab* (honorific epithet) of *al-shaykh al-akbar* or “the Greatest Master.”

Much of Ibn al-'Arabī's works have triggered attacks from certain jurists. Some of the themes in the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn al-'Arabī's other book, have become the focus of attacks from the eighth century down to the present day, such as the unity of being, the notion of the pre-existence of the human soul, the final salvation of Pharaoh, the perfect man, and the non-eternity of infernal punishments—though they are not absent from

the *Futūḥāt*. It was for this reason, Addas argues, that –“due allowance being made for the intellectual laziness of the jurists, who were generally happy simply to cite the ‘condemnable propositions’ already catalogued by Ibn Taymīyya—the *Fuṣūṣ* lent themselves to criticism far more readily than the *Futūḥāt*.”⁽²⁾

Although there are still ongoing polemics against Ibn al-‘Arabī and his teachings, he is nonetheless very influential for the development of contemporary Sufism, in both its intellectual and popular forms. It should be noted, however, that differences of circumstance and context will determine not only the mode and scope of the dissemination of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings, but also the ways of understanding it. On certain occasions—as we saw in the case of the causal factors behind Ibn Taymīyya’s polemic—the doctrine of “the unity of being” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), for example, has been interpreted in ways approaching monism or pantheism. Accordingly, some saw the mystic path as a personal striving to become one with the only Being—a striving that has no use for so-called “organized religion.” Such relativistic and anti-religious⁽³⁾ interpretations depart radically from the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī in the way that they blur all distinctions between Islam and other religions (something Ibn al-‘Arabī never did), and generally undetermined all legitimate the notions of “heresy.”

For many centuries now, the teachings and legacy of Ibn al-‘Arabī have held a special attraction for those who strongly feel the mysterious dimensions of God’s presence in all human experience. Many find Ibn al-‘Arabī’s spirituality—one of deep piety and moral conviction, on the one hand, and an expansive notion of what is True and Real, on the other hand—uniquely compelling, especially in a context where the importance of embracing cultural, ethnic, political, and religious plurality is only matched by the importance of rooting oneself in what it

is one believes.

Ibn al-'Arabī's Scriptural Hermeneutics and his perspective on Religious Diversity

Ibn al-'Arabī is a figure who has been at the center of some controversy within his tradition. In light of this fact, it would not be surprising if some were to find the idea of using the thinking of controversial figure within the tradition as the source of understanding of religious diversity and peaceful coexistence. To those who would have serious reservations about the use of this figure based on the controversial nature of certain aspects of his thinking, I respond in two related ways. The first is to point out that the greatest and most creative minds in the history of religions have always been at the center of some controversy. From Maimonides to Augustine to Shankara to al- Shāfi'ī and Ibn Rushd, the historical record is replete with stories about the “trouble” caused by particularly gifted religious geniuses.⁽⁴⁾ The second is to say that if, in the process of mining the riches of our tradition, we wish to assess fairly and accurately the orthodoxy of a religious thinker, we need to do so on the basis of a fair and open analysis of his teachings themselves and not on whatever propaganda may exist for or against the figure in question. When it comes to the figure of Ibn al-'Arabī and the way in which his teachings can be seen as expressions of Islamic orthodoxy on the issues of religious pluralism and interfaith peaceful coexistence, this process of fair analysis may be simpler and more straightforward than many would suspect.⁽⁵⁾

In one of his well-known essays on biblical hermeneutics, Michael Fishbane notes that the tradition of rabbinic mystical exegesis known as *Sod*⁽⁶⁾ turned on the principle that the words

of sacred scripture speak to the reader “without ceasing.” Thus, Fishbane asserts, “There is a continual expression of texts; and this reveals itself in their ongoing reinterpretation. But *Sod*,” Fishbane emphasizes, “is more than the eternity of interpretation from the human side. It also points to the divine mystery of speech and meaning.”⁽⁷⁾ Fishbane goes on to speak about the “prophetic task” of “breaking the idols of simple sense” and restoring “the mystery of speech to its transcendent role in the creation of human reality.” He asserts that one of the primary functions of the mystical exegete—individual like Ibn al-‘Arabī—is “to continue this prophetic mission.” It is “in the service of *Sod* [i.e., mystical exegesis],” that mystical exegete like our master mediates “a multitude of interpretations” as “he resists the dogmatization of meaning and the eclipse of the divine lights of speech.” Taking our lead from Fishbane, we can assert that, as a mystical exegete, our master seeks to “transcend the idolatries of language” and to condemn “hermeneutical arrogance in all its forms...”⁽⁸⁾

In his approach to canonical scripture, Ibn al-‘Arabī fulfill the role of mystical exegete as Fishbane interprets it for us. He believes unequivocally in an infinitely readable Text, and he champions this infinite readability in the hopes of combating the “idolatries of language” and “hermeneutical arrogance.” According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, each word of the Quran –not to mention its verses and chapters –has unlimited meanings, all of which are intended by God. Correct recitation of the Quran allows reader to access to new meanings at every reading.⁽⁹⁾ “When meaning repeats itself for someone reciting the Quran, he has not recited it as it should be recited. This is proof of his ignorance.”⁽¹⁰⁾ In fact, Ibn al-‘Arabī regards the words of language as symbolic expressions, subject to the interpretive efforts, which he calls *ta’bīr* (lit. the act of “crossing over”). Thus, for him the truth of the interpretive effort presents itself

in the act of crossing over from one state to another, and under this interpretation, difference becomes the root of all things since for the thing to be in a constant state of crossing is for it to be constantly differentiated, not only from other things, but also from itself.⁽¹¹⁾

Thus, with respect to scriptural hermeneutics, our master appears to be convinced in the infinite potential for meaning inherent in the nature of divine revelation, especially in the form of sacred scripture. Such an understanding of the nature of scripture can be invaluable in dialogue to create a peaceful coexistence because it demands that the person of faith not only take a stance of conviction within the teachings of his or her sacred texts, but also that they realize that this conviction—however deep it may be—does not restrict or exhaust in any way the potential meaning of these texts. There is also an additional sense in which the insights of the masters with respect to the infinite readability of scripture have particular relevance to dialogue which will create a peaceful coexistence. If dialogue is authentic and brings about authentic transformation, then the encounter with the religious other should have some effect on our religious self-understanding, and therefore on our own readings of our own texts.

For some, religious diversity may be viewed as a problem, but it certainly is not for Ibn al-'Arabī and for the school of thought that he established. In fact, Ibn al-'Arabī has an *explicit* theology of religions. In Ibn al-'Arabī's own words, "There are as many paths to God as there are human souls." The reality, however, of how religious diversity has been dealt with in Islamic history varies from context to context. To generalize, it is not inaccurate to say that—much the same as the case of Christianity (which tended, at least in the medieval period, to be significantly less tolerant of intra- and interreligious diversity than Islam)—some Muslim scholars

have emphasized an exclusivist approach, while others have emphasized a more open and inclusivist one. Ibn al-'Arabī seems to be the most sophisticated and profound thinker of this second category.

