

*In Search of the
Lost Heart*

Explorations in Islamic Thought



William C. Chittick

Edited by Mohammed Rustom, Atif Khalil, & Kazuyo Murata



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Dedicated to the memory of Omer Fereig (1979–2008)







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A Note on Transliteration and Style

Arabic and Persian terms have been transliterated in accordance with the system employed by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES)*, with the following major exceptions: (1) no distinction is made in transliterating consonants shared between Arabic and Persian; (2) complete transliterations of book and article titles have been retained throughout; (3) in contexts where transliteration is not an absolute necessity (i.e., book/article titles and technical expressions), certain terms that appear on the *IJMES* word list, namely hajj, imam, *kalām*, *qibla*, Qur'an, *shahāda*, shari'a, Shi'i, sunna, *ṭarīqah*, and 'ulama', appear here as Hajj, Imam, Kalam, kiblah, Koran, Shahadah, Shariah, Shi'ite, Sunnah, Tariqah, and ulama respectively; (4) in several special cases (e.g., when paired with the word Koran), the term hadith appears as Hadith.

Grammar and punctuation has been standardized in accordance with *Garner's Modern American Usage* (3rd ed.). The bibliographical format for references in this book closely follows the *Chicago Manual of Style* (15th ed.), with some minor adaptations. With the exception of the "Editors' Introduction," a short-hand citation method has been adopted in the volume's notes.





Editors' Introduction

William C. Chittick was born in Milford, Connecticut in 1943. As an undergraduate student majoring in history at the College of Wooster (Ohio), Chittick spent the 1964–1965 academic year abroad, studying Islamic history at the American University of Beirut. It was here that he first came into contact with Sufism, as he decided to write his junior year independent study on the topic. Having become familiar with the standard accounts of Sufism, Chittick attended a public lecture on the topic by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who was the University's Agha Khan Visiting Professor that year. Nasr's lecture deepened Chittick's interest in Sufism to the point that he eventually resolved to pursue graduate studies in Tehran.

Chittick began his graduate work in the foreign students program at the University of Tehran's Faculty of Letters in 1966. In 1974, he obtained a doctoral degree in Persian language and literature under Nasr's supervision. Chittick then began teaching comparative religion at Aryamehr Technical University (now Sharif University of Technology) and, in 1978, joined the faculty of the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy (now the Iranian Institute of Philosophy). Shortly before the revolution in 1979, he returned with his wife, Sachiko Murata, to the United States. In the early 1980s, Chittick served as an associate editor for *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. In 1983, he and Murata took up posts at the State University of New York (Stony Brook), where they are currently full professors in the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies.

During his long stay in Tehran, Chittick studied under and/or collaborated with some of the most distinguished scholars of Islamic thought: Jalāl al-Dīn Āshṭiyānī, Henry Corbin, Toshihiko Izutsu, Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, Jalāl al-Dīn Humā'ī, Mehdi Mohaghegh, and 'Allāma Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Suffice it to say that Chittick's prolonged contact with these and other scholars has provided him with a unique appreciation and grasp of classical Arabic and Persian on the one hand, and a variety of medieval Islamic philosophical, theological, and mystical texts on the other.

In addition to his academic training, Chittick is a highly skilled translator who possesses a rigorous analytical mind and a rare ability to explain some of the most difficult ideas in a remarkably lucid manner. This helps explain why his works have had such wide appeal among students of Islamic civilization, comparative philosophy, and religious studies, and have been translated into





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Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Persian, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, and Urdu.

Beyond North American and European academia, Chittick's books have also been well-received by Muslim communities in the West.¹ In the East, his works are taught and discussed in Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan, India, and, of course, Iran, where his *Me & Rumi* (2004) was awarded the World Prize for the Book of the Year in 2005, and was named the best work in the field of Iranian Studies. More recently, a Tehran-based cultural society paid tribute to Chittick's scholarly achievements by holding a ceremony and publishing a festschrift in his honor.²

It would be an understatement to say that Chittick's scholarship has brought the ideas of a number of Islam's most significant intellectual and spiritual figures out of relative obscurity. In *The Heart of Islamic Philosophy* (2001), he highlights the central concerns of the Islamic philosophical tradition through his study of the writings of Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī (commonly known as Bābā Afḍal). The book also goes a long way toward demonstrating how Bābā Afḍal molded the Persian language in order to convey the practical concerns of philosophy to those who did not have specialized training in the discipline. Chittick's *The Sufi Path of Love* (1983) and award-winning *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi* (1974; 2005) are arguably the best expositions of Rūmī's worldview to date. They also stand as correctives to the widespread misinformation about the teachings and even "religion" of this spiritual giant of Islam.

