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Editorial

Since the release of *The Canberra Chronicles* on 30 April 2023, a stream of feedback has been received from our group's members and readers. For instance, one of them said, 'I greatly valued your article on de Tocqueville, who is a hero of mine, though the author [of the reviewed book] broadens his scope far beyond *Democracy in America*. I knew little about Tocqueville's subsequent career in France and the developments in his thinking to which it led. I'm sure you know of a book by Robert Bellah *et al.*, *Habits of the Heart*, which re-applies Tocqueville's theories to the sources of authority in present-day America. I found it inspiring.'¹ It's also inspiring to converse with the reader such as this, and I hope that the journal continues to inspire your interest and create dialogue among us for years to come.

This volume comprises three pieces of submissions: two articles and one book launch address as follows:

- Emeritus Professor Anthony H. Johns FAHA, 'The One and the Many,' initially submitted on 30 September, revised and resubmitted on 2 October 2023;
- Emeritus Professor Anthony H. Johns FAHA, '*The Dye of God: Essays on Islam and the Qur'an: The Author's Address*,' submitted on 11 August 2023; and
- Fr Mannes Tellis OP, 'Dominic de Guzman and His Legacy of Learning,' initially submitted on 31 August, revised and resubmitted on 18 September 2023.

The first article aims to be engaged in an interfaith dialogue with one of our contributors. It focuses on a concept of 'the Unity of Being' proposed in Dr Nicholas Coleman's article published on 30 April 2023 and other previous volumes. From its outset, it addresses difficulties concerning the study of Islam as a religion *per se* in Southeast Asia. Especially since the end of the Second World War, the study of Islam has been 'uneven, and currently the greater part of academic interest in the region has been devoted to political and sociological issues, and overshadowed by the spectre of the so-called "war on terror"' (p. 4). Furthermore, it has been complicated by the imposition on the region of a framework of nation states; thereby the centralising authority of Indonesia and Malaysia, 'has generated new modes of self-identification, new kinds of belonging, and a transformation of earlier world views, resulting from the lines drawn creating legal barriers defining identity where previously there had been fluidity, exchange of interactions' between individuals – horizontally and vertically – within the community and across the frontiers (p. 4).

After briefly describing the history of Islamic studies in the region and the interconnected history of local communities, namely Samudra-Pasai, Malaca, and Aceh Dar al-Salam, the author moves on to describe the work of prominent Islamic scholar, Shams al-Din who 'had a key position at the Acehnese court, and was a spiritual and political figure' (p. 8). Shams al-Din's work is described sophisticatedly and precisely in following sections: The Invocation, The Prologue, The Five Chapters, and The Epilogue. Based on his 'Sufistic metaphysics,' Shams al-Din 'has written a brilliant and deeply felt exposition of the Unity of Being, one filled with awe of God as a personal god' (p. 20). Professor Johns emphasises that, Shams al-Din's *wahda al-wujud* (the Unity of Being) is 'not simply a philosophical concept' or 'to be

¹ Email of 15 July 2023 from Emeritus Professor John D'Arcy May FTCD, a Visiting Research Fellow, Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College, Dublin.

taken as a philosophical structure,' but 'the fruit of a profound religious experience' ... 'fraught with meanings intended to lead the pupil along the path back up the mystical experience of God...' He also makes an important remark on this profound religious experience that, 'One can no more believe a little bit in the Unity of Being than one can be a little bit pregnant!' (p. 20). This is what one could learn from 'a Sufi tradition in Aceh,' Professor Johns concludes.

In his address to the Book Launch on *The Dye of God: Essays on Islam and the Qur'an*, we learn more about Professor Johns' journey to discover the spiritual world of Islam and become one of the world's foremost scholars on Sufism. We also learn more about his discovery how interfaith dialogue and encounter conjugate, despite the fact that 'the story told in a different language, operating according to different rhetorical conventions, [it] represented... a different understanding of the divine design for creation and human history' (p. 26). Religious experiences, intuition and insight expressed poetically in this book provide a challenge for others 'to gain access to another textual world, another tradition, another faith' (p. 28).

The second article derives from a presentation by Fr Mannes Tellis OP, Holy Rosary Parish Priest, on St Dominic's Feast Day Celebration held in early August. It's about St Dominic's life and his legacy in Western education and civilisation presented via the History of Ideas or Intellectual History. With his desire to have qualified preachers, Dominic 'dispatched' seven priests to many university centres in Western Europe, e.g., the Convent of St Jacques (in 1217) in Paris, university towns in Bologna (1218), Palencia and Montpellier (1220) as well as Oxford (1221). His vision in creating the intellectual life of the Order was carried out by two prominent intellectuals of the Order, Albert of Cologne (1200-1280), known as Albert the Great or St Albert the Great, and his protégé Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274).

In addition to the close connection between the church and universities, the article highlights the relationship between theology and philosophy from one of the Middle Ages' intellectuals. In Aquinas's view, 'philosophy was always the handmaid of theology, giving theology a credible voice and helping this science be viewed, not as a fanciful superstition or as an anti-intellectual discipline, but rather a way of seeing the world through another type of lens' (p. 39). This reflection derives from his realisation that 'study without prayer would become a purely academic pursuit which could easily lead to a major intellectual vice, namely *curiositas*' (p. 39). While the debate on Artificial Intelligence (AI) coupled with the hubris of 'secular education' continues, we may wonder how the present-day pursuit of education would respond to the ancient wisdom of St Thomas Aquinas.

Besides kind words of encouragement mentioned above, this journal would not be finalised without the unfailing commitment of contributors and dedication of the editing team of volunteers. Despite his ailment, Professor Johns whose 95th Birthday was elegantly celebrated in late August this year has submitted his article and continued revising it 'radically.' Eventually, he decided to rewrite and presented it succinctly and perfectly in the current form as shown below. As I expressed my appreciation of his perseverance to be engage in interfaith dialogue on the Unity of Being concept, he replied, 'We worked together for our community.' What a tender and beautiful soul for which I am forever grateful!

My grateful thanks also go to Fr Mannes Tellis OP for his generous contribution and patiently response to our requests, to Professor Raymond Canning, Dr Mary Sheather and Dr Nicholas Coleman for their editing assistance. I would also thank Jo Excel Rinon, a casual professional photographer who provides me with photographs of ACU events, including the celebrations of St Dominic's Feast Day, ACU Canberra Campus' 60th Anniversary (2 August) and Professor Johns' Book Launch (11 August), generously hosted by ACU Canberra Campus Dean, Associate Professor Darius von Güttner (see pp. 29-32 & 44-45). Without their solid backing and a keen eye for detail, it would be difficult to publish a high-quality work and distribute it to the group's members and the public at large. Any shortcomings remain entirely mine.

The Editor

The One and the Many

Anthony H. Johns FAHA
Emeritus Professor, Islamic Scholar and Interfaith Conciliator
School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific,
Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200.

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Southeast Asia is home to one fifth or more of the world's Muslims. Not long ago it was widely regarded as a periphery of the Muslim world, and discussed as such in western academe: an area only of marginal relevance to the great tradition of Islam. Yet a millennium ago, there were already scattered Muslim communities in this region, and the growth of the number of Muslims to the present demography has been slow but consistent, with a strong forward movement becoming apparent from the beginning of the 15th century CE.

It is only in recent times that an appreciation of the scale of this expansion of the world of Islam, especially its religious dimension, has been awakened, and is receiving the appreciation it deserves.¹ Even so, the distribution of interest and emphases in research is uneven, and currently the greater part of academic interest in the region has been devoted to political and sociological issues, and overshadowed by the spectre of the so-called 'war on terror.'

Modern Muslim Southeast Asia is dominated by the nation states Indonesia and Malaysia. Both have a distinctive political role in the world of Islam on the world stage. But the use of these names anachronistically when writing of Islam in the region, as though there had always been an Indonesia, and had always been a Malaysia as definable entities – admittedly difficult to avoid – imposes on the region of a framework created within living memory. This framework obscures the vitality and complexities of the individual relations that pertained between the cultural areas now set within the frontiers of Malaysia and Indonesia, and their relations, whether individual or collective, with the wider world of China to the Northeast, or the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East to the Northwest. The centralising authority of these two nation states has generated new modes of self-identification, new kinds of belonging, and a transformation of earlier world views, resulting from the lines drawn creating legal barriers defining identity where previously there had been fluidity, exchange and interaction.

There is not one, but many narratives of Islam to be uncovered in Southeast Asia of varying levels of historical importance, not all of which are equally known. The survival of data to construct these narratives, by the very nature of the case is irregular, incomplete, often erratic and arbitrary, as centres of authority have shifted, records have been lost, and communities taken on new forms and played different roles when confronted by the challenges of changing kinds of political authority and European incursions.

¹ Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past*, Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011.

For the earliest period, data is sparse: a report by a Chinese traveller here, a tombstone or inscribed pillar there, reports from the occasional Middle Eastern or European travellers. These hardly supply sufficient information to support continuing narratives.

The earliest accounts of Muslim life and activities are from harbour principalities which developed to serve the maritime trade routes from Europe, the Middle East and South Asia to the spice islands and beyond, across the Indian Ocean and into the South China Sea. In this trading system, the Straits of Malacca had a key role. Once it was dominated by Muslim traders and Islamic contract law assured business confidence, there was a secure place for Muslim communities in these port settlements. Those participating in this trading system entered the pages of history in their own right as sultanates.

Three of these focal points are relevant to this paper: in ascending order of importance, Samudra-Pasai, on the east coast of north Sumatra; Malacca, on the central west coast of the Malay Peninsula; and Aceh Dar al-Salam, on the north tip of the island of Sumatra (see Map 1 below).



Map 1: Showing three focal points of Islamic centres: Samudra-Pasai, Malaca, and Aceh Dar al-Salam.

Source: <http://ursramseyer.blogspot.com/2015/08/indonesia-14-2000-years-of-trade-and.html?view=classic> – accessed 9 October 2023.