Ibn al-'Arabī's discussion of religious pluralism begins with the assertion that God Himself is the source of all diversity in the cosmos. Thus, divergence of beliefs among human beings ultimately stems from God:

God Himself is the first problem of diversity that has become manifest in the cosmos. The first thing that each existence thing looks upon is the cause of its own existence. In itself each thing knows that it was not, and that it then came to be through temporal origination. However, in this coming to be, the dispositions of the existent things are diverse. Hence they have diverse opinions about the identity of the cause that brought them into existence. Therefore the Real is the first problem of diversity in the cosmos.⁽¹²⁾

According to Ibn al-'Arabī, this diversity of opinion is one of the many signs that, to paraphrase the famous hadith *qudsī*, 'God's mercy takes precedence over His wrath.' Thus, "since God is the root of all diversity of beliefs within the cosmos, and since it is He who has brought about the existence of everything in the cosmos in a constitution not possessed by anything else, everyone will end up with mercy."⁽¹³⁾

In addition, for Ibn al-'Arabī, religious diversity is a natural consequence of the unlimitedness of God's Self-disclosure⁽¹⁴⁾ and the concomitant degree of "preparedness" of any element of the phenomenal world to be a *maḥall* or "locus" of the Self-disclosure. Another way of articulating this point would be to say that diversity in the phenomenal world is a direct function of the varying "preparedness" or capacity of creatures to receive the divine Self-disclosure. For Ibn al-'Arabī, God's Self-disclosure or his *tajallī* is very much

connected with the “receptivity” (*qabūl*) and “preparedness” (*isti'dād*) of the creatures or the vessels (*maḥall*). Thus, when God discloses Godself, the degree to which a thing receives God’s Self-disclosure is determined by its “preparedness” to bear it. In Ibn al-'Arabī’s teaching, receptivity “must be taken into account not only on the cognitive level, but also on the existential level.”⁽¹⁵⁾ About preparedness, Ibn al-'Arabī writes:

God says, “the giving of your Lord can never be walled up (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Isrā’ [17]: 20). In other words, it can never be withheld. God is saying that He gives constantly, while the loci receive in the measure of the realities of their preparedness. In the same way we say that the sun spreads rays over the existence of things. It is not miserly with its light toward anything. The loci receive the light in the measure of their preparedness.”⁽¹⁶⁾

According to the quotation above, the essence of God never manifests in the universe; rather, it is God’s specific attributes and Names that manifest themselves. Ibn al-'Arabī refers to God in God’s manifestation as the divine presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-ilāhīyya*), and he distinguishes this from God as non-manifest which Ibn al-'Arabī refers to as the primordial presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-qadīma*).⁽¹⁷⁾ This distinction plays an important role in Ibn al-'Arabī’s understanding of spiritual attainment. The master claims that no human being can go beyond the Realm of God’s Self-disclosure because the Absolute in Its Essence is absolutely unknowable. The only and the highest possibility for the human being come in seeking the Absolute within the parameters of a particular instance of divine Self-disclosure within the human self. Now the viability of any particular instance of divine Self-disclosure is ultimately determined by the receptivity or preparedness of the existent entity. It is for this reason that there is a distinction between God’s prophets and “friends” (*awliya’* or *akhillā’*) on one hand, and ordinary

people on the other. The prophets and friends of God are loci of the manifestation for all the divine Names, but other people are more limited in their receptivity and can only make certain Names manifest. It is important to note that, although God's Self-disclosure depends on the receptivity and preparedness of the locus or vessel (*maḥall*), this does not mean that God's Self-disclosure, which is God's Mercy, is suspended.

For Ibn al-'Arabī, the concepts of receptivity and preparedness are closely connected to the question of the divine "measuring out" of human "destiny" (*qadar*). Before it comes into existence, God knows the qualities and characteristics of each entity, because its "treasuries are with Him." Then, in the process of creation, God measures out these qualities and characteristics—including one's destiny (which ultimately is identical to one's capacity to receive divine manifestation)—according to the creature's preparedness to receive. To illustrate this point, Ibn al-'Arabī has recourse to one of his favorite ontological metaphors, the metaphor of the mirror: "Try, when you look at yourself in a mirror, to see the mirror itself, and you will find that you cannot do so. So much is this the case that some have concluded that the image perceived is situated between the mirror and the eye of the beholder."⁽¹⁸⁾ Thus, the recipient sees nothing other than his own form in the mirror of Reality. It also means that the existent entity, fixed forever in God's knowledge, can never receive anything beyond what it demands in itself and according to its own capacity. This is one of the foundational principles behind Ibn al-'Arabī's approach to the diversity of destiny among human beings, but also his approach to the diversity of religions.

When God brings the cosmos into existence, God, the One, discloses itself in the diversity of modes, which means that the One, the unlimited, delimits itself in its delimited *wujūd*. With

regard to human beings, their diversity is an expression of the infinite potentiality of Being which is underscored by the unrepeatability of the human soul. For Ibn al-'Arabī, diversity of religions is essentially due to the nature of the non-redundant diversity of human souls as they are brought into existence by the One. As constituent elements of the phenomenal world, each human being is by nature, as mentioned above, a *maḥall* (lit. a “place”) or *mazhar* (locus of manifestation) in which the One discloses Itself in and to the phenomenal realm. Because religious traditions realize themselves in the lives of the human individuals who constitute any religious community, the diversity of persons as distinct and particular manifestations of the One Being is reflected in the particular traditions as a whole. Speaking fairly directly to the issue of religious diversity, the master writes:

You worship only what you set up in yourself. This is why doctrines and states differed concerning Allah. Thus one group says that He is like this and another group says that He is not like this, but like that. Another group says concerning knowledge (of Him) that the color of water is determined by the color of the cup. . . . So consider the bewilderment that permeates (*sariyya*) every belief.⁽¹⁹⁾

Ibn al-'Arabī is very fond of quoting the great ninth-century mystic master of Baghdad, Abu 'l-Qāsim Muḥammad al-Junayd (d. 910) who once used the metaphor of water colored by its container as a metaphor for unity in diversity: “The color of the water is the color of its container.”⁽²⁰⁾ Ibn al-'Arabī's fondness for this metaphor, however, by no means indicates that he considered all religions to be equally valuable, but simply that, like every other constituent element of the existing order, all religions have their origin in God. One might paraphrase Ibn al-'Arabī's interpretation of Junayd's water metaphor by asserting that if the water represents the divine

Being, the differences between religions is represented by the color or colors of the container. The color or colors, therefore, are directly related to the “preparedness” of a given religion to receive its particular manifestation of the Real. There are some religions which may be monochromatic or whose colors are strictly limited or faded. Other religions may have more distinct colors, but all of the same basic hue. Still others may have distinct colors of different hues, etc. “He who discloses Himself,” Ibn al-‘Arabī writes, “in respect to what He is in himself, is One in entity, but the self-disclosures—I mean their forms [e.g. the various religions]—are diverse because of the preparedness of the loci of self-disclosure.”⁽²¹⁾ As always, Ibn al-‘Arabī roots this idea in the Quran. In this respect he makes specific reference to the Holy Quran, Sura Hūd [11]:118-119: “If your Lord had willed [it], He would have fashioned humanity into one community, *but they will not cease to differ*, except those upon whom your Lord has been merciful.”⁽²²⁾

Just as God never ceases to love or desire to be “recognized,” or to be manifest, God’s Self-manifestation also takes an infinite multiplicity of loci or receptacles (*maḥallāt*). Thus, phenomenal multiplicity, which is rooted in divine infinity, in fact has only one ontological entity, but because God’s self-manifestation never ends, the loci of manifestation (*maẓāhir*) are infinitely diverse. This logic quite straightforwardly carries over to the phenomenon of the diversity of religions. In more direct terms, Ibn al-‘Arabī writes, “every observer of God is under the controlling property of one of God’s Names. That Name discloses itself to him or her and gives to him or her a specific belief through its Self-disclosure.”⁽²³⁾

One might also note that, from a slightly different angle, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teaching on the diversity of religions can be inferred from what he has to say about perpetual creation. As part of his teaching on this subject, the master emphasizes that “the

Real does not manifest Itself twice in one form, nor in a single form to two individuals.”⁽²⁴⁾ Ibn al-'Arabī's strongly asserts, not only that creation is a never ending process, but also that God never manifests in a single form twice. Thus, for the master, the belief of believers is the cognitive manner in which the Self-disclosure of the Real is understood or misunderstood, cognitively conceived or misconceived.⁽²⁵⁾ In a similar vein, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (d. 1273), who appears to have been highly influenced by the master, asks: “If you pour the ocean into a jug, how much will it hold?”⁽²⁶⁾ Thus, every believer worships God the Real according to the particular “Lord” (*rabb*) whom she or he recognizes in her or himself.⁽²⁷⁾ “Since there are as many cups as drinkers at the Pool which will be found in the abode of the hereafter,” Ibn al-'Arabī himself writes, “and since the water in the cup takes the form of the cup in both shape and color, we know for certain that knowledge of God takes on the measure of your view, your preparedness, and what you are in yourself.”⁽²⁸⁾ In many ways this statement is similar to the words of Thomas Aquinas: “Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower.”⁽²⁹⁾ “Although the Real is One,” Ibn al-'Arabī affirms,

beliefs present Him in various guises. They take Him apart and put Him together, they give Him form and they fabricate Him. But in Himself, He does not change, and in Himself, He does not undergo transmutation. However, the organ of sight sees Him so. Hence location constricts Him, and fluctuation from entity to entity limits Him. Hence, none becomes bewildered by Him except him who combines the assertion of similarity with the declaration of incomparability.⁽³⁰⁾

