

4^e

CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds
Studies

28 June - 2 July 2021



Panel 42

The symbolism of love and hermeneutics in Muslim mystical theology.

A ḥadīth qudsī makes God say: «I was a hidden treasure, and I wished to be known; hence I created the creatures so that they would know me.» For mystical thinkers, this ḥadīth shows clearly how the notions of knowledge (ma'rifa) and love (maḥabba) are intertwined in the path to the Divine. Beyond the mutual love between God and his creature which is suggested here, if we take them together, the nature of the divine and the term «hidden» implies that the Ultimate knowledge is beyond the rational. While explaining the ineffable nature of mystical experimentation, it will therefore justify a search for the hidden meaning of things, sometimes with intuition. Following the example of the Quranic discourse, it is not surprising to see the technical language of the Sufis making abundant use of metaphor and symbolism. It is thus a question of going beyond the simple explanation of a text which is limited to the meaning of the words to discover the hidden meaning of the text with the help of the ta'wīl, or in the case of the mystic, to bring out its spiritual meaning. However, as might be expected, this opening of the hermeneutic field has most often run up against the doctrinal barriers set up by the literalist thought. Using the texts as a starting point, this workshop will therefore explore how Muslim thinkers coming from diverse backgrounds, oscillating between speculative hermeneutics (ta'wīl 'aqlī) and the hermeneutics of unveiling (ta'wīl kashfī), by combining the theory of love and the theory of knowledge, have contributed to the formation of an inclusive mystical epistemology.

Person in charge : Lemmel Pascal (EPHE, ED 472, attached to the Monotheism Studies Laboratory, UMR 8584)

Discussant : Lory Pierre (EPHE/LEM)

Program

Ashian Zahra (EPHE, ED 472, attached to the Monotheism Studies Laboratory, UMR 8584)

Hermeneutics and symbolism in Shiite mystical exegesis: the case of Sayyed Ḥaydar Āmolī's Tafsīr al-muḥīṭ al a'zam

Mystics and metaphysicians frequently use symbolic interpretation in their writings. This is a way for them to go beyond the literal meaning of things. This exegetical method based on symbolic interpretation holds a special place in Shiism. As the main hermeneutic orientation of this current the ta'wīl is considered as the noblest science and it is reserved to an elite. Its practice must make possible to rise by degrees from the reality of the phenomenal world to higher levels of reality.

Here we are interested in Tafsīr al-muḥīṭ al a'zam, a work composed by the 14th century duodecimal Shiite theologian, mystic and commentator Sayyed Ḥaydar Āmolī (d.1385). This exegesis, which consists of a set of commentaries and symbolic interpretations (ta'wīl) of the verses of the Qur'an and the Hadiths, is one of the most remarkable works of speculative mysticism. According to Āmolī, spiritual hermeneutics is based on the matching of the following three Books: 1) the Sacred Book, i.e. the Qur'an;

2) Kitāb afaqī which is represented by the phenomenal or sentient world (āfāq); and 3) Kitāb anfusī or the world of the soul (anfus), i.e., in other words, the matching of the macrocosm and the microcosm. Even if this position is not without precedent in Islamic mysticism, we will see that this Shiite thinker provides us with unparalleled examples of this kind of hermeneutic.

Ezzat Fadila (EPHE, ED 472, attached to the Monotheism Studies Laboratory, UMR 8584)

Language theory, Quranic hermeneutics and ontology in Syed Muhammad Naquib al Attas

During this presentation, we propose to examine the thought of the contemporary Malaysian philologist and Islamologist Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (b. 1931). More specifically, We would like to discuss around his theory of language, his Quranic hermeneutics and the links between these and his ontology. Main part of al-Attas's work is based on an extensive body of classical Sufi literature, which he draws on and reinterprets in the light of modern and contemporary philosophical trends. AlGhazālī (d.1111), Ibn 'Arabi (d.1240), and many other thinkers or mystics form the background of this syncretic and original philosophical project that attempts to place Sufism, the «science of hearts», at the center of contemporary intellectual debates.

Al-Attas's theory of language allows us to grasp the foundations of his ontological system where the reality of existence is not limited to the subject/object dichotomy, but rather requires a complementarity between a thinking and perceiving subject and a basic substratum or objective reality, which will inform his relationship to the world. This implies a well-defined anthropology, in which the human mission is to decipher the divine signs and symbols present in Nature. However, as a subject taking this nature as an object of study, human is an integral part of it, and therefore is both subject and object. He must therefore rely on the Sacred Word of God, as it was revealed to him in the Quran, during his earthly journey in order to reach his original state.

Lemmel Pascal (EPHE, ED 472, attached to the Monotheism Studies Laboratory, UMR 8584)

Walk towards God. About the hermeneutics and the place of symbolism in the «path of Hereafter» from Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (m.1111).

Close to the political realities of his time, the theologian and legal theorist but also philosopher, alĠazālī is also known as the promoter of a mystical doctrine that appears to be original in Islamic area. This subtle doctrine or «way of the afterlife» was intended to enable the believer to acquire, from here below, «true knowledge» (ma'rifa), means knowledge of God, but also to bring together the community of believers, beyond the various dogmatic currents. As an unprecedented synthesis between theology, metaphysics and mysticism, or even between reason, revelation and supernatural intuition, the new system produced led to a new mystical theology at the service of a theory of knowledge itself backed by a doctrine of Love. It is thus a fusion of the systems of thought of his time that al-Ġazālī ended up proposing. What will interest us here is the subtle balance that the theologian has established between the different hermeneutical fields superimposed within his doctrine. Through examples taken from his work, we will see that if on the one hand, in accordance with his epistemology and following the example of what we find in the Quranic text, he used symbolism to link speculative and intuitive fields, on the other hand, he proposed hermeneutical rules that, although allowing the overcoming of the classical commentary or tafsīr of the 'ulamā', at the same time, framed the commentary of the hidden meaning (bāṭin) or ta'wīl as well as that of the spiritual meaning or istinbāṭ.

Shariati Azadeh (EPHE, ED 472, attached to the Monotheism Studies Laboratory, UMR 8584)

The notion of passion love ('išq) in the doctrine of Najm al-dīn Rāzī.

The notion of love has been the subject of much research among Muslim exegetes and thinkers of all tendencies, and in particular among the mystic of Persian origin Najm al Dīn Rāzī (m.1256). As a sufi master of ṭarīqa kubrāwiyya, Najm al Dīn Rāzī has dealt with this notion in several of his works such as The Way of the Servant (Miršād al-'ibād), The Mysteries of Asadī in the Psalms of David (Marmūzāt i Asadī dar mazmūrāt-i Dāwūdī), The Epistle of Love and the Intellect (Risāla 'išq va 'aql) or in The Lights

that Enlighten those who walk towards God (Manārāt al sāirīn ila-Allāh). Our contribution will aim to clarify the thought of Najm al-Dīn Rāzī by highlighting the place of love within his mystical doctrine. We will first see that he considered love in the first place as an attribute of the essence of the Divine. Therefore, for him, Love happened to be the first characteristic that manifested itself in God as a consequence of His Divine beauty and then manifested itself through the Muhammadian light with which God created the world and human beings. By creating the human being in His image, God thus made love a constitutive element of human nature. As we shall see, this is also why Najm al Dīn Rāzī considers knowledge (ma'rifa) as a necessary condition for the occurrence of the feeling of love that lead the way to the ultimate truth, thus giving the notion of love its full mystical significance.