Samudra-Pasai is distinguished as the site of the tomb of a local ruler, Sultan Malik al-Saleh, damage to the tombstone giving as date of his death a hijra year that corresponds to 1297 or 1307 CE depending on how the inscription is read. Although little is known of the internal history of this sultanate, it is the earliest evidence of a Muslim dynasty in the region. Much more is known of Malacca (1400-1511 CE). A narrative of its internal history is possible, thanks to the *Sejarah Melayu* (The Malay Annals) – a genealogical and anecdotal chronicle,² which with external largely Portuguese sources, show it as an important trading centre, an emporium serving a wide area extending to the Philippines, creating a broad area of Malayo-Islamic culture.

The *Sejarah Melayu* shows Malacca was home to a number of ethnic groups, attracting religious teachers from Samudra-Pasai in Sumatra, and across the Indian Ocean. It includes vignettes of the religious life of the court, the eccentricities of various religious teachers, the personal piety of some rulers, and the presence of a Sufistic spirituality. It is written in an adapted form of the Arabic script, and includes many Arabic and Persian loan words, along with iterations of Islamic themes and stories of Islamic heroes serving as cultural reference points. By this time, Malay already bore hallmarks of Islamic culture just as had Persian and Turkish, and across the Indian Ocean in East Africa, Swahili.

Significant events, such as the Portuguese capture of Malacca in 1511 are vividly presented, and occasionally there are references to issues debated in Islamic theology, among them the question as to whether or not the damned are in hell for all eternity. There are no references to the ways in which Islamic Law was administered, or to Islamic teaching institutions – independent or court sponsored – nor reference to basic works in the Islamic disciplines. It does not offer adequate material to provide any sustained personality-based narrative.

After the Portuguese capture of Malacca, the local and international trade that passed through the Straits of Malacca was diverted from it to a port on the northern tip of Sumatra that was to become the Sultanate of Aceh Dar al-Salam. Here, a fuller and more diverse narrative becomes possible. The first ruler to enter the pages of its history was Sultan Ali Mughayat Shah (r. 1514-1530). He rapidly established the Sultanate as a regional power, subsuming under its political control the territories of the earlier sultanate of Samudra-Pasai, and soon gained international recognition and respect.

In its spiritual and political culture it was vibrantly Islamic. Its geographical position, commanding the Straits of Malacca, made it a trading centre for spices, pepper, gold, elephants and other commodities. Its participation in Indian Ocean trade and strategic position provided an economic base for a widespread trading and diplomatic network. It was to enjoy a constant exchange of visitors and embassies from the Indian sub-continent, the broader periphery of the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka, the Holy Land, and China as well as the European trading nations Portugal, Holland and Britain. It rapidly became, in fact as well as in its self-perception, an integral part of the Muslim world and, equally important, a regional

² The Malay Annals or *Sejarah Melayu*, R.O. Winstedt (ed.), *JMBRAS* (Journal of the Malay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society), Vol. XVI Part III, Singapore 1938, pp. 1-228. An English translation is published in the same Journal: *Sejarah Melayu: A Translation of Raffles MS 18 with Commentary*, C.C. Brown, *JMBRAS*, Vol. 25, No. 159, Pts 2 & 3, Singapore 1952 (appeared 1953), pp. 1-276.

centre of religious learning. As the last landfall for travellers before venturing across the Indian Ocean to perform the hajj, it was known among aspirant religious scholars and pilgrims alike, as the 'veranda of Mecca.' Its rulers were recognised as members of the exclusive 'club' of Sultans, and were acknowledged by the Ottomans as rulers of a powerful and wealthy state, and defenders of Islam against 'infidels.'

Its participation in Indian Ocean trade and strategic position provided an economic base for a widespread trading and diplomatic network. It also provided patronage of Islamic learning, and attracted visits by numbers of scholars from Mecca, Egypt, Syria and Gujarat, some of them well known in Islamic history, such as Shaykh Abu al-Khayr ibn Shaykh Ibn Hajar, son of the great jurist Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (1504-1567). Abu al-Khayr taught various of the religious disciplines: *usul al-fiqh* (Islamic legal theory), *fiqh* (Islamic law), *ma'qulat* (rational sciences), and *tasawwuf* (mysticism). That his book on the *a'yan al-thabitah* (Fixed Essences) entitled *al-Sayf al-Qati'* (The Trenchant Sword) is mentioned in a local history reveals a concern with *wujudiyah* mysticism (based on the idea of the Unity of Being) in the kingdom. Very little, however, is known or even knowable about these scholars' activities or local influence, but their presence is sufficient to establish that Aceh was recognised as a significant entity by the wider Islamic world.

In its simplest form, the faith of Islam is austere, and its foundation simple. There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God. God is one, He is the creator of humankind and all that is out of nothing but His word. His will for humankind is revealed in the Qur'an and illumined by the sayings of Muhammad (hadith). Together they offer a salvation history, a liturgy, a spirituality and a law. God has the most beautiful names. In the Qur'an, there are ninety-nine. He is Allah – the personal name of God – and among them are the Merciful, the Compassionate, the King, The Most Holy, The Carer, The Strong, The Mighty, The Generous and so on. It is a devotional practice to meditate on and recite them. To aid counting they are arranged in three groups of thirty-three on a rosary.

Scholastic theologians have written on the twenty necessary attributes of God. Among them are existence, timelessness, perpetuity, being other than anything created, self-subsistence, and unity. God is one with life, one with knowledge, one with will, one with strength, one with hearing, one with sight, one with speech. He lives, He wills, He knows, He is mighty, He hears, He sees, He speaks. These qualities are realised in His acts. The opposite of any of these attributes is impossible of Him.³ It is impossible for Him that He not exist, for example, it is impossible for Him that He be like anything created.

The living and thinking of Islam is realised in various traditions, ranging from the austerity of the rigid literalism of the Wahhabis, to the warm humanism of more mainstream Muslim communities inspired by the Qur'an and the wonders of the natural world. But there is yet another dimension, an ecstatic experience of God gained from the Sufi path, a sense of awe at the wonder of the world and the cosmos being of God, that passes beyond what dogmatics can teach and generates a sense that God is all.

This wonder of the world, the cosmos and being of God, creates a sense of awe that adds a

³ Following his email of 2 October 2023, Professor Johns comments that, 'This is usual in the literature. What is possible of God, impossible of Him, etc.'

new dimension to the dogmatic definitions of the religion, and generates a sense that God is all. It derives from the tradition of Ibn 'Arabi, grows out of and is driven by a yearning for God, who sees in it a response to His act of love in revealing Himself to be loved.

The resulting theosophy is not merely a system of thought, but a way of understanding, loving and adoring that belongs to the Islamic tradition, that invites the human into a world closed to those who do not seek it, and whose understanding does not go beyond the literal meaning of *la ilaha illa'llah* – there is no god but God. The goal is to find within and behind the words on the printed page, or even as they are carried on the voice of the reciter, something more than the words, something that carries the reader into a different world where all meanings are transfigured.

This was the tradition that Shams al-Din lived in and by. But not only was he a great mystic, he had a key position at the Acehnese court, and was a spiritual as well as political figure. His date of birth is unknown. He is identified solely by his *nisba* al-Samatra'i, (sometimes al-Samatrani). Literally, this means 'the Sumatran,' but in his case this refers not to the island of Sumatra, but Samudra-Pasai, on the northeast coast of Sumatra, and deemed his place of birth. He appears in Acehnese history virtually out of nowhere as Shaikh al-Islam, an established public figure, close to the centre of power with an active role both within the court, and in its international relations. He served three sultans: 'Ala al-Din Ri'ayat Shah (r. 1582-1603), 'Ali Ri'ayat Shah (r. 1604-1607) and Iskandar Muda (r. 1607-1636).⁴ Of these, Iskandar Muda, also known as Johan Alam, is reputedly the greatest, and ruled Aceh during what is regarded as its golden age. There is no record, however, of any interactions he may have had with any of the distinguished '*ulama*' visitors referred to above.

An anonymous work, the *Hikajat Atjeh*, records a number of his activities over the years, but gives no dates. Most of this information has to do with his relations with Sultan Iskandar Muda, last of the three rulers he served. He translates a letter brought by a Portuguese delegation to the Sultan; he presides over the presentation of a gift to the court fencing-master because the Sultan's grandson displays outstanding swordsmanship and leads all present in the recitation of al-Fatiha (the opening sura of the Qur'an) to celebrate the event; he receives foreign visitors. Further he was the Sultan's *murshid* (mystical guide) and inducted him into a *tariqa* (Sufi order). There are vivid accounts of his role in the celebration at the court of the great festivals of the Islamic calendar. He accompanies the Sultan in procession with his officials from the palace to the mosque with an array of elephants, dozens of Abyssinian guards armed with swords and lances and a riotous musical accompaniment of wind instruments, drums and gongs. He plays a role in other court events. When the betrothal of the Sultan's daughter was announced, he played a leading role in the ensuing celebrations, and headed the list of those to whom Sultan Iskandar announced the name of his designated successor.⁵ He prays beside the Sultan in the

⁴ Teuku Iskandar, *De Hikajat Atjeh*, Verhandeling van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal,- Land,- en Volkenkunde 26, 'sGravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958, p. 153.