Ibn al-'Arabī's explanation above is based on the opinion that the “God of belief” is Being (*wujūd*), which manifests itself to every believer. Because every one of God's Self-manifestations is single and never repeats, every belief is

single and exclusive. And because the object of every belief is single—i.e., the “God of belief” or the “God worshipped by each believer” differs from the God of every other believer. In fact, Ibn al-‘Arabī attempts to emphasize this point by talking about a multiplicity of “Lords” manifesting the one God:

Every believer has a Lord in his heart that he has brought into existence, so he believes in Him. Such are the People of the Mark on the day of resurrection. They worship nothing but what they themselves have carved.⁽³¹⁾ That is why, when God discloses Himself in other than that mark, they are confounded. They know what they believe, but what they believe does not know them, for they have brought it into existence. The general rule here is that the artifact does not know the artisan, and the building does not know the builder.⁽³²⁾

Ultimately, for Ibn al-‘Arabī, it is crucial for the believer to transcend the “God created in belief.”⁽³³⁾ For the master, the path ultimately leads one to transcend the “color” conveyed by religious affiliation. This is not, however, a prescription for a relativistic approach to religion. We should remember that in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s mind God’s Law (i.e., the Sharī‘a) is crucial for the realization of the Real (*lā ḥaqīqa bila sharī‘a*). Thus, the path to God must be facilitated by the purest and most correct beliefs and practices possible. For Ibn al-‘Arabī, these are found in the proper interpretations and practices of the Sunna of Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets—i.e., the religion commonly referred to as “Islam.”

Unlike many Muslims who believe that certain exclusive verses in the Quran abrogate (*naskh*) certain inclusive verses in the Quran—thereby concluding asserting that Islam abrogates previous religions—Ibn al-‘Arabī does not draw such a conclusion. For Ibn al-‘Arabī,

All the revealed religions (*sharā‘i*) are lights. Among these

religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. They being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through Muhammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the lights of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all the revealed religions. They are not rendered null (*bāṭil*) by abrogation —that is the opinion of the ignorant.⁽³⁴⁾

What Ibn al-'Arabī is basically saying is that it is incumbent on Muslims to follow the path of their Prophet Muḥammad and stick to the guidance of the Quran. At the same time, he also emphasizes that the nature of the Quran is inclusive; that it includes within itself the paths of all the prophets preceding Muḥammad. He writes:

Among the path is the path of blessing. It is referred to in God's words. "To every one of you We have appointed a right way and a revealed law"⁽³⁵⁾ (Sura al-Mā'ida [5]: 48). The Muḥammadan leader chooses the path of Muḥammad and leaves aside the other paths, even though he acknowledges them and has faith in them. However, he does not make himself a servant except through the path of Muḥammad, nor does he have his followers make themselves servants except through it. He traces the attributes of all paths back to it, because Muḥammad's revealed religion is all-inclusive. Hence the property of all revealed religions has been transferred to his revealed religion. His revealed religion embraces them, but they do not embrace it.⁽³⁶⁾

In the *Futūḥāt* Ibn al-'Arabī further explores the phenomenon of the diversity of religions. To summarize what we have already stated, for Ibn al-'Arabī, God Self-discloses in numerous ways, infinitely diverse and thus unique and different from one another. Although God in Godself is

immeasurably greater than all God's manifestations, God also is somehow manifest in the form of every belief. But God does not constrain Godself within one particular belief. One belief may well be more accurate than another (e.g., "I believe there is only one God" versus "I believe there is no God"), but God is too glorious to delimit Godself to one form of belief rather than another.

In fact, Ibn al-'Arabī plays with the root *'-q-l* in order to convey the inherent potential of discursive language and rationalist thought to delimit that which cannot be limited. The trouble with speculative thinking—especially when taken to the extreme—is that the *'aql* or "intellect" that is the human faculty enabling us to engage in such thought, acts like a "fetter" (*'iqāl*—from the same root), which at times is very useful (i.e., helping us to develop categories with which to better understand ourselves and our world), but at other times can be very dangerous. The danger lies in the capacity of the intellect to attempt to "fetter" and pin down, that which is beyond fettering. Ibn al-'Arabī, then, criticizes speculative thinking and formulation when it acts to confine the infinite Essence of God. Ibn al-'Arabī goes on to strengthen this argument by reflecting on the root of the words for "creed" (*'aqīda*) and "belief" (*i'tiqād*). The root is *'-q-d* which has to do with "binding" and "tying" a knot. He is not attacking "creeds" and "beliefs" because he thinks they have their place in the life of faith. What he is criticizing is the attempt to absolutize "creeds" and "statements" to the point at which one is involved in the futile (and perhaps even blasphemous) attempt to 'tie a knot' around God. He writes:

God is known through every knotting. Although the beliefs are totally diverse, their aim is one. He is a receptacle for everything that you tie Him to and every knotting you make concerning Him. And within that He will disclose Himself on

the day of resurrection, for it is the mark which is between you and Him.”⁽³⁷⁾

For Ibn al-'Arabī, only the *'arif* (lit. “gnostic”), who has attained the station and state of the Perfect Human, can see God as manifested in every belief, and as unconstrained by any belief. The true *'arif* identifies the Truth in any belief and understands that any belief involves a Self-disclosure of the Real. He or she understands that, while some beliefs may be true and others false, all beliefs are delimitations of the non-delimited *wujūd*, which according to Chittick, “embrace[s] all reality on whatever level it is envisaged.”⁽³⁸⁾ As the “locus of manifestation” of the all-comprehensive Name of God (i.e., Allah), and thus as one who stands in the “station of no station,” the Perfect Human acknowledges any station and any belief insofar as it corresponds to one of the infinite multiplicities of the Self-disclosure of God.

Perhaps the Quranic text which Ibn al-'Arabī quotes most frequently in support of his argument that all religions are manifestations of the Real is: “Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God” (Sura al-Baqara [2]: 115).⁽³⁹⁾ Commenting on this verses and a few others like it, Ibn al-'Arabī writes, “God has made it clear that He is in every direction turned to, each of which represents a particular doctrinal perspective regarding Him.”⁽⁴⁰⁾ Indeed, for Ibn al-'Arabī, because God is the *wujūd* or essential reality of all phenomenal multiplicity, no path is essentially distorted or warped; every path according to him essentially brings believers to God. Quoting the Quranic verse “To Him all affairs shall be returned” (The Holy Quran, Sura Hūd [11]: 123), Ibn al-'Arabī writes, “certainly, all roads lead to Allah, since He is the end of every road.”⁽⁴¹⁾ Thus, every believer serves God on the basis of God’s Self-disclosures and their preparedness, so all beliefs in fact are rooted in God the infinite. By saying this, it does not mean that all beliefs are

similar and have the same effect on the transformation of human consciousness toward God.⁽⁴²⁾ It means that each belief manifests truth and, insofar as it does this, it is part of the path to human perfection in service to God.