It may come as a surprise to many that, along with Sachiko Murata and Tu Weiming, Chittick has recently published a book on Chinese Sufism entitled *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi* (2009). This important work investigates the cross-pollination that took place between Neo-Confucian thought and Sufism in the figure of Liu Zhi (or Liu Chih), one of the two important Chinese Muslim thinkers introduced by Murata in an earlier study.³

Chittick's works on Ibn al-ʿArabī, such as *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (1989) and *The Self-Disclosure of God* (1998), have shed a great deal of light on some of the fundamental metaphysical and practical teachings that have influenced over seven hundred years of Islamic thought from North Africa to Malaysia. Indeed, Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings are just as if not more relevant today, which is why a number of prominent thinkers have drawn on his ideas in developing responses to a variety of pressing contemporary issues, such as the question of the religious "other."⁴



Students of Islamic thought are, in one way or another, indebted to Chittick's writings. Needless to say, the editors of this volume are no exception. His works have greatly assisted us in navigating our way about the often bumpy terrain of Islamic thought. Over the years we have found that, apart from Chittick's books, many of his most helpful studies can only be found in journals, fest-





schrifts, collective volumes, encyclopedias, and the like. Unlike his books, many of these works are not easily accessible to scholars and students, let alone the wider public.

The present volume, therefore, brings together a diverse selection of Professor Chittick's seminal studies (published between 1975 and 2011) on key themes and figures in Islamic thought. For the most part, materials readily available in Chittick's books or on the Internet have not been included.

After having selected material for this volume, we divided the essays into four categories, updated the notes where necessary, and thoroughly edited the essays such that each piece naturally flows into the other without any awkward breaks or repetitions. Thus, although this work is a collection of essays, it is also meant to be a book sufficient unto itself, which, when taken as a whole, can be said to explore the underlying worldview of Islam.

The volume's first category is entitled "Sufism and the Islamic Tradition." The essays in this section investigate the general theoretical and practical dimensions of Sufism, highlighting its relationship to Islamic law and theology, scriptural hermeneutics, and religious pluralism.

Since the details of Ibn al-ʿArabi's impact on later Islamic thought are only known to a handful of specialists, the second part of this book, "Ibn al-ʿArabi and His Influence," mainly seeks to demonstrate the extent of his legacy. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the section's last three pieces, which introduce the ideas of several key eleventh/seventeenth-century Indian representatives of the school of Ibn al-ʿArabi.

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

The essays under the fourth heading, which we have labeled "Reflections on Contemporary Issues," present a coherent picture of the least-known aspect of Chittick's writings. Here are to be found his appraisals of such issues as the ecological crisis, religious exclusivism, and the universal concern for global peace.

If the first three sections of *In Search of the Lost Heart* give readers a good idea of the worldview of premodern Islamic thought, the fourth will demonstrate for them how the Islamic intellectual tradition can address our concerns today. Whether it is the treatment of issues in politics or theology, many contemporary Muslim thinkers fail to take Islam's rich intellectual resources—theoretical Sufism and Islamic philosophy in particular—into account in their formulations. They more often than not opt for paradigms outside of the tradition, or superficially attempt to integrate these paradigms into the tradition. Like these scholars, Chittick also has a lot to say about the current human "situation," but from the perspective of a civilization whose worldview is not constrained by the categories in vogue today. Because Chittick's worldview is, first and foremost,



shaped by the traditions of Sufism and Islamic philosophy, when he attempts to offer a solution to a contemporary problem, he does so from the perspective of classical Islamic thought.⁵

Following the essays are three appendices. The first appendix is a chronological table of the historical figures cited in the volume, the second a list of the sources for the essays presented, and the third a catalogue of Chittick's published books to the end of 2011.



It remains for us to thank Professor Chittick for kindly accepting our offer to bring this collection of essays together, supplying us with electronic copies of his articles, providing us with many helpful suggestions, and reading over the manuscript. We are grateful to Seyyed Hossein Nasr for his encouragement with this project. Thanks also go to Alexander Knysh, Leonard Lewisohn, Sachiko Murata, Salman Naqvi, Haji Noor Deen, Shiraz Sheikh, and Shafique Virani for sharing their precious resources with us; Aasim Hasany, Arin McNamara, Nosheen Mian, and the State University of New York Press's anonymous reviewer for their insightful feedback on the book's contents and organization; Ali Lakhani, G. A. Lipton, Omid Safi, Muhammad Suheyl Umar, and Jeff Zaleski for providing us with important references along the way.

While we were working on *In Search of the Lost Heart*, we received the sad news of the tragic death of our dear friend Omer Fereig. Omer was the most ardent supporter of this book, and we are grateful to him for his sound advice and guidance during its preparation. This volume is dedicated to his memory.