⁵ This must have been post 1617, the year in which Sultan Iskandar Muda had brought to Aceh a son of Sultan Ahmad of Pahang who was to rule as Iskandar Thani (r. 1636-42) and was married to Sultan Iskandar Muda's daughter. This is probably the betrothal referred to. See M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, London & Basingstoke: Macmillan 1981, p. 32.

mosque, and at the festival of the sacrifice, after the sultan had ceremonially put a knife to the throat of the sacrificial animal, took the knife himself and completed the slaughter.⁶

He died in 1630. His death is recorded in al-Raniri's *Bustan al-Salatin* which gives him a brief entry, recording his death 'on the eve of Monday' [i.e. Sunday evening], 12 Rajab of the *hijrah* year 1039 [24 February 1630], and that 'he was learned in the Islamic disciplines, well-known for his standing in Sufism, and author of a number of works on religious topics,'⁷ but no further information. It is ironic that it is the same al-Raniri, who ordered that a number of Shams al-Din's works be burnt, who provides this brief death notice. In it he records no titles of any of Shams al-Din's writings. In fact, al-Raniri is responsible for the loss of a number of his writings, a loss which cannot be quantified.⁸

There is a corpus of works still in MSS attributed to him, most in Malay, although all with Arabic titles. These were given a secure place on the academic map of Islamic studies in this region in 1945 by C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuize's dissertation *Shams al-Din van Pasai*.⁹ It gives an outline of Shams al-Din's activities at the Acehese court, surveys his work, and offers an analysis of the theosophy of divine self-manifestation that he elaborated. Further, it lists every manuscript relevant to him in Arabic or Malay known at the time he wrote his dissertation. It includes a number of Malay texts with Dutch summaries, and in an appendix, editions of two of his Arabic works, *Jawhar al-Haqa'iq* (The Essence of Realities), and a shorter treatise *Risalat tubayyin mulahazat al-muwahhidin fi dhikr Allah* (Treatise Clarifying the Perceptions of Those Who Profess the Divine Unity).¹⁰ This material is adequate to support further research into Shams al-Din's status and role as a fellow teacher, mystic and spiritual guide, his place in the vernacularisation of Islam in the region, and in the network of scholarly and religious interchange between Aceh, South Asia, and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

⁶ Takeshi Ito, *The World of the Adat Aceh: A Historical Study of the Sultanate of Aceh*, PhD dissertation, Faculty of Asian Studies [now defunct], Australian National University, 1984, pp. 232-238. The dissertation is based on G.W.J. Drewes and P. Voorhoeve, *Adat Atjeh Reproduced in Facsimile from a Manuscript in the Indian Office Library*, Verhandeling van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal,- Land,- en Volkenkunde 24, 's Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958.

⁷ Teuku Iskandar, ed., *Nuru'd-din al-Raniri Bustanu's Salatin Bab II, Fasl 13*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1966, p.35

⁸ al-Raniri was an interloper from Rander in the Gujerat, who inveigled himself into the position of Shaikh al-Islam during the reign of Iskandar Muda's successor Iskandar Thani (r. 1636-42). He claimed that Shams al-Din had propagated unbelief, burnt some of his writings and had some of his close followers executed. On the death of Iskandar Thani, and the accession of his widow Safiya al-Din in 1642, there was a reaction against his policies, a 'coup,' and al-Raniri disappears from the Acehese scene.

⁹ C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuize, *Shams al-Din van Pasai: Bijdrage tot de kennis der Sumatraansche Mystiek*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1945.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 245-289.

A resume of Shams al-Din's life and works is in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 1350-1850*.¹¹ Most are in Malay (although with Arabic titles) on aspects of *tasawwuf*. One exception, however, is *Mir'at al-mu'minin*, a reworking in Malay of Sanusi's *Umm al-Barahin* that is a basic work on dogmatics.¹²

van Nieuwenhuize discusses only his works in Malay, and he appears to have disregarded the Arabic work *Jawhar al-Haqa'iq*, apparently not having realised how important a work is, the skill of its construction, the range of learning, and the religious passion that drives it. It is the earliest known original work by an Acehnese written in Arabic, and it is hardly an exaggeration to describe it as a masterpiece.

The only text of the work available is that edited by van Nieuwenhuize and included as an appendix in his dissertation. The manuscripts on which it is based are relatively late (circa 18th century). Though its value is enhanced by the inclusion of marginal glosses on the manuscripts in both Arabic and Malay as footnotes, it is by no means perfect, and further work on the text requires further reference to the manuscripts on which it is based. The work gives an account of the importance of recognising and of understanding the full meaning of *la ilaha illa'llah*. It is a work that discovers a full understanding of the great sentence of the divine unity *la ilaha illa'llah* – there is no god but God – is only to be experienced and understood by seeing within it a recognition of the Unity of Being, a Being that reveals itself over five grades, an understanding that enables a human response to the cosmic love that lies behind the myriad manifestations of the unknowable God, the One above/beyond any description. It outlines how an aspirant gnostic can find the path he must follow to realise and experience his consubstantiality with this Being. The work is a high point among the achievements of Islamic thought in insular and peninsular Southeast Asia.¹³

The work is addressed to one who has not yet entered on the mystical path. It urges him to do so, and offers him encouragement and support along the way. It consists of an Invocation (*khutba*) in the traditional binary form (Praise of God and an Invocation of Blessings on the Prophet), a Prologue (*Muqaddima*), a sequence of Five Chapters (*fasl*) with the headings *Ahadiyya*, *Wahda*, and *Wahidiyya*, (these three are different forms of the Arabic root for ONE), followed by *'Alam al-arwah* (The World of Spirits/Souls) and *'Alam al-shahada* (the Visible World), indicating five levels of being. The work concludes with an Epilogue.

¹¹ See A.H. Johns, 'Shams al-Din al-Samatra'i (1560-1630)' in *Essays in Arabic Literary Bibliography 1350-1850*, Joseph E. Lowry and Devin J. Stewart (eds.), Mizan Band 17, Harrassowitz Verlag - Wiesbaden 2009, pp. 357-371.

¹² *Mir'at al-mu'minin*, a reworking in Malay of Sanusi's *Umm al-Barahin* is a basic work on dogmatics; it is summarised in A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932, p. 275.

¹³ There is little doubt that more MSS of the work are waiting to be discovered. Dr Oman Fathurahman of the Indonesian State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah recently informed me in a personal communication of the work in a collection of MSS held in a madrasa in the small town Sijunjung in West Sumatra.

The work is filled with a spiritual yearning and passion setting out the path an aspirant has to follow to achieve gnosis, to realise that he is one with the ultimate reality. It uses the traditional vocabulary of Islamic theology, and draws on traditional authorities, but uses them to reveal a radically different depth of spiritual meaning. In it is the same ambiguity and tension that is at the heart of Ibn 'Arabi's thought and the tradition stemming from it.

At one level within it is a complete fidelity to the monotheistic pattern of Unity (God), and Multiplicity (His creation), yet at another level, in his Sufistic metaphysics there is the identification of the One and the Many. So much so, it may at first be difficult to say whether it is monism in an Islamic dress, or Islam in a monistic dress. Whichever, there is no disputing the spiritual longing and moral passion that drives the author to bind together an internal love, yearning for God, and externally total obedience to the Revealed Law. It is convenient to discuss these divisions individually.

The Invocation

The Invocation (*khutba*) is in rhymed prose and the traditional two-part form: the first a doxology, and the second an invocation of blessings on the Prophet, his house and companions, the second generation of Muslims, and the community of the mystic brotherhood.

Shams al-Din addresses a fellow Muslim, one he intends to invite to follow the mystic path:

In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate. Praise be to God who in His knowledge first engendered (*ansha'a*) our essences (*a'yanana*), and secondly fashioned (*khalaqa*)¹⁴ our spirits (*arwahana*) after fashioning (*khalq*) the spirit of our Prophet (*ruha nabiyyina*), and finally placed in the world of elements our immaterial forms (*ashbahana*), and on it brought into being our [physical] human form (*insanana*).

Blessing and peace – our messenger (*rasuluna*) has a unique claim to them both – along with his household (*aluhu*) and companions (*sahbuhu*) – those who are our models, and their followers (*atba'uhum*) – those who are our leaders, and after them, those who are our brethren (*ikhwanuna*).

The doxology goes far beyond the conventional opening of a work. It encapsulates what is to be the content of the book, setting out five stages of God's 'creation' of Man, from the spiritual to the material – that of our essences (*a'yanana*), that of the spirit of the Prophet (*ruha nabiyyina*), that of our spirits (*arwahana*), that of our (immaterial) forms (*ashbahana*), and that of our physical forms (*insanana*). These stages are five, just as the levels of being are five. The spirit of the Prophet is transfigured into a logos by which our spirits take their form.

¹⁴ *ansha'a* ('to bring into being') and *khalaqa* ('to measure out,' 'to fashion') in the Ibn 'Arabi tradition are ambiguous. They may mean 'to create' in the conventional sense, or bring into a state of individual being something already existing in another form.'

In the second part, the eulogy calls down blessings on the Messenger, his Household, his Companions, his Followers (the second generation of Muslims), and our Brethren (i.e., the Sufis to whom Shams al-Din is heir, and among whom he numbers himself). This lineage continues in the author's own day, and will do so until the end of time. Again, these blessings are five. These five critical interventions manifest God's design in time and history. Parallel to them are five sources of spiritual guidance: The *Qur'an*, *Hadith*, *Hadith Qudsi* (non-Qur'anic divine utterances to the Prophet), *Athar* (utterances of the Companions) and the insights of the mystics.

It concludes with an apologia, consisting of a prayer for the success of the author's work, and begs forgiveness for its shortcomings.

We ask God to provide us the means to attain to Him, and by that, (in His gifting of it) both the goal and our request for it to be granted; and that out of His favour, and His magnanimity, and generosity and blessings to us, He will disregard the occasions when our feet have slipped and our pens have erred [in the writing of it].

He then sets out what his work is to be:

To begin then: Shams al-Din b. Abi Abdullah, one acknowledging his sinfulness before the God of whom he asks guidance and forgiveness, to whom he has recourse, of whom he asks help, declares 'My dear brother, this is a simple but comprehensive treatise composed of lustrous pearls. I have gathered them from the subtleties/hidden implications of the [Most Beautiful] Names, and I have called it *Jawhar al-Haqa'iq* (Essence of the Realities), and arranged it in the form of a Prologue (*muqaddima*), Five Parts (*fasl*) and an Epilogue (*khatima*) on the path to attain *wusul* [mystical Union]. It is Allah – may He be exalted – who is to be asked for His favour in this world solely by virtue of His name *al-Karim*, and asked that this treatise be a means of salvation from every fear and awesome horror in the hereafter. It is to be hoped of God that He spread widely its benefit, and by hearing it bring about an increase of listening. He it is who is the Wali of response to [prayer], and the bringer of success (*muwaffiq*) in reaching the goal.

Central to his work are the Most Beautiful names. But these names are not simply words of piety or devotion, but, in the Ibn 'Arabi tradition, are instruments of cosmic revelation, and salvation. Thus, God may be asked for His favour, by virtue of His name *al-Karim* (the Bountiful One), and responds to prayer by virtue of His name *al-Wali* (the True Protector).