One of the most touching and profound aspects of Ibn al-'Arabī's teaching on the diversity of religions can be found in the *Futūḥāt* where the master refers to God as "taking care of the needs of misbelievers" and "giving them to drink."⁽⁴³⁾ According to Ibn al-'Arabī, all those who are worshipping God, even though they may be doing so falsely by attaching the name 'God' to their idols, are nonetheless the loci of God's Self-disclosure, and as such are de facto recipients of God's mercy. "God takes care of their need and gives them to drink," Ibn al-'Arabī writes, "He punishes them if they do not honor the Divine Side in this inanimate from."⁽⁴⁴⁾ Here Ibn al-'Arabī's phrase "giving them to drink" echoes his discussion of "the drinking places," a discussion in which he refers to many Quranic verses:

The drinking places have become variegated and the religions diverse. The levels have been distinguished, the divine names and the engendered effects have become manifest and the names the gods have become many in the cosmos. People worship angels, stars, Nature, the elements, animals, plants, minerals, human beings and jinn. So much is this the case that when the One presented them with His Oneness, they said, "Has He made the gods One God? This is indeed a marvelous thing." (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Mu'minūn [23]: 117). [T]here is no effect in the cosmos which is not supported by a divine reality. So from whence do the gods become many? From the divine realities. Hence you should know that this derives from the names. God was expansive with the names: He said, "Worship Allah (4:36), Fear Allah, your Lord (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Ṭalāq [65]: 1), Prostrate yourself to the All-merciful (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Furqān [25]: 6). And He said, "Call upon Allah or call upon the All-merciful; whichever," that is Allah or the All-Merciful," you call upon, to Him belong

the most beautiful names” (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Isrā’ [17]: 110). This made the situation more ambiguous for the people, since He did not say, “Call upon Allah or call upon the All-merciful; whichever you call upon, the Entity is One, and these two names belong to it.” That would be the text which would remove the difficulty, God only left this difficulty as a mercy for those who associate others with Him, the people of rational consideration—those who associate others with Him on the basis of obfuscation.⁽⁴⁵⁾

In fact, one of the most important and striking features of Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings on the nature of the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*) and its connection to religious pluralism is that they are thoroughly grounded in Quranic exegesis. One of the most important verses upon which he bases these teachings is: “Then high exalted be God, the King, the Real! There is no God but He, the Lord of the noble Throne” (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Mu'minūn [23]: 116). Commenting on this verse Ibn al-'Arabī says:

This is the *tawḥīd* of the Real, which is the *tawḥīd* of the He-ness. God says, “We created not the heavens and the earth and all that between them, in play” (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Anbīyā' [21]: 116; Sura al-Dukhān [44]: 38). This is the same meaning as His words, “What do you think that We created you only for sport?” (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Mu'minūn [23]: 115). Hence, “there is no God but He” [in the above Quranic passage] is a description of the Real.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Here Ibn al-'Arabī is describing the way in which the verse in question (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Mu'minūn [23]: 116) speaks about a particular expression of the divine oneness. In doing so he makes two points that are critical for an understanding his teaching on religious diversity. The first point is that the Quran reveals multiple dimensions of the divine oneness. Another way of putting this is to say that the Quran discusses more than one “type” of *tawḥīd*. In fact, according to Ibn al-

'Arabī, there are thirty-six different types of *tawhīd* found in the Quran. The dimension of the divine oneness expressed in the Holy Quran, Sura al-Mu'minūn [23]: 116 is that of the "He-ness" of God or the degree to which the Real is God and God alone. The second point Ibn al-'Arabī is making in this brief commentary on the Holy Quran, Sura al-Mu'minūn, [23]: 116 is that every element of phenomenal existence is a purposeful expression of the divine oneness (i.e., no aspect of creation exists as "play" or "sport.") For Ibn al-'Arabī, this includes the diversity of religions. Indeed, Ibn al-'Arabī affirms that the abundant Quranic references to the plurality of religions is by no means a reference to an accident of fate, but is rather the nineteenth type of *tawhīd* which the Quran most directly addresses in the following verse: "We never sent a messenger before thee [i.e., Muḥammad] except that We revealed to him, saying, "There is no god but I, so worship Me!" (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Anbiyā' [21]: 25). Commenting this verse Ibn al-'Arabī says:

This is a *tawhīd* of the I-ness.... It is like God's words, "Naught is said to thee but what was already said to the messengers before thee" (41: 43). In his verse God mentions "worship" (*'ibāda*), but not specific practices (*a'māl*), for He also said, "To every one [of the prophets] We have appointed a Law and a way" (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Mā'idah [5]: 48), that is, We have set down designated practices. The period of applicability of the practices can come to an end, and this is called "abrogation" (*naskh*) in the words of the learned masters of the *Sharī'a*. There is no single practice found in each and every prophecy, only the performance of the religion, coming together in it, and the statement of *tawhīd*. This is indicated in God's words, "He has laid down for you as Law what He charged Noah with, and what We have revealed to thee [O Muḥammad], and what We charged Abraham with, and Moses, and Jesus: "Perform the religion, and scatter nor regarding it" (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Shūrā [42]: 13). Al-Bukhārī has written in a chapter entitled, "The chapter on

what has come concerning the fact that the religion of the prophets is one,” and this one religion is nothing but *tawḥīd*, performing the religion, and worship. On this the prophets have all come together.⁽⁴⁷⁾

What, then, is the distinction that Ibn al-'Arabī is making between the Holy Quran, Sura al-Mu'minū [23]: 116 and the Holy Quran, Sura al-Anbīyā' [21]: 25? As he himself tells us, it is a distinction made between two expressions of *tawḥīd*. The first is an expression of *tawḥīd* in which God refers to Godself in the third person (i.e., as “He”) and in which He makes mention of Himself as “King” (*al-malik*) and “The Real” (*al-ḥaqq*), and also makes reference to His “Noble Throne” (*al-'arsh al-karīm*). In a sense, this can be interpreted as the Quran's own use of the language of discursive or speculative theology which can only speak of God in the third person, and thus takes as its appropriate object the divine “He-ness” (*huwīyya*). In the Holy Quran, Sura al-Anbīyā' [21]: 25, however, God expresses His oneness in the first person (i.e., as “I”). In this context, God makes reference to the Prophet Muḥammad himself (the recipient of this specific revelation) in the second person singular, to all the messengers sent before Muḥammad, and to acts of worship. For Ibn al-'Arabī, this verse is making a direct connection between the succession of messengers (and by extension the different forms that authentic religion takes) and acts of worship which ideally mediate a direct experience of the “I-ness” of God in which God acts as the subject beyond objectification. Thus, when one juxtaposes the two verses, one sees the divine oneness being expressed in two very different verbal modalities which reflect two very different human activities: the cognitive activity of speculative thought and the more affective experience of ritual worship. It is not that one modality is a more authentic expression of *tawḥīd* than the other, but rather that both represent two very important

dimensions of *tawhīd*.

As Ibn al-'Arabī more explicitly develops his teaching on religious diversity he builds upon a key insight conveyed by the second of the two verses analyzed above. For Ibn al-'Arabī, the succession of prophets and messengers, culminating in the messengership of Muḥammad, which characterizes all orthodox Islamic perspectives on the history of revelation is one in which an underlying unity of encounter with the one and only God (i.e., the one immutable religion for which all of humanity for all time has been created) is historically expressed in a multiplicity of forms. In the master's own words: "The 'path of Allah' is the all-inclusive path upon which all things walk, and it takes them to Allah."⁽⁴⁸⁾ Thus, commenting on al-Bukhārī's title, mentioned in the quotation above, "The chapter on what has come concerning the fact that the religion of the prophets is one," in which al-Bukhārī uses an article in the word "religion" ("the religion", instead of a "religion"), Ibn al-'Arabī says,

He brought the article which makes the word "religion" definite, because all religion comes from God, even if some of the rulings are diverse. Everyone is commanded to perform the religion and to come together in it. . . . As for the rulings which are diverse, that is because of the Law which God assigned to each of one of the messengers. He said, "To everyone (of the Prophets) We have appointed a Law and a Way [*shir'a wa minhāj*] ; and if God willed, he would have made you one nation" (5: 48). If He had done that, your revealed Laws would not be diverse, just as they are not diverse in the fact that you have been commanded to come together and to perform them.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Thus, Ibn al-'Arabī is differentiating between *din*, which means primordial ideal religion and "path," or *shir'a wa minhāj* ("law" and "way"; or contextualized/historicized religion"). Although the "*din*" is always singular and unitive,

the various “paths” or “laws” are numerous. “The paths to God are numerous as the breaths of the creatures,” writes Ibn al-'Arabī, “since the breath emerges from the heart in accordance with the belief of the heart concerning Allah.”⁽⁵⁰⁾ Such approach endorsed by Ibn al-'Arabī is very essential in enhancing interfaith peaceful coexistence and acceptance of different religious perspectives.

There is no way that the careful reader of Ibn al-'Arabī can miss the fact that his teachings on the underlying unity of all human systems of belief and practice is part of an elaborate esoteric commentary on the first article of Islamic faith “*La ilāha illa Allāh*” (There is no god save God). We can see a very direct example of this by returning briefly to his exegesis of the Holy Quran, Sura al-Mu'minūn [23]: 115.

That within which the existence of the cosmos has become manifest is the Real; it becomes manifest only within the Breath of the All-Merciful, which is the Cloud. So it is the Real, the Lord of the Throne, who gave the Throne its all-encompassing shape, since it encompasses all things. Hence the root within which the forms of the cosmos became manifest encompasses everything in the world of corporeal bodies. This is nothing other than the Real Through Whom Creation Takes Place. Through this receptivity, it is like a container within which comes out into the open (*burūz*) the existence of everything it includes, layer upon layer, entity after entity, in a wise hierarchy (*al-tartīb al-ḥikamī*). So it brings out into the open that which had been unseen within it in order to witness it.⁽⁵¹⁾

Another Quranic verse important to an understanding of Ibn al-'Arabī's teaching on religious diversity is: “Everything is perishing except His Face [or Essence] (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Qiṣaṣ [28]: 88). This verse refers to the sense of the relativity of all things in the face of God, which is helpful in cultivating the humility necessary for openness to other perspectives and

other stories of encounters with the divine. Equally important are Quranic references such as:

And unto God belong the East and the West; and wherever ye turn, there is the Face of God (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Baqara [2]: 115).

He is with you, wherever you are (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Ḥadīd [57]: 4).

We are nearer to him [man] than the neck artery (The Holy Quran, Sura Qāf [50]: 16).

God cometh in between a man and his own heart (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Anfāl [8]: 24).

Is He not encompassing all things? (The Holy Quran, Sura Fuṣṣilat [41]: 54).

He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Ḥadīd [57]: 3)

These verses express a profound sense of the immanence of the divine which, Ibn al-'Arabī rightly argues, are set in balance with those preeminent verses such as we find in *Surat al-Ikhlāṣ* (The Holy Quran, Sura 112) and the famous "Throne Verse" of *Sura al-Baqara* ([2]: 255) For Ibn al-'Arabī, the balance between the *tanzīh* (transcendence) and *tashbīh* (immanence) of God plays a major role in his thinking about religious diversity. *Tanzīh* involves the fundamental assertion of God's essential and absolute incomparability "with each thing and all things."⁽⁵²⁾ It involves the assertion that His being transcends all creaturely attributes and qualities. At the same time, however, "each thing displays one or more of God's attributes, and in this respect the thing must be said to be "similar" (*tashbīh*) in some way to God."⁽⁵³⁾ Thus, a certain similarity can be found between God and creation. Unlike traditionalist theologians, who opine that these two concepts are diametrically opposed and cannot exist together in harmony, for Ibn al-'Arabī, both *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* are in this sense compatible with each other and complementary.

Tanzīh and *tashbīh* “derive necessarily from the Essence on the one hand and the level of Divinity on the other.”⁽⁵⁴⁾ Out of this distinction, Ibn al-'Arabī challenges, that anybody who exercises and upholds *tanzīh* or *tashbīh* in its extreme form is either an ignorant man, or one who does not know how to behave properly toward God, because such extremes are attempts to delimit God's Absoluteness. To deny completely the authenticity of other religious “ways” is to insist that there is no divine self-disclosure to be found there. In doing so, one sets limits on God much in the same way as those who only know God through cognitive activity (which tends to place emphasis on transcendence) and not through affective experience (which can convey a profound sense of divine immanence). Only when one combines *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* in one's attitude can one be regarded as a ‘true knower’ (*‘arīf*) of the Absolute.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Ibn al-'Arabī says,

When the Gnostics know Him through Him, they become distinguished from those who know Him through their own rational consideration (*naẓar*), for they possess non-delimitation, while others have delimitation. The Gnostics through Him witness Him in each thing or in the entity of each thing, but those who know Him through rational consideration are removed far from Him by a distance which is required by their declaration of His comparability. Hence they place themselves on one side and the Real on the other. Then they call Him “from a far place” (The Holy Quran, Sura Fuṣṣilat [41]: 44).⁽⁵⁶⁾

Ibn al-'Arabī's Hermeneutics and those of Modernist Thinkers

It is important to note that Ibn al-'Arabī's interpretation of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* and how this relates to his teaching regarding

the underlying unity of all religions is by no means restricted to medieval esoteric hermeneutics. The highly influential Salafi modernist thinker Rashīd Riḍā offers an interpretation of the meaning of the word *islām* in the Quran which complements and supports Ibn al-'Arabī's approach to the question of religious diversity. The Quran declares, "Do they seek other than the religion of God, when unto Him submits whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly? (The Holy Quran, Sura Āl 'Imrān [3]: 83). Here the Quran uses the word *aslama* based on the fourth form of the root *s-l-m* which has to do with the act of "submitting" to God. The word *islam* is the *maṣḍar* or verbal noun from this same form and thus literally means "submission." As is the case in the Holy Quran, Sura Āl 'Imrān [3]:19,⁽⁵⁷⁾ in this verse *islām* is identified as "the religion of God." According to Rashīd Riḍā, understanding the word *islām* in the proper sense (i.e., writ large as "Islam") to refer to the doctrines, traditions and practices observed by Muslims, is a post-Quranic phenomenon according to which *al-din* is understood in its social and customary form.⁽⁵⁸⁾ For Riḍā, these forms of Islam, writ large, "which [vary] according to the differences which have occurred to its adherents in the way of uncritical acceptance, has no relationship with true *islām*. On the contrary," Riḍā writes, "it is subversive of true faith."⁽⁵⁹⁾

Riḍā's interpretation of the Quranic usage of the word *islām* is helpful in understanding the distinction Ibn al-'Arabī makes between the form and essence of revealed religion. Ibn al-'Arabī's interpretation of the scriptural story of Noah is clearly rooted in this distinction. In the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn al-'Arabī says that the people of Noah are not entirely mistaken. For Ibn al-'Arabī, the idols that were worshiped by the people of Noah were in fact 'the diversity of the names' understood by Ibn al-'Arabī as the Divine Names through which human beings become aware

of the self-disclosure of God. The people of Noah committed “the sin of idolatry” not because they recognized the divine in a plurality of forms, but because of their ignorance that these forms are not deities in themselves, but rather concrete forms of the one God’s self-manifestation. Their sin, therefore, was in their worship of these forms as independent entities apart from God. According to Ibn al-'Arabī, the idols are nothing other than God’s self-manifestations.⁽⁶⁰⁾ For Ibn al-'Arabī, the Quranic verse: “And Thy Lord hath decreed that you should worship none other than Him” (The Holy Quran, Sura al-Isrā’ [17]: 23) does not mean, as it is usually understood, “that you should not worship anything other than God,” but rather “that whatever you worship, you are thereby not (actually) worshipping anything other than God”.⁽⁶¹⁾

In this sense, “idolatry”—as serious a sin as it is—can be nothing more than a matter of the worshipper’s awareness and intention. Since there is no God but God, it is actually impossible to worship anything other than He/She. Some may well ask what impact such a distinction might have on the approach to the whole question of religious diversity. Does it matter, in other words, whether one asserts that idolaters are sinning because they are actually worshipping something other than God, or because, though they are worshipping God and cannot do otherwise, they sin in their lack of awareness of the true nature of their worship? The answer seems to be “yes.” By locating the sin in the human being’s intent, rather than in objective reality, one retains the necessity of discernment in intent and the meaningfulness of true worship versus idolatry, without the arrogance of believing that some human beings have an authentic relationship to God and others do not. In this way, not only is it possible to perceive degrees of authenticity in different forms of worship, but it also no longer guarantees that just because an individual or group adopts a particular

form of worship, they are immune to idolatry.⁽⁶²⁾

There are many other aspects of Ibn al-'Arabī's thought that have direct relevance to what he has to say about religious diversity, but which, unfortunately, are too numerous to mention here.⁽⁶³⁾ The key thing to remember about Ibn al-'Arabī's teaching on religious diversity is that, although it is not in the least bit relativist (i.e., it never denies the superiority of Islam over the other religions of humanity), it abhors the arrogance and idolatry of suggesting that other religious ways are not somehow themselves manifestations of authentic human connections to the one source of all Being.