It is God then who after fashioning the spirit of our Prophet engendered our essences in His knowledge. He was not only the bearer of God's message, but a cosmic instrument by which God manifests aspects of His hidden life. When placed in the world of elements, our immaterial forms brought into being our physical human selves.

The Prologue

The Prologue is a discourse in its own right. It makes a direct appeal to the 'brother' to enter the mystical path:

My dear brother, why is it that do you do not yet profess the divine unity (*tawhid* i.e., utter the sentence *la ilaha illa'llah*), the true fortress of God, with a full understanding of what *tawhid* is? such a profession of *tawhid* expressing not simply the recognition that God is one, but that all being is one.

Shams al-Din bases his appeal to him on citations from the five authorities he identifies in the Invocation that establish the sublime dignity of Man: 'In the finest of fashionings He shaped you,' in which is an echo of sura al-Tin (95): 5, 'We created man in the best of forms'; and 'In His likeness He created *you*,' in which is an echo of the hadith, 'For indeed God created Adam in His likeness.' These, he argues, are proof that '*You* are indeed the origin, *you* are the all, in *you* is the all, and from *you* is the all.'

He continues, 'There is nothing that encompasses *al-haqq* (the ultimate reality) other than *you*,' and 'None bore the trust (*al-amanah*) other than *you*.' This is the implication of the *hadith qudsi*, 'He said to *you*, "My heaven and my earth do not encompass me, but the heart of my believing servant encompasses me."' The Qur'anic verse, sura al-Ahzab (33: 72) is 'Indeed, We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they refused to bear it, and feared it, but man accepted it, evil and ignorant though he be.' These two texts establish that a complete declaration of the divine unity, *tawhid*, must be of God as both immanent and transcendent. In the words, 'The heart of my believing servant encompasses me.' God reveals Himself as immanent; in 'We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth.' God reveals Himself as transcendent.

He assures his brother that this was the faith too of al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and al-Maha'imi (d. 1431). He redoubles his appeal:

This is the instruction that I give, this is my guidance, so pay heed to it, and keep it in mind, and seek success from God Almighty (*tawfiq*) lest you fall into the unbelief of inattention (*shirk al-ta'wiq*), for one who has not first received loving care (*'inayat*), will be blind to the light of reason and guidance. Indeed, I truly wish to give you the benefit of the amazing gift that we have, and that I guide you through the marvels to be found among us.¹⁵

He then utters these words, he says out of love for his 'brother,' and it is this love that brings him to the heart of the Prologue. For the 'brother' must understand that when God willed to reveal His beauty in the mirror of the Names and Attributes, He said of Himself, in the *hadith qudsi*, 'I was a hidden treasure, and I loved that I be known, so I created creation that I might be known. So, by Me, know Me.'¹⁶ 'So, by the grace of God, O yearning one, pay heed to this Prologue. May God, be He praised and exalted, take you by the forelock (*'asiyah*) [along His straight path].' There is a neat irony in the phrase 'take you by the forelock,' with its allusion to sura al-'Alaq (96: 15), not that of a mocker being dragged to hell by his forelock, but of the aspirant mystic being taken by the forelock, along the straight path, to the mystic union!

¹⁵ This blending of the traditions of Ibn 'Arabi and al-Ghazali is a striking feature of the treatise.

¹⁶ The final words 'So, by Me know Me,' do not occur in the traditional collections of *hadith qudsi*.

The Prologue is on Love of the divine Self (*hubb al-dhatiyya*); the first chapter on Being from the standpoint of *ahadiyya mahd*, the second chapter on Being from the standpoint of *al-wahda al-jam'iyya al-ilahiyya*, and the third on Being from the standpoint of *wahidiyya al-jam'iyya al-rahmaniyya*. The fourth chapter explains the world of sanctified spirits (*al-arwah al-muqaddasa*), and the fifth explains the world of absolute vision (*al-shahada al-mutlaqa*). The Epilogue explains the spiritual exercises of *dhikr*, *muraqaba*, *tawajjuh* and *mushahada*, these being four levels of meditation on the profession of divine unity that once fully understood, leads to the Absolute Beauty (*al-jamal al-mutlaq*), may He be exalted.

The Five Chapters

Ahadiyya

Shams al-Din opens this chapter addressing his brother, 'My dear brother, may God guide me and you to guidance and virtuous conduct, and walk with me and you along the path of probity and righteousness.' He tells him that this is the grade of non-determination, that of the hiddenness of God, the grade at which nothing can be known or said of Him, above even the concepts of Lord and servant. It is referred to by the Qur'anic verse, 'There is nothing like Him' (Q. 42: 9). It is a grade which transcends the application of any attribute, even that of absoluteness. The charter concludes with the injunction, 'Assert [the reality of] Being without anthropomorphism, and be at peace in exalting and proclaiming His holiness and transcendence, and look with the light of God, O seeker, into this chapter. May God, be He praised and exalted grant you success on the straight path of God.'

Wahda

This is the grade at which the dynamic of differentiation begins in the divine mind as the Spirit of Muhammad, the interior aspect of which is *bi'smillah* (in the name of Allah). Through it the essences of humankind are placed in the world of elements, thence to become our immaterial forms and subsequently our human shape. It proceeds as an act of God's Will. Indeed, throughout the work the phrase, 'When God willed' recurs like a drumbeat. At this level Godhead is revealed by the name Allah as a manifestation of absolute existence. It stands at the head of the other names though the ideas in the divine mind are still undifferentiated conceptually one from another. It is referred to as the 'most holy outpouring' of God's revelation of Himself, an outpouring that springs from the love He tells of in the *hadith qudsi* cited in the Prologue 'I loved that I might be known...' This 'outpouring' leads to a second outpouring at which the name The Creator is revealed, and becomes the second grade of manifestation, *Wahidiyya*. The personal relationship is revealed in its fullest at this, the next level, at which the name of *al-Rahman* (the Merciful), is manifest, and in which the exposition of the theosophy is illumined by the Qur'anic verse, 'Call Him Allah, call Him al-Rahman' (Q 17: 110).¹⁷

The next stage in manifestation – prefaced by the same phrase – is to be understood through the implications of 'Every day He is in a [new] activity' (sura al-Rahman 55: 29).

¹⁷ The chapter headings for these levels are referred to simply as *ahadiyya*, *wahda* and *wahidiyya*.

With it become manifest His infinite might and beauty in the difference between the forms of the decrees of Lordship and Servanthood. Underlying them is the name al-Rahman, just as Allah underlies the first manifestation, that of Lordship and servanthood. It is this – al-Rahman – that is the source of the divine and existential determinations ‘externally’ (*kharijan*).

Wahidiyya

The explanation of this term is neatly dovetailed with that of *Wahda*. It is the grade at which God wills that conditioned (*muqayyad*) being be manifest in Himself through Knowledge, His absolute Being revealed through all the names and existential attributes differentiated one from another. It is also known as the Reality of Man. This manifestation is through the name al-Rahman (the Merciful), since the giving of existence is an act of Mercy, and to receive it means to come into Being.

Shams al-Din sees in this grade two aspects, one the dominion of the name al-Rahman, a general mercy inherent in God’s being, and the other, the dominion of al-Rahim, a particular mercy, and its effect on creation.

The grades of *Wahda* and *Wahidiyya* then are to be seen as the effects of the names Allah, al-Rahman and al-Rahim, the opening words of the Qur’an and prior to the undertaking of any good deed, *Bi’millah al-rahman al-rahim* – in the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate.

‘Alam al-Arwah (World of Spirits)

The chapter is introduced by a prayer, ‘My brother, may God set you and me among the victorious, and set you and me among the throng of His righteous servants.’ It continues, ‘God, when He wished to be manifest in other than himself, created light (al-Nur).’ Light, from the standpoint of its being something independent, simple and manifest in itself, is called Spirit, and the World of the Hidden (*‘alam al-ghayb*). From the standpoint of its being composite, subtle, though not divisible or subject to partition or division, it is called the World of Ideas (*‘alam al-amthal*). The chapter concludes with the prayer, ‘Understand these expressions, and understand what they mean, for they are taken directly from the learning of the Sufis (*al-qawm*). May God then make me reliable [in relaying their words] in this chapter, O [aspiring] Sufi! May God grant you help along the straight path of God.’¹⁸

‘Alam al-Shahada (The Visible World)

This is the final level of manifestation. It begins with a prayer, ‘My dear brother, may God pardon me and you our sins up to the Day of Judgement (*yawm al-din*), and not assemble me or you on that day with those who perish.’ It continues, ‘When God wished to make a clear manifestation of Himself, He created a physical darkness which is composite, dense and susceptible of partition and joining.’ This darkness is the phenomenal world. In it too Absolute Being is manifest through all the Names and Attributes. This physical darkness is

¹⁸ van Nieuwenhuize, *Shams al-Din van Pasai...*, p. 257

the raiment of God made manifest, displayed under the name The Manifest (*al-Zahir*). Then when God wished to be manifest in the clearest possible way in other than Himself, He created Man under the twin aspects of *al-insan al-bashari* and *al-insan al-haqiqi*, in a physical form and a spiritual form. In his physical form, Man comprises the four elements Earth, Water, Air and Fire, under the dominion of the divine names, The Wise, the Giver of Life, The Strong and the Mighty respectively. Man as a spiritual reality has four internal elements, Being, Knowledge, Light and Vision; Being meaning the Essence, Knowledge the Attributes, Light the Names, and Vision the Acts. Man, under the dominion of the name The Combiner, unites them both. Man, as he is, body and spirit, of these eight elements is under the dominion of these eight divine names.

The chapter closes with the stirring peroration, 'My brother, you who profess the Unity (of God and of Being), this is what I profess, and this is my conviction. I have imparted it to you out of my love and affection for you. Hold to it firmly, for God gives the capacity to do so to those with knowledge and understanding. ... Pursue it as long as you live, and if you achieve it, hold on to it, and never be neglectful of it. And if signs of favour from your Lord supervene upon you, then say, 'Lord, add to my knowledge' [sura Ta Ha (20): 114]. 'Thank Him for what He has entrusted to you, and savour the kindness of God (*karam Allah*). O you who try to realise (*muhaqqiq*) what is in this chapter, may God, be He praised and exalted, take you ever further along His straight path.'¹⁹

There is a delightful symmetry in the presentation of these chapters. As divine manifestations move from the higher to the lower, the pupil ascends from a lower grade to a higher.