In the final analysis, Ibn al-'Arabī warns his fellow Muslims against restricting God to the form of one's own belief, a warning that is entirely in accordance with the thrust of so much Quranic discourse:

Beware of being bound up by a particular creed and rejecting others as unbelief! Try to make yourself a prime matter for all forms of religious belief. God is greater and wider than to be confined to one particular creed to the exclusion of others. For He says, "Wherever ye turn, there is the Face of God."⁽⁶⁴⁾ He who counsels his own soul should investigate, during his life in this world, all doctrines concerning God. He should learn from whence each possessor of a doctrine affirms the validity of his doctrine. Once its validity has been affirmed for him in the specific mode in which it is correct for him who holds it, then he should support it in the case of him who believes in it.⁽⁶⁵⁾

In light of certain key Quranic verses, Ibn al-'Arabī maintains that Muslims are commanded to believe in all revelations and not just in that conveyed by the Prophet of Islam. He writes:

All the revealed religions are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are included in

the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through Muhammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the lights of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all the revealed religions. They are not rendered null [*bāṭil*] by abrogation—that is the opinion of the ignorant.⁽⁶⁶⁾

Thus, Ibn al-'Arabī insists that one should not delimit God within just one of the many possible modes of divine self-disclosure. Instead, the true Muslim is a person who recognizes God in all revelations:

So turn your attention to what we have mentioned and put it into practice! Then you will give the Divinity its due and you will be one of those who are fair toward their Lord in knowledge of Him. For God is exalted high above entering under delimitation. He cannot be tied down by one form rather than another. From here you will come to know the all-inclusiveness of felicity for God's creatures and the all-embracingness of the mercy which cover everything.⁽⁶⁷⁾

Ibn al-'Arabī alerts the believers not to fall into particularism—an admonition which resonates with the Quranic dictum: "And they say: 'None enters paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian.' These are their own desires. Say: 'Bring your proof if you are truthful.' Nay, but whosoever surrenders his purpose to God while doing good, his reward is with his Lord; and there shall be no fear upon them, neither shall thy grieve."⁽⁶⁸⁾



REFERENCES

Addas, Claude. *Ibn `Arabi, ou, La quete du soufre rouge, (Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn `Arabi)*, translated from the French by Peter Kingsley, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993.

------. *Ibn `Arabi: The Voyage of No Return*. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2000.

------. "The ship of Stone." *The Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn `Arabi Society*, 1996, Volume XIX, in the special issue entitled, "The Journey of the Heart."

Afifi, A. E. "Memorandum by Ibn `Arabi of His Own Works." Introduction, in *the Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University*, VIII, 1954.

------. *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din-Ibnul `Arabi*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1939.

Al-Ghazali. *Al Munqid min al-dalal*. Lahor: Hay'ah al-Awqaf bi-Hukumat al-Bunjab, 1971.

Akkach, Samer. *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam, An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas*. Albany: State University of New York press, 2005.

al- Hakim Souad. "Ibn `Arabi's twofold Perception of Women." *Journal of The Muhyiddin Ibn `Arabi Society*. Vol. xxxix, 2006.

Almond, Ian. *Sufism and Deconstruction*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

------. "Divine Needs, Divine Illusions: Preliminary Remarks Toward a Comparative Study of Meister Eckhart and Ibn Al`Arabi." *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*. 10, 2001.

al-Qashani, Abd al-Razaq. *Sharh al-Qashani `ala Fusus al-Hikam*. Cairo, 1321 A. H.

al-Sha`rani, `Abd al-Wahhab. *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*. Cairo, 1954, Vol. I.

Ates, A. "Ibn al-`Arabi." *The Encyclopedia of Islam*. new ed., ed., Bernard Lewis et. Al., Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971.

Bashier, Salman H. *Ibn al-`Arabi's Barzakh, the Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.

Chittick, C. William. "Presence with God." *The Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn `Arabi Society*. Vol. XX, 1996.

------. *Ibn `Arabī: Heir to the Prophets*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2005.

------. "Note on Ibn Al-`Arabi's Influence in the Subcontinent." *The Muslim World*. Vol. LXXXII, No. 3-4, July-October, 1992.

------. "Ibn al-`Arabi and His School." *Islamic Spirituality, Manifestation*. ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, New York: Crossroad, 1991.

------. *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-`Arabi's Cosmology*. Albany: State University of New York

Press 1998.

----- . *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

----- . "On the Cosmology of Dhikr." in *Path to the Heart, Sufism and the Christian East*. Edited by James S. Cutsinger, World Wisdom, 2002.

----- . *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989.

----- . "The Five Divine Presence: From al-Qunawi to al-Qaysari." *Muslim World*. 72, 1982, 107-128.

----- . "The Perfect Man as a Prototype of the Self in the Sufism of Jami'." *Studia Islamica*. 49, 1979, 135-158.

----- . "Mysticism versus Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History: The al-Tusi al-Qunawi Correspondence." *Religioua Studies*. 17, 1981, 87-104.

----- . "Wahdat al-Wujud in Islamic Thought." *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies*. 10, 1991, 7-27.

----- . "Belief and Transformation: Sufi Teaching of Ibn al-'Arabi." *The American Theosophist*. 74, 1986.

----- . "Rumi and Wahdat al-wujud." Amin Banani, Richard G Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh. eds. *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: the Heritage of Rumi*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 1994.

----- . "Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi on the Oneness of Being." *International Philosophical Quarterly*. 21, 1981, 171-184.

Chodkiewicz, Michel. *Ocean Without Shore: Ibn 'Arabi, the Book, and the Law*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993.

----- . *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and*

Sainthood in the Doctrines of Ibn Arabi. trans. Liadain Sherrard, Islamic Text Society, Cambridge, 1993.

Corbin, Henry. *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn al-'Arabi*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, or *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Şufism of Ibn 'Arabi*. with a new preface by Harold Bloom, 1998. (A new Translation of the Creative Imagination)

Coates, Peter. *Ibn 'Arabi and Modern Thought, The History of Taking Metaphysics Seriously*. Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2002.

Dabashi, H. *Truth and Narrative: The Untimely Thought of Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhani*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999.

------. "Persian Sufism during the Seljuk Period."

Lewinsohn, Leonard, ed. *The Heritage of Sufism, Classical Persian Sufism for Its Origin to Rumi (700-1300)*. Vol.I, Oxford: Oneworld, 1999.

Elmore, Gerald T. "The Uwaysi Spirit of the Spirit Autodidactic Sainthood as the "Breath of the Merciful." *Journal of Ibn Arabi Society*. Vol. XXVIII, 2000.

------. *Islamic Sainthood in The Fullness of Time, Ibn al-'Arabi's Book of the Fabulous Gryphon*. Leiden, Brill, 1999.

------. "On the Road to Santarem." *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*. Vol. XXIV, 1998.

Ernst, Carl W. *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985.

Esack, Farid. *Quran, Liberation, and Pluralism, An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*. Oxford, Oneworld, 1997.

Hirtenstein, Stephen. *The Unlimited Merciful, The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn 'Arabi*. Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 1999.

Homerin, Emil. "Ibn Arabi in the People Assembly, Religion, Press, and Politics in Sadat's Egypt." *The Middle East Journal*. Vol. 40, 1986.

Houedard, Dom Sylvester. "Ibn 'Arabi's Contribution to the

Wider Ecumenism." *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, A Commemorative Volume*. eds. Stephen Hirstenstein and Michael Tiernan, Shaftesbury: Element, 1993

Ibn al-'Arabi, Muhyi al-Din. *The bezels of wisdom*. Tr. and introd. by R.W.J. Austin; pref. by Titus Burckhardt, New York: Paulist Press, 1980.

----- . *Sufis of Andalusia: the 'Ruh al-quds' and 'al-Durrat al-fakhirah' of Ibn 'Arabi*, tr. with introd. and notes by R. W. J. Austin; with a foreword by Martin Lings, London, Allen and Unwin, 1971.

----- . *Risalat ruh al-quds fi muhasabat al-nafs*. Damascus: Mu'assasat al-'Ilm li l-Tiba`ah wa-al-Nashr, 1964.

----- . *al-Diwan al-akbar*. Bulaq, 1271H.

----- . *Mir'at al-'Arifin*. Damascus: Maktabah Rafiq Hamdan al-Khassah, nd.

----- . *Fusus al-Hikam*. ed. A. Afifi, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1946.

----- . *Shajarat al-Kawn*. trans. A Jeffrey, Lahore: Aziz, 1980.

----- . *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya*. ed. 'Uthman Yahya, Cairo: al-Hay'at al-Misriyat al-'Amma li al-Kitab, 1972-.Vol. 12 has date on cover: 1989. Includes bibliographical references and indexes Introductions in Arabic and French.

----- . *Fusus al-Hikam*. by Caner Dagli, Kazi Press, Chicago, 2001.

----- . *Journey to the Lord of Power*. trans. Rabia Terri harris, London: East West Publications, 1981.

----- . *The Wisdom of the Prophets*. partial translation of the *Fusus al-Hikam*. from Arabic to French by T. Burckhardt, and from French to English by A. Culme-Seymour, Swyre Farm, Gloucestershire, 1975.

----- . *The Tarjuman al-Ashwaq: A*

Collection of Mystical Odes by Muhyiddin Ibn al-Arabi. trans. R. Nicholson, London, 1978.

----- . *Ismail Hakki Bursevi's Translation of and Commentary on Fusus al-Hikam.* trans. B. Rauf, 4 vols, Oxford, 1986-91, Vol. 4.

Ibn Hazm. *On the Perfect Knowledge of Juridical Bases (Al-Ihkam fi usul al-ahkam).* Cairo: 1345-47/1926-28, 8 books in 2 vols.

Izutsu, Toshihiko. *Sufism and Taoism, A comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1983.

Izutsu, Toshihiko. "Ibn al-'Arabi," *The Encyclopedia of Religion.* Mircea Eliade, ed. -in chief, New York: MacMillan, 1987.

----- . *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things, Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy.* Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1994.

Jayyusi, S. K. *The Legacy of Muslim Spain.* Vol. I, Leiden: Brill, 2000.

Jeffrey Arthur. "Ibn al-'Arabi's Shajarat al-Kawn." *Studia Islamica.* 11, 1959.

Knysh, Alexander D. "Ibrahim al-Kurani (d. 1101/1690), An Apologist for Wahdat al-Wujud." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.* 3rd series, 5, 1995, 39-47.

----- . *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Mediaval Islam.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.

----- . "'Orthodoxy' and 'Heresy' in Medieval Islam: An Essay in Reassessment." *The Muslim World.* Vol. LXXXIII, No. 1, Jan. 1993.

Lanzetta, Beverly J. *Other Side of Nothingness, Toward a Theology of Radical Openness.* Albany, State University of New York Press, 2001.

Lewinsohn, Leonard. ed. *The Heritage of Sufism, Classical Persian Sufism for Its Origin to Rumi (700-1300).* Vol.I, Oxford:

Oneworld, 1999.

Little, John T. "al-Insan al-Kamil: The Perfect man according to Ibn al-'Arabi." *The Muslim World*. Vol. vii, 1987.

Morris, James Winston. "How to study the Futuhat: Ibn `Arabi's Own Advice." Stephen Hirtenstein and Michael Tiernan, eds. *Muhyiddin Ibn `Arabi: A Commemorative Volume*. Shaftesbury, 1993.

------. "Ibn `Arabi's 'Esoterisism': The Problem of Spiritual Authority." *Studia Islamica*. 71, 1990, pp. 37-64.

------. "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn `Arabi and the Mi`raj." pts. 1 and 2, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. 107, no 4, 1987: 108, no. 1, 1988, 69-77.

Murata, Sachico. *The Tao of Islam*. State University of New York Press, 1992.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Sufi Essays*. London, 1972.

------. *Three Muslim Sages*. Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1970.

Nicholson, Reynold A. "Lives of 'Umar Ibnu'i-Farid and Muhiyyu' ddin Ibnu'l-'Arabi. *J. R. A. S.* 1906

------. *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*. Cambridge, 1921.

Palacios, Miguel Asin. *Ibn al-'Arabī, hayatuhu wa-madhabuh*. tr. al-Isbaniyah `Abd al-Rahsan Badawi , translation of *El-Islam Christianizado; estudio del "sufismo" a traves de las obras de Abenarabi de Murcia*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlu al-Misriyah, 1965.

------. *Islam and the Divine Comedy*. translated and abridged by Harold Sunderland. Lahore: Qausain, 1977.

Sells, Michael Anthony. *Mystical languages of Unsayng*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994

------. "Ibn `Arabi's 'Polished Mirror': Perspective Shift and Meaning Event." *Studia Islamica*. 67,

1988, 121-149.

Shah-Kazemi, Reza. *Paths to Transcendence: According to Shankara, Ibn 'Arabī, and Meister Eckhart*. Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006.

------. *The Other in the Light of the One, The Universality of the Quran and Interfaith Peaceful coexistence*. Cambridge: The Islamic Text Society, 2006.

Tahrāli, Mustafa. "The Polarity of Expression in The Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam", in Hirtenstein and Tiernan, eds., *Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī: A Commemorative Volume*. Shaftesbury, Dorset; Rockport, MA: Element, 1993.

Takeshita, Masataka. *Ibn 'Arabī's Theory of the Perfect Man and Its Place in the History of Islamic Thought*. Tokyo, 1987.

Winkel, Erick. *Islam and The Living Law, The Ibn al-Arabi Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

------. "Ibn al-'Arabī's fiqh: Three Cases from the Futūḥāt." *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*. 13, 1993, 54-74.

Winter, Michael. *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1982



Notes

1. Stephen Hirstenstein, *The Unlimited Merciful, The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn `Arabi* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 1999), ix.
2. Claude Addas, *Ibn `Arabi, ou, La quete du soufre rouge, (Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn `Arabi)*, translated from the French by Peter Kingsley, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993, 278.
3. Especially in the contemporary sense in which “spirituality” is set up in opposition to “religion.”
4. Syafaatun Almirzanah, *When Mystic Masters Meet: Towards A New Matrix for Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, Blue Dome Publication, New Jersey, 208. For orthodoxy and heresy in Medieval Islam, see Alexander Knysh, “‘Orthodoxy’ and ‘Heresy’ in Medieval Islam: An Essay in Reassessment,” *The Muslim World*, Vol. LXXXIII, No. 1 (Jan. 1993).

5. Syafaatun Almirzanah, *When Mystic Masters Meet*, 208.
6. In his essay entitled, "The Teacher and the Hermeneutical Task: a Reinterpretation of Medieval Exegesis," Fishbane makes reference to the four-fold typology of medieval scriptural interpretation common to both the Jewish and Christian traditions. For Jewish exegetes, this typology took the form of the acronym PaRDeS, where P=*Peshat* (the literal meaning); R=*Remez* (the allegorical meaning); D=*derash* (the tropological and moral meaning); and S=*Sod* (the mystical meaning). See Michael Fishbane, *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 113.
7. Fishbane, *Garments*, 120.
8. Fishbane, *Garments*, 120.
9. We may also mentioned here about Muhammad Shahrour, a professor of Civil Engineering who was born in Damascus in 1938, in his 800 page book, *Al-Kitāb wa'l-Qur'ān: Qirā'a mu'āṣira* (The Book and the Qur'an: A Contemporary Interpretation) (1990), who asserts the timelessness of the Quran and says that there is a direct conversation between the reader and the text, "If Islam is sound for all times and places," Muslims must not neglect historical developments and the interaction of different generations. Just as the Prophet, his contemporaries and his immediate successors understood the text of the Quran in the light of their intellectual capacities and of their perception of the world, so we should read and understand it in the light of ours. We should reinterpret sacred texts and apply them to contemporary social and moral issues. The Quran should be read as if the Prophet Muhammad had only recently died, informed us of this Book (41).
10. *Fut.* IV, 367. 3.
11. *Fut.* II, 518. 12. Indeed, Ibn al-'Arabi was what Bruce Law-