The five chapters setting out these five levels of Being are parallel to the five levels of 'creation,' the five modes of divine intervention in history, and the five authorities for the guidance of humankind presented in the Invocation. These five chapters deserve much closer study than can be given here. Each elaborates the level of being to which it is dedicated, from the hiddenness of *Ahadiyya* 'down' to that of *alam al-shahada* (the world of visible beholding) at which Man may know himself as a mirror reflecting the divine Attributes. Each level represents the 'action' and realisation of the most beautiful Names in a way worthy of Ibn 'Arabi himself.²⁰

This exploration of the *Jawhar* is hardly more than an introduction based on a barely adequate text. Although it was included among the appendices to his dissertation, van Nieuwenhuize confined his analysis of Shams al-Din's theosophy to MSS in Malay. Any serious engagement with his work needs to take the *Jawhar* as a point of departure.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

²⁰ For an account of the Divine Names as lines of force in God's manifestation of Himself in creation, see A.E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyi-Din-Ibnul 'Arabi*, Cambridge University Press, 1939, pp. 41-47.

The Epilogue

The Epilogue opens with a prayer, one that reiterates the spirit of all that has gone before, 'My dear brother, may God bring to fulfillment [and put a seal on this journey] for me and for you by good acts, and grant me and you a copious reward.'²¹ It is on the path of *dhikr*, *muraqaba tawajjuh* and *mushahada* towards the presence of the Absolute Beauty, the Ultimate Reality (*al-Haqq*), and is the climax of the work. *Dhikr* is the ritual recitation of *la ilaha illa'llah* – the very fortress of God. This recitation is at four levels. At that of *dhikr* it is with the tongue, at *muraqaba* with the heart, at *tawajjuh*, it is when the heart is so close to the presence of God, there is no need for the raiment of sound to be heard or letters (*huruf*) to be read. This prepares the path to *mushahada*, to vision, the pinnacle of the exercise, when the seeker enjoys the mystical experience of encountering the ultimate reality within himself, when he will have passed beyond his own sense of individuality, and God alone is both beholder and the beheld. It is the understanding of the first part of the book, of the realisation that the full meaning of *la ilaha illa'llah* is that Being is One, that is the pre-condition for this.

The Epilogue concludes with a caution. The brother's setting out on his journey presupposes his obedience to the Law. In emphasising this, Shams al-Din refers to a *hadith* 'Every joy throughout life is gained through obedience to God' and quotes the Qur'anic verse [al-Fatir (35): 10], 'Good utterances (*kalim*) ascend to Him, and good deeds raise them up.'²² Among these 'good utterances' is the sentence of *tawhid*, *la ilaha illa'llah*, (there is not god but God) the essential meaning of which Shams al-Din has expounded, and its repeated utterance is the foundation of the spiritual exercise of the *dhikr*. Indeed, it is not until the full meaning of this great sentence – the fortress of God – as Shams al-Din has expounded it is understood, that the practice of *dhikr*, the ritual recitation of this statement of divine unity, can be truly effective. But the fruit of this spiritual exercise is granted only when it is borne up by good works, i.e., by obedience to the Law. As Shams al-Din says to the brother, 'You must clear the land, sow it with divine knowledge, and water it with good deeds, for the better the land is sown and watered, the more complete and perfect the result will be.'²³ The *Jawhar* concludes with a prayer that he utters on behalf of them both, 'May God sustain me and you with what has sustained them (i.e., the saints), and grant me and you His enabling grace as he has granted it to them.'

In his peroration, he reprises the key themes and adjurations of the Prologue, sometimes extending their area of reference. In the Prologue, for example, he sources God's will to reveal Himself in the love expressed in the *hadith qudsi*: *kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan* – I was a hidden treasure, and I desired to be known. Here, he calls on humankind to reciprocate this love on the authority of sura Al 'Imran (3: 31), 'Declare, if you love God, then follow me,' a call to be faithful to the *sunna* (practice) of the Prophet. One who understands the realities explained to him, but ignores this obligation is an unbeliever (*zindiq*). He must persevere in

²¹ van Nieuwenhuize, *Shams al-Din van Pasai...*, p. 260.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 266.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

both to be worthy of achieving the grade of *fana' fi'llah wa baqa' bi'llah* – disappearance within God, eternal life by God.

This is to what the brother is summoned, and Shams al-Din cites the impassioned invitation to the spiritual path by al-Ghazali, 'This is the highway, so where is the traveller? These are the objects of desire, so where is the seeker? This is the garment of Joseph, so where is Jacob? This is mount Sinai, so where is Moses, this is *Dhu'l-fiqar*, so where is 'Ali, father of Hasan? These are the indications (*isharat*), so where are Junayd and al-Shibli? Here are the patched garments of asceticism, so where is Uways, and where is Adham, where are the Sufis? O Sufis, what is it to me if I see the friary [*dayr*], and in it there are no brethren [*dayyar*]?'²⁴

He then renews his appeal, 'My dear brother *al-muhsin*,²⁵ may God give you with the gift of His help,' and renews the invitation from the opening of the Prologue, 'What is it with you that you do not seek this *tawhid* with earnestness and effort, and what is it with you that you do not act on it, when you are aware that it is the grace of God bestowed upon you, by His might, His generosity and His kindness.'

The Epilogue is rich in intertext. It shows the density and intensity of meaning in the sentence of *tawhid* that makes it rightly the foundation of continuous *dhikr*. It shows the various levels of divine revelation with the Qur'an at its summit, yet with the assurance that God's concern with His people continues through time in the guidance He gives to the mystics, setting out the spiritual goal of the mystics: gnosis. At the same time, it zealously guards the concept of an active, knowing God, reiterating that things happen, and are as they are, because it is His will.

Notwithstanding the theosophical framework of five levels of being that it sets out, God is addressed as a personal God. Praise is offered to Him – *al-hamdu li'llahi* – as Allah who in His knowledge 'originated our essences,' i.e., at the level of *wahda*, the level at which God's personal name Allah, is manifest, not at the level of *ahadiyyah*, which is above any description, and with which no kind of relationship is possible, even that of servant to Lord.

Further, when he willed to show the implications of, 'Indeed, everything We created in a proper measure' Sura al-Qamar (54: 49). He 'created' the spirit of Muhammad, and the spirit of Muhammad appeared.²⁶ And the proof text justifying this is the Prophet's words to Jabir, 'The first thing that God created was the spirit of your Prophet.'

Shams al-Din presents the testimony of some of the earlier Sufis who have tasted and written of this experience of gnosis. Among them is one who said, 'In the world is a garden. Anyone who enters it will not yearn for the garden of the world to come, nor for anything,

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

²⁵ *muhsin* here dignifies the brother addressed as one who realises the hadith of *ihsan*. But perhaps too he realises or attempts to realise its inner meaning as understood in the Ibn'Arabi tradition – if you are not, (i.e., have reached), you see Him.

²⁶ Shams al-Din may be referring here to the spirit of the terrestrial, mortal Muhammad.

and he will never be weary of it.' He was asked, 'What is this garden.' He replied, 'Gnosis (*ma'rifa*) of God.'²⁷

But the jewel in the crown of these testimonies are two lines he quotes from the *Nazm al-Suluk* (Poem of the Mystical Journey) by Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235), the poet of divine love daringly using a feminine personal pronoun referring to God, His face:

For me, every day on which with eyes refreshed I see the beauty of
her face
 is a festival day
And every night when she draws near is the Night of Destiny
 and every day of meeting is a Friday
And every hastening to her is a pilgrimage, and every standing
 at her door a standing [on the plain of Arafat].²⁸

He then returns to the dignity of Man, again insisting to the 'brother' on the importance of what he is being taught, and that he must understand that the first existent God fashioned was a single, spiritual, simple substance, which is not divisible. This is reminiscent of an idea elaborated by al-Jami,²⁹ but it is in Shams al-Din. He addresses him directly, 'You are as a mirror ... in you appear the names and the attributes, you are the proof of your designation as a vicegerent, and you will appear among them [the prophets and saints] through what I have taught you.'

It is in the light of the wonder of such an experience of the true understanding of *tawhid*, that Man should realise the glory of his destiny and the splendor of the responsibility he bears as *khalifa Allah* (Vicegerent of God) on earth as the Prologue has argued that he is. He should devote himself exclusively to his Lord, and serve him with all his heart.

The *Jawhar* is redolent with awe and wonder at the Unity of Being, and shows Shams al-Din driven by a concern for the 'brother' he addresses as a companion on the journey. It infuses an immediacy and power to the declaration of *tawhid*, the sentence of Divine Unicity, and offers a knowledge and experience of God through his Attributes and Names that takes the devotee far beyond the mere physical utterance of the Arabic words *la ilaha illa Allah* – 'There is no god but God.'

²⁷ van Nieuwenhuize, *Shams al-Din van Pasai...*, p. 265.

²⁸ Lines 355-357. Mahdi Muhammad Nasir al-Din, (ed.) *Diwan Ibn al-Farid*, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2002, p. 52. The poem is lengthy and very difficult, and his familiarity with it is a measure of Shams al-Din's learning. Quite wrongly, van Nieuwenhuize footnotes this citation, 'A quotation, probably very corrupt!'

²⁹ In al-Durrah al-Fakhirah, 'God's custom ('adah) is to bring power and choice into existence in a man,' on which al-Lari comments, 'As for the verifying Sufis, the mirrors of their hearts were illumined by virtue of the verse, 'Now We have removed from thee their covering [sic] [sura Qaf (50): 22] so that they saw in existence ... only a real, simple and single essence (*dhat wahidah basitah haqiqiyyah*) appearing in the form of the man and in the form of what is carried out upon him.' Nicholas L. Heer, *The Precious Pearl*, Albana New York: SUNY 1979, pp. 65 & 149.

In it is the same ambiguity and tension that is at the heart of Ibn 'Arabi's thought and the tradition stemming from it. At one level within it is a complete fidelity to the monotheistic pattern of Unity (God), and Multiplicity (His creation), yet at another, in his Sufistic metaphysics there is the identification of the one and the many.³⁰

One can no more believe a little bit in the Unity of Being than one can be a little bit pregnant! But over enthusiastic, and even ecstatic expressions of this belief, of this experience of reality can be misleading for the literal minded.

Shams al-Din is no more to be classified as a teacher of heterodox pantheistic mysticism than were his great predecessor Hamzah al-Fansuri, his successor 'Abd al-Ra'uf, or were 'Abd al-Ra'uf's friend and mentor in Madina Ibrahim al-Kurani, or that sublime poet of divine love, 'Umar ibn al-Farid.

Shams al-Din had an extraordinary career, holding the position of Shaikh al-Islam during the reign of three sultans, and having Sultan Iskandar Muda himself as his student. He has written a brilliant and deeply felt exposition of the Unity of Being, one filled with awe of God as a personal God. It is the fruit of a profound religious experience, that for its authenticity depends on obedience to the Law, and in it are glimpses of an ecstasy that permeates the intricate configurations and interactions of the 'effects' of the divine names, every one of which depends for its realisation on an act of the Divine Will. The expression *wahda al-wujud*, (the Unity of Being) for him was not simply a philosophical concept, and listing of grades of Being was not to be taken as a philosophical structure, but each was fraught with meanings intended to lead the pupil along the path back up to the mystical experience of God within the community of Islam so vividly expressed by Ibn al-Farid. He is an exemplar of a Sufi tradition in Aceh, glowing with the love of learning, and the desire for God.

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³⁰ Ronald L. Nettler, *Sufi Metaphysics and Qur'anic Prophets Ibn 'Arabi's Thought and Method in the Fusus al Hikam*, The Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 8-9.

The Dye of God: Essays on Islam and the Qur'an:
The Author's Address

Anthony H. Johns FAHA
Emeritus Professor, Islamic Scholar and Interfaith Conciliator
School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific,
Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200.

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If I may use a cricketing metaphor, and despite my accent I barrack for Australia; it is difficult to put a bat to the ball bowled by Tony Street.<sup>1</sup> I am deeply moved by his kind words and the acuity of his insights (see the Book Launch pictures below). He was first Ph.D. student to graduate in our Arabic programme at the Faculty of Asian Studies. His words awake many memories of years together at the ANU, as student and friend. And months spent together in Cairo as guests at the Dominican Institute of Oriental Studies, where we were Tony I [read 'Tony un' in French] and Tony II ['Tony deux']. There, Tony II was able to work with the revered Georges Anawati, a great Dominican, a great scholar, a great Arabist and a great eccentric, who insisted that knowledge of French was a necessary pre-condition for entry to heaven. While in Cairo, I forget the year now, we were able to get to the Azhar Ramadan book fair, the Azhar University being within walking distance of the Institute, where we were able to buy at bargain prices many of the basic works of Islamic scholarship, and Tony II had the contacts to enable their transport to the Menzies Library [ANU]. Alas, Fr Anawati and many of his confrères are long passed away. I am indebted to them and to many more colleagues and friends at the ANU, in Indonesia and the UK, who have contributed to much, both to what I had to unlearn, and what I had to learn as the years passed. Of these too, many are no longer with us. I think especially of my very first colleague from Indonesia Dr S. Soebardi who joined me back in 1960. More recently, there are Dr Ian Proudfoot, and Dr S. Supomo, colleagues and friends over the years who have been taken all too soon. And this thought brings the realisation, that anything I now say, whatever its sense or any aspiration it expresses, may be validictory.

I should also thank this campus of Australian Catholic University for hosting this launch, and – while being thankful myself for still being here, thankful to all of you for being present: new and old friends, and especially Hilary Regan editor of the Australian Theological Forum (ATF), from distant Adelaide. It was Hilary who offered the opportunity to put the book together, and to whom I owe copious apologies for repeated unscheduled amendments to drafts of the text. Something editors rightly abhor!!! And would it be out of place to acknowledge the presence of my daughter, three sons and Yohanni among you.

It is an honour to be included in the ATF's Scholars Collection. In it are names I revere. Perhaps there is even a symbolic value in the book being 12<sup>th</sup> in the series. More important, however, is the fact that it steps out of the so-called 'Western World,' and explores aspects

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Tony Street of the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, UK, who launched the book on 11 August 2023 at ACU Canberra Campus [Editor].

of 'the other' in the Qur'an, and the world of Islam, with the vision of salvation history, and the colourings it imparts to so many cultures.

Republishing already published material is a fraught exercise. It raises the inevitable question: Is it worth it? Or perhaps, was it worth it, even in the first place? But one should have confidence in the judgement of editors who, someone remarked to me (not wholly in jest), are omniscient as a breed and have impeccable taste. There was still a decision to be made: When a piece is selected for reprinting, is it to be reprinted as it is, following the example of the wise thrush who sings each song twice over, (lest we forget his first fine careless rapture) or is there an opportunity, as has been said of von Karajan's repeated recordings of the Beethoven symphonies, for trying to get it right. I settled for a chance to get them better, even if not right. In any case, the Qur'an presents more challenges and has more to offer than the score of a Beethoven symphony. All the same, if you forgive the metaphor, we are gathered here today to set this cardboard boat with its sails of paper on its maritime journey to be buffeted by whatever winds happen to blow.

The spiritual world of Islam is both remote and familiar. And what is familiar can effectively disguise and even distort what is remote. And what is remote is in some respects so private and personal as to be inaccessible, and approaches to it by an outsider, a non-Muslim, may appear intrusive, or an attempt at appropriation. It is private and personal. And there is yet another difficulty. Religious traditions develop a way of presenting their internal coherence in a special kind of language, one that includes not just the mastery of a currency of specific concepts but a tone and colouring that accompany and are distinctive of all internal communications within the community living by this tradition. Learning this language is not just an ability to state a given set of doctrines; tone and colouring are equally part of the reality a religion represents. Like any language, the former can be studied, ideally by spending a number of years in a madrasa, but the tone and colour can only be learned by living the language, by sharing in some way in the life of the community for whom it is native.

In saying this, I speak personally, conscious of the false trails I have followed, detours, back tracks, false starts. No one starts from nowhere, and a starting point conditions the course of the journey, and perhaps even determines its destination. Background, education, culture, life experience, personal contacts, often unplanned, arbitrary even, direct the course of the journey.

Southeast Asia is now recognised as one of the major cultural regions of the Islamic world, and in this world, Indonesia has a special place. Its Islamic culture is revealed in institutions such as the madrasa, in calligraphy, in the illumination of manuscripts; likewise in the use of the human voice – above all in Qur'anic recitation – and in dance and drama. It is to be found in various genres of religious writing. All are part of a continuum which began when the first Islamic communities were established in the region, and even as I speak are being extended as artists and scholars re-present the spirit and achievements of the past in new forms: experimentation in new styles of calligraphy, dramatic performances of the Barjanji, and what has been called *dakwa rock*, group songs with religious lyrics.

It has fecundated a rich Islamic humanism. The religious elements in it may be immediately evident, or indirect and allusive. They may be seen in the design of public buildings. They may insinuate themselves into secular forms of music, dance and drama; they may be imbedded in works of literary imagination in its variety of forms: lyric poetry, the essay, and the novel, all of which offer a writer scope to express even doubt as a part of religious faith.

Northrop Frye<sup>2</sup> looked at the whole corpus of English literature and saw it virtually as a commentary on the great spiritual themes presented in the Bible: Fall and Redemption, Death and Resurrection. In the same way, values, symbols, types and antitypes from the Qur'an are present in virtually all writings with an Islamic provenance. Such a presentation may not be explicit, and at a superficial level may even seem to be denied. Yet it is the themes of the Islamic revelation that set the basic moral perspectives of human perception of personal identity.

My journey into this world began on Christmas Eve 1947, arriving in Singapore on a troopship for two years military service in what was then British Malaya. On 1 January 1950, I returned to the UK, with my heart left in the Malayo-Indonesian world of Southeast Asia. I enrolled in SOAS [School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London] for a degree in Malay with Arabic as a subsidiary subject. (Dismayed, my parents asked, 'what is the commercial value of Malay?') In 1954 this was to lead me to Indonesia, where I spent four years during which I met Yohanni. In 1958, I was appointed to what is now the ANU and what became the Faculty of Asian Studies. We made our home in Canberra, and there, and elsewhere, I taught and wrote for 35 years; after retirement continuing my association with the ANU (Department of Political and Social Change) as a Visiting Fellow (without Grant). The book is the fruit of teaching, study and travel over these years, and up to and including today [11 August]. I was devoted to the new literature of Indonesia, the writings of Amir Hamzah, Chairil Anwar, Achdiat Karta Mihardja. Popular names at the time, but perhaps now a little *démodés*. Then moved back to a study of Islamisation and *tasawwuf* (Sufism) in Indonesia. I proposed that it was primarily Sufism that facilitated the spread of the new religion (a 'courageous' hypothesis) which had the effect of throwing a stone into a pool of frogs. I then moved on to Qur'anic exegesis, and the Qur'an itself.

For at least ten of these years, I had paid only a passing attention to the Qur'an. When I was a student at SOAS way back in 1950, courses in Arabic, and on Islamic thought, treated the Qur'an in a rather off-hand fashion. Thatcher's Arabic grammar was the foundation of the language course. Occasionally a phrase from the Qur'an might occur without comment in a grammatical exercise, for example *Inna li'llahi wa inna ilayhi raji 'un* (We belong to God, and to Him we are returning). It tests knowledge of features of Arabic grammar, no doubt. The lecturer identified it as Qur'anic, but added nothing on the significance of its meaning, let alone its place in social life, where it is regularly uttered in expressions of condolence on news of a death. On theology, the Qur'an was said to be inconsistent or disorganised; there were references made to sura and verse, but without attention to their context or wider setting.

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<sup>2</sup> Herman Northrop Frye CC FRSC (1912-1991) was a Canadian literary critic and literary theorist [Editor].



The Qur'an – even in translation – is not easy reading for non-Muslims, or an unprepared reader. There is the sheer stylistic unattractiveness of many English renderings which often have a churchy tone, imitating the diction and rhythms of the King James Bible. Such a style is ineffective for the rhetoric of the Qur'an which moves at a different pace, and has different arcs of tension. This is sufficient to discourage many from even an effort to read it. I will come to a more serious problem later.

There are other reasons for this. One is cultural. In the English literary tradition, there are no reference points such as those provided for the Bible, by the Authorised Version of the Bible. Another is rhetorical. It is the spoken word and internal organisation into what are called suras, which do not have an explicit continuing relationship that one expects from the word 'chapter' in English. Its 114 divisions are sequential, but the sequence is not chronological or logical, and the relations between the suras are subtle and indirect. Furthermore, there is the switching of styles and topics. Its tone moves seamlessly from the grandiloquent and poetic, to the formal and legalistic, devotional and mystical.

There is a variety of rhetorical forms within the suras, descriptions of the wonders of nature, of land, sea and sky, multi-directional dialogue, rapid shifts of speaker, exhortations to battle, promulgation of laws, dramatic changes of scene, allusions to events in the immediate and remote past, reference to beliefs, memories and practices, and events occurring outside the text, although encoded within it. A rendering of the Qur'an in English may then be accurate at the level of the word, but it cannot of itself on the printed page provide signals to decode the shifts and contrasts in style, the modulations of tone, the changes in speakers, for which there are no explicit signals in the printed text, and which need to be heard. It is then difficult to give a coherent rendering in English that communicates both its meanings and the variety of styles in which they are expressed.

On a first encounter it appears disjointed and incomplete, and links between events appear to lack a framework in which they can be set. Yet with its ringing changes, and continuities, silences and dramatic encounters, it comes together as a unit. It is one book. It is to be heard. It is the ear that carries it to the heart so that it is experienced. This is why for many Muslims, it is an ideal to memorise the whole Qur'an. All Muslims know some of the shorter suras by heart as part of the daily ritual prayers. The language of the Qur'an hovers as a penumbra over the Arabic-speaking world, and every student of Arabic should be aware of this, and as part of any course, memorise some suras.

Nevertheless, along my journey I came across a number of verses and shorter suras that even in an English rendering served as points of entry into its textual world, enabling me to explore it, appreciate it, and so respect it as a revealed book. Yet these passages of spiritual depth and beauty also need to be understood in their context, and their place in the movement of the sura, and this is difficult to express. Among them are many that move the heart and mind of the non-Muslim as directly as the psalms, and can be felt as an authentic extension of that spirituality. Among them is the first verse of the penultimate sura:

Declare: I take refuge with the Lord of the Dawn (113: 1)

Another is God's counsel to Muhammad:

Think on your Lord morning and evening,  
Humbly, and filled with awe,  
Speechless with adoration (*Sura 7*, v. 205)

But there are longer passages too of sustained power and beauty that can be expressed effectively in English, among them the sublime verse of the throne.<sup>3</sup>

God, there is no god but He, The Living, the Eternal;  
Neither slumber nor sleep seize Him.  
To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth.  
Who is there who could intercede with Him without His leave?  
He knows what is before men and what is past,  
But they know nothing of His knowledge, except in so far as He wills,  
His throne embraces the heavens and the earth:  
to sustain them is no burden to Him.  
He is the Exalted, the Almighty (*Sura 2*, v 255).

There is the divine generosity revealed in the gifts of nature:

We pour down the rain in abundance,  
We break open the earth,  
and make spring from it grain and grapes and clover,  
olives and date palms,  
gardens planted thick with trees,  
and all the gifts of the earth (*Sura 80*: 25-31).

The sublime diction of such verses in my early encounter with the Qur'ān opened for me the door to enter the world of Qur'ānic studies. But there were two events that were life-changing in the way they propelled me into that world. One was a chance meeting with a remarkable Egyptian scholar and reciter, Dr Muhammad Ali al-Erian. He had agreed to recite a number of passages of the Qur'an for an English-speaking audience, and something prompted him to ask me to prepare English renderings of them to distribute for the event. Among them was the celebrated Light Verse (*al-Nūr* 24: 35):

God is the light of the heavens and the earth.  
His light is like to a niche  
in which is set a radiance;  
this radiance is within a glass,  
the glass gleaming like a brilliant star.  
Its radiance is lit [from the oil] of a blessed olive tree  
of neither east nor west,  
an oil that would radiate light  
without ever flame having touched it,  
light upon light.

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<sup>3</sup> This, and subsequent renderings of Qur'ānic verses are not offered as formal translations. They are simply to illustrate my personal experience of the Book.

As he recited it with a superb cantillation, he caressed on his lips, with lingering embrace, phrases that had a special meaning for him. And when he came to the final words 'light upon light', *nūrun 'alā nūr*, he halted, then repeated them time and time again – up to seven times – before continuing. When I heard these words of the Qur'an, lifted from the confines of the printed page, it was as though they had taken wing from the letters with which they were written. And I at once understood the lines of the Indonesian poet Amir Hamzah expressing his love of God as he recites the Qur'an:

*Kujunjung di atas hulu  
Kupuji di pucuk lidah  
Kupangku di lengan lagu  
Kudaduhkan di selendang dendang*

(I hold You in highest honour  
I praise You with my tongue  
I bear You in the arms of melody  
I cradle You in a shawl of melody.)

The presentation was a success. So later he asked me to present a lecture on the Qur'ānic story of Joseph. He urged me to study it, analyse, and explain it, then prepare English renderings for the passages that he would recite in Arabic. At first, I resisted. At that stage I could not relate to it. The telling of the story in the biblical book of Genesis formed a barrier of habit and custom that I had to discard before I could appreciate it in its own terms.

I had to realise that not only was the story told in a different language, operating according to different rhetorical conventions, it represented a radically different salvation history, a different understanding of the divine design for creation and human history. This Joseph was not a key figure on the road to the coming of the Messiah as in Jewish history, but a prophet sent to teach them, his own people. The Jews in Islamic salvation history are not a chosen people. They are, however, a specially favoured people. More messengers have been sent to them than to any other people. But they have rejected them, as they are rejecting Muhammad.

I am forever grateful to the memory of Dr Muhammad Ali al-Erian for the insight he gave me. He provided the jolt necessary for this break-through, to hear and experience afresh the story I already knew in its biblical form. I then realised that the story of Joseph in its Qur'ānic form reflects this cosmic difference in vision of salvation history between it and the Bible, and communicates it through a different rhetorical form. And it is told for a different reason. Muhammad is challenged to tell it as proof that he is a prophet, as Joseph too was a prophet. The same is true of all the figures in the Qur'an with biblical names. They are presented in narratives which have many elements in common with their biblical counterparts, such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, but they are playing their roles on a different stage in a different cosmic drama. These roles need to be understood and accepted as the Qur'an presents them, independently of their biblical antecedents, if the distinctive genius of Islam to be understood. Their role in Islam is as the Qur'an presents them, and what it has to tell of them.

The second breakthrough was when I encountered, in Cairo, the work of one of the great minds of human history, the philosopher and Qur'an exegete Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Keys to the World beyond Vision), a work of exegesis in sixteen volumes (32 fascicules). I had discovered him thanks to a commentary on the Qur'an written in Mecca by an Indonesian, a Sundanese from Banten, oddly enough brought to me from Banten by my colleague Dr Soebardi. The Sundanese Indonesian from Banten had spent most of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Mecca, and was given the title Lord of Religious Scholars of the Hijaz (Sayyid 'ulama' al Hijaz). The great Dutch scholar Snouck Hurgronje met him there in 1884.

His work *Marah Labid* introduced the name of Razi to me, and in Cairo, Razi himself was introduced to me by the Dominican scholar Jacques Jomier, passing me volume by volume from his room (or cell). This was how Tony Street, too, made the acquaintance of Razi and found in his *tafsir* a topic for his PhD thesis – a wonderful study. A few years later, the Dominican Fr Laurie Fitzgerald followed in his footsteps with another outstanding thesis. To me, Rāzī became a guide, my Virgil, who took me by the hand to lead me through the universe of the Qur'an. Because Dr al-Erian had sensitised me to the sura of Joseph, Razi's exegesis of this chapter was the first part of his work that I read. It demonstrated how the Qur'anic presentation of the story was not simply a collage of episodes from different sources inexpertly put together. Neither were other accounts of prophetic figures in the Qur'an. Many of the lemmata of them in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (at least the first edition) regarded the biblical citation, being the earlier, as a norm. Subsequently, reports of them in the *Talmud* and the oral tradition found their way into the Qur'an in a confused form. The Qur'an accordingly was regarded as an epigone – a later and inferior re-working of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures.

Stories of the prophets, such as that of Joseph, are one of the major Qur'anic modes of communicating its message. The Qur'an throngs with personalities along with them, male and female, the blessed and the damned. The story of Joseph is the best known, and is unique in that an entire sura is devoted to it. There are 25 names of individuals with prophetic status, for example Noah, Abraham and Moses. Their stories are told in different ways: sometimes in full, sometimes in episodes distributed across a number of suras. Sometimes mentioned only in a verse or two. These figures are often presented with a freshness and vigour that adds to their appeal. They need to be recognised as personalities in their own right. In addition to these, however, there are myriads of prophets, most of them not known by name. Extra-Qur'anic stories about the prophets abound, culled from a variety of sources, distributed across all levels of society, as people let their imaginations and spiritual taste run untrammelled. They are an important genre of Islamic literature, and are to be found in all the languages of the Islamic world.

Public street corner and market-place storytelling is not common in today's western world. They are not to be seen (or heard) at entrances to the Canberra Centre. But 12<sup>th</sup> century Baghdad was different. The story of Joseph, his father Jacob, his brothers, the wolf, Zulayka, and Potiphar provided rich materials for the public imagination.

There was a storyteller who promised to tell the name of the wolf that ate Joseph. A passing scholar objected that the wolf had not eaten Joseph. Undeterred, the storyteller said he would give the name of the wolf that had not eaten Joseph.

There were story tellers who sexed up the narrative by saying that after Zulaikha's words 'Hayta laka' (Qur. 12: 23) – which might be freely rendered, 'Yipee I'm ready for you. Take me,' she dimmed the lights, locked the doors, drew the curtains and stripped herself naked. There was even a storyteller who related that Potiphar was impotent – which would explain much. But there are also stories with higher themes. One is that Zulaikha repented her attempt to seduce and calumniate Joseph, and that their love and marriage had been predestined.

Scholarly exegetes found exemplars of virtue in them; sometimes they identified with them, seeing in them their own joys and sorrows. The great exegete Razi saw in Jacob's grief the pain at the loss of his own son, Salih Muhammad, who had died far from home and family. He asks anyone who found his book of value to say *al-Fatiha* (Qur. 1) for his son and himself and all who die away from home, far from brethren, mother and father. And he quotes lines of a classical Arab poet's dialogue, he asks a companion why he weeps whenever he passes a cemetery, and receives the reply, 'It is like a wound that bleeds afresh when the scar is torn off – for every grave there is the grave of my brother Abdul.'

At this point I might properly conclude and declare for Raymond (Our M.C.)<sup>4</sup> in a Dutch/Flemish professorial manner: *Ik heb mijn stuk gezegd* – I have said my piece.

But a word of conclusion is still needed. The essays in this cardboard boat with sails of paper are about something remote and something familiar; about a way to one from the other. The stories of the great figures, culture heroes of the Judaeo-Christian tradition are familiar. As told in the Qur'an they appear remote. In understanding this difference, we are put to the test. The Qur'an presents them unambiguously as participants in its own revelation of salvation history. Its presentation of them proceeds differently to our expectations of narrative. The challenge is to find access to a different tradition, using this difference as leverage to gain access to another textual world, another tradition, another faith. This I try to summate in the final essay with the question as title '... Abraham our father in faith...?'

A question!! Can there be an answer? Only one word can be the last word, the great word AMEN (Or as our Muslim friends might express it: *Amin, amin, ya rabba'l-'alamin.*)

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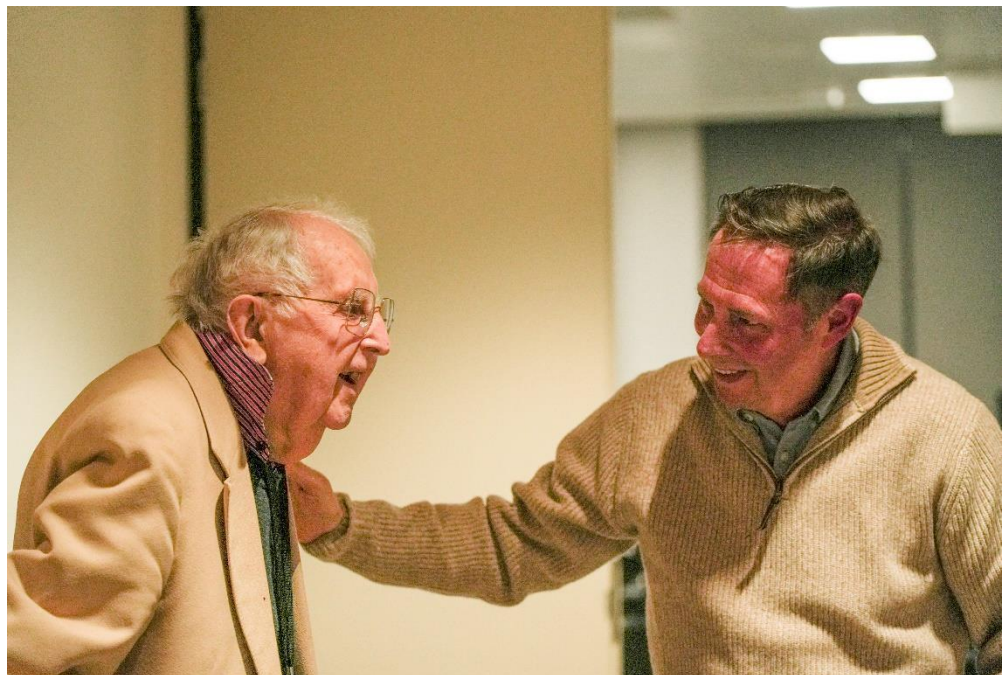
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<sup>4</sup> Professor Raymond Canning, former head of the School of Theology, Faculty of Theology and Philosophy, ACU Canberra Campus, who was the Master of Ceremony (M.C.) at the book launch on 11 August 2023.

**Book Launch: *The Dye of God: Essays on Islam and the Qur'an***  
11 August 2023, 5.30 – 8.30 p.m., ACU Canberra Campus



**Picture 1:** The book by Professor Anthony H. Johns, published by ATF Press, Adelaide, 2023. Its launch was generously hosted by Associate Professor Darius von Güttner, Campus Dean of ACU Canberra Campus.



**Picture 2:** Professor Tony Johns (Tony I) and Dr Tony Street (Tony II).



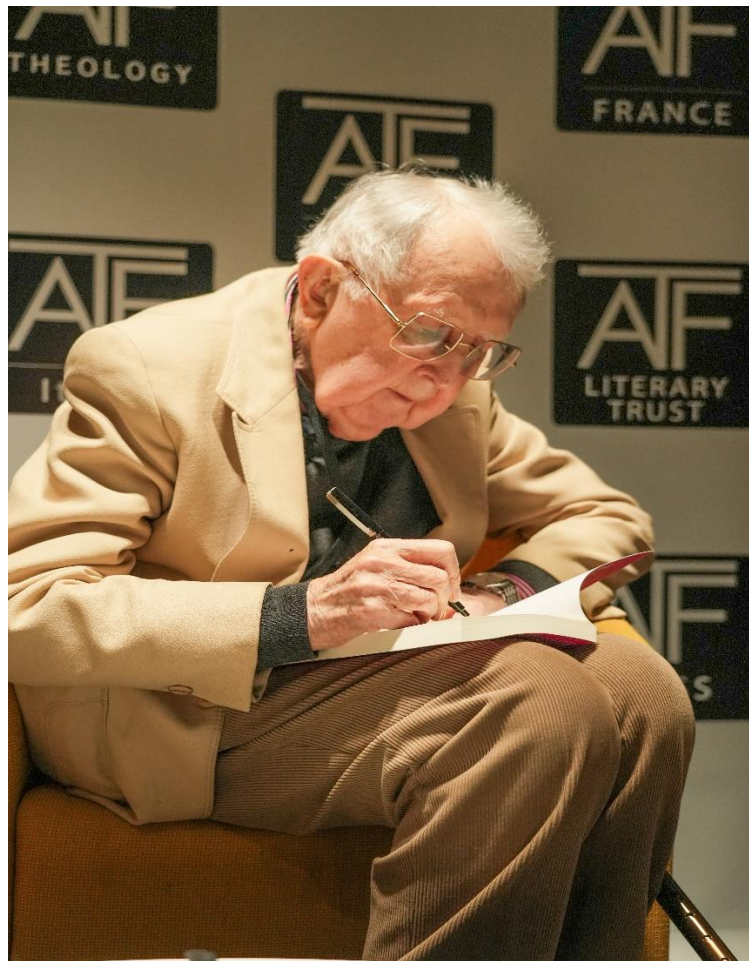
**Picture 3:** Imam Adam Konda from the Canberra Islamic Centre; and the Sabah Al-Ahmad Mosque at Monash.



**Picture 4:** The meeting between two scholars in Interfaith Dialogue, with David Johns, Principal of St Paul's Catholic Secondary School, and Professor Johns' youngest son.



**Picture 5:** With his daughter-in-law, Cathie Gough, Manager, Marketing and Communications, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS).



**Picture 6:** The signing of his book.





**Picture 7:** (from left to right): Rev Dr Sarah Bachelard, Director, Benedictus Contemplative Church, Canberra; Professor Raymond Canning, former head, School of Theology, Faculty of Theology and Philosophy, ACU Canberra Campus; and Dr Tony Street of the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, UK.



**Picture 8:** Professor Tony Johns, Yohanni, the family and friends.

## Dominic de Guzman and His Legacy of Learning

Fr Mannes Tellis OP  
Parish Priest, Holy Rosary Church, Watson, Canberra &  
Superior, Dominican Fathers in Canberra.

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The connection between the Dominican Order and the teaching or academic world seems at first to be a bit of a dead end. The figure of St Dominic, as portrayed by writers of his time, does not, at first, appear a great academic or a gifted teacher. So how do we come to celebrate the Dominican contribution to the world of learning? This essay will firstly chart the Dominican Order's beginnings including its early relationship with the life of the academy. Second, it will sketch the contribution of Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) who typified the Dominican approach to education. Also, Aquinas's own contribution to the harmonious synthesis of faith and reason will be briefly explored. Lastly, the discussion will succinctly illustrate the commitment of the Dominican Order to the life of the mind and the Church since the time of Aquinas.

Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221) was born into minor nobility in the hamlet of Calaruega, about 50 kms south of the city of Burgos in Spain's Castille region. Dominic's early life had already been dedicated to the service of God in the Church. His initial schooling was supervised by an uncle who was a priest. Dominic himself underwent rigorous academic training before ordination to the priesthood, and his later tenure as a canon of the Cathedral of Osma. At age fourteen, the youthful Dominic entered the University of Palencia where he would have been exposed to the traditional round of academic pursuits, the usual *Trivium*. All in all, the liberal education afforded Dominic set him up for his later work in founding an Order of Preachers.¹

Martin de Bazan (d. 1201), the bishop of Osma at the time, was keen to renew the staffing of his Cathedral and had handpicked Dominic to be a part of this reform. Marie-Humbert Vicaire in his biography of Dominic recounts that during the time of his arrival in Osma a definite re-organisation of the clergy was underway, particularly in the Cathedral community of priests.² Jordan of Saxony, Dominic's successor as head of the Order of Preachers, mentions in his biography of the saint that this reform included an effort to

¹ M.H. Vicaire notes that Dominic did not devote himself to the entire *Trivium* course, noting that his biographer Jordan of Saxony wrote, 'when he [Dominic] judged that he had sufficient knowledge... he abandoned these studies as if he feared to waste upon them with too little fruit the brevity of life here on earth.' Vicaire also adds that, although Dominic did not prolong his studies in order to be a teacher of Theology (*Magister*), 'he was at least a *divinus*, as it was called then, a well-formed theologian. M.H