- rence calls “a deep-sea diver in the Ocean of the Quran.” (See Bruce Lawrence, *The Quran, A Biography* (New York: Broadway, 2006), 109.
12. *Fut.* III, 465, 23 in *IW*, 4.
 13. *Fut.* III, 465. 25 in *IW*, 4-5.
 14. Divine Self-disclosure or Self-manifestation is one of the most central teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ontology. It is rooted in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s reflection on a well-known *hadith qudsī*: “I was a Hidden Treasure [lit., “a treasure which was not recognized”] and desired [*out of love*] to be recognized, so I created the creatures and introduced Myself to them, and thus they recognized me.” (*Fut.* II, 322. 29; II, 310. 20; II, 232. 11; II, 399. 29; *SPK*, 66, 126, 131, 204, 250). According to this concept, creation is God’s Self-disclosure to Godself through the veils and signs of the creatures. For Ibn al-‘Arabī, everything that exists in the world is, after all, nothing but the self-manifestation of the Absolute. In this case, Ibn al-‘Arabī uses the term “hidden treasure” to refer to God’s Being before it manifests itself and comes to be known by means of creation. Ibn al-‘Arabī insists that “through the universe [which means by the creation of universe] God comes to be known.” (Sachico Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992, 11.)
 15. *SPK*, 91.
 16. *Fut.* I, 287. 10; *SPK*, 91-2.
 17. Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam, An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany: State University of New York press, 2005), 67.
 18. Ibn al-‘Arabi, Muhyi al-Din. *The bezels of wisdom*. translation and introd. by R.W.J. Austin ; pref. by Titus Burckhardt, New York : Paulist Press, 1980 (hereafter abbreviated as *BW*), 65.

19. *Fut.* II, 212.1-7, also quoted by Bashier, *Ibn al-'Arabi's Barzakh, the Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 123.
20. *Fut.* II, 316.10; *SPK*, 149, 229, 341-344.
21. *Fut.* I, 287. 19, also quoted by *IW*, 141.
22. *Wa law shā'a rabbuka la-ja'ala al-nāsa ummatan wāhidatan wa lā yazālūna mukhtalifin illā man raḥima rabbuka.*
23. *Fut.* II, 85.14, also quoted by William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994 (hereafter abbreviated as *IW*), 141.
24. *Fut.* II, 657.13.
25. *SPK*, 340, see *Fut.* II, 509. 31.
26. *IW.*, 163.
27. From the hadith: "He who knows himself knows his Lord."
28. *Fut.* IV, 443. 33, II, 597. 35; Cf. *SPK*, 342.
29. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia* 2.2ae.1.2, cited by John Hick, "Ineffability," *Religious Studies* 36 (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 40.
30. *Fut.* IV, 393. 6, also quoted by *IW*, 163.
31. According to Chittick, here Ibn al-'Arabi is alluding to the words of Abraham quoted in the Quran, Do you worship what you yourselves carve, while God created you and what you do? (Q 37: 95-96. see *IW*, 185. n. 7.
32. *Fut.* IV, 391. 12, quoted by *IW*, 151.
33. *BW*, 282.
34. *Fut.* III, 153. 12, quoted by *IW*, 125.
35. This translation should read: "a revealed law and a way (*shir'atan wa minhājan*)."
36. *Fut.* III, 410. 21, quoted by *IW*, 145.
37. *Fut.* IV, 416. 29; *IW*, 164.
38. *IW*, 139.

39. Wa li-llāh al-mashriq wa al-maghrib fa aynamā tuwallū fa thamma wajhu Allāh; see for example Ibn al-'Arabī, Fuṣūṣ, 113, and IW, 137.
40. *IW*,138.
41. *Fut.* II, 148. 11; *SPK*, 303.
42. On the transformation process in Ibn al-'Arabī's teaching, see William C. Chittick, "Belief and Transformation: Sufi Teaching of Ibn al-'Arabī," *The American Theosophist* 74 (1986).
43. *Fut.* II, 661. 27; *SPK*, 381, also cited by Dom Sylvester Houedard, "Ibn 'Arabī's Contribution to the Wider Ecumenism," in *Muḥyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī: A Commemorative Volume*, Stephen Hirtenstein and Michael Tiernan, eds. (Shaftesbury: Element, 1993), 295.
44. *Fut.* II, 661. 27; *SPK*, 381, also cited by Dom Sylvester Houedard, "Ibn 'Arabī's Contribution to the Wider Ecumenism," 295.
45. *Fut.* III, 94. 19; *SPK*, 363-364, also cited by Dom Sylvester Houedard with slightly different translation in "Ibn 'Arabī's Contribution," 295.
46. *Fut.* II, 415. 18; *SPK*, 134.
47. *Fut.* II, 414.13; *SPK*, 171.
48. *Fut.* III, 410. 25, 411. 22; *SPK* 302-3.
49. *Fut.* III, 413. 15; *SPK*, 303.
50. *Fut.* III, 411. 22; *SPK*, 303.
51. *Fut.* II, 415. 20; *SPK*,134.
52. *SPK*, 9.
53. *SPK*, 9.
54. *SPK*, 69.
55. Izutsu, Sufism and Taoism, 54.
56. *Fut.* III, 410. 17; *SPK*, 110.
57. Ibn al-'Arabī offers his own interpretation of 3:19 as follows: "Verily the true *din* with God is this *tawḥīd* which He has

prescribed for Himself. His *din* is, therefore, the *din* of the submission of one's entire being . . . [to be a Muslim means that I have] severed myself from my ego and achieved annihilation in Him." In Pseudo-Ibn al-'Arabi (ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī), *Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabī*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Sadr, n. d), 105, cited by Esack, *Quran, Liberation, and Pluralism, An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford, Oneworld, 1997), 127.

58. Muhammad Rashid Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah), vol. 3, 361, cited by Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation, and Pluralism*, 130.
59. Riḍā, *Al-Manār*, 361, Esack, *Quran, Liberation, and Pluralism*, 130.
60. Afifi, *Fusus, Com*, 39, see *BW*, 76, "The Wisdom of Exaltation in the Word of Noah."
61. Afifi, *Fusus Com*, 39, Cf. also Ibn al-'Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam*, ed. A. Afifi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1946), 55/72, also cited by Isutzu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 59-60.
62. We may also mention here about Nurcholis Madjid (1939-2005), one of Indonesia's most respected Islamic scholars graduated from the University of Chicago, who dubbed as the icon of reform of the Islamic movement in the country, and who had expressed concern that Islamic parties have become a new "Allah" for Indonesian Muslims who regard them as sacred and who regard Muslims who do not vote for them as sinful.
63. E.g., in the *Futuhāt*, Ibn al-'Arabī gives a more explicit explanation for the esoteric unity of all revelation, which is, for him, is innate in every diversity. He quotes the verses 42: 13, which affirms that the law with which Muhammad is charged is the same as with which Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus were charged. Then, Ibn al-'Arabī quotes from other verses, which mentioned further prophets, and

concludes with verse 6: 90 saying: “Those are they whom God has guided, so follow their guidance.” Then He says, “This is the Path that brings together every prophet and messenger. It is the performance of religion, scattering not concerning it and coming together in it. It is that concerning which al-Bukhārī wrote a chapter entitled “The chapter on what has come concerning the fact that the religion of the prophets is one” (Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fut.* III, 413. 12 in *SPK*, 303). Ibn al-‘Arabī also recommends to the seeker of God not to get fascinated with any one form of belief, but rather to try seeking the “knowledge that is inherent in God” (*‘ilm ladunnī*), and not to be imprisoned within ideologically closed ways of viewing the phenomenal world. This is why Ibn al-‘Arabī can convey the following in a poem in his *Tarjumān al-Aswāq* (The Interpreter of Ardent Desires): “My heart has become capable of every form.” According to Peter Coate, this aspect of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s worldview reflects “the perfect immensity of his metaphysics which makes it intrinsically antithetical to all forms of fundamentalism, cognitive or metaphysical” (Peter Coate, *Ibn ‘Arabī and Modern Thought*, 15).

64. Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 113, cited by *IW*, 176.
65. *Fut.* II, 85. 11 quoted by *IW*, 176.
66. *Fut.* III, 153. 12, quoted by *IW*, 125.
67. *Fut.* II, 85. 20; *SPK*, 355-356.
68. The Holy Quran, Sura al-Baqarah [2]: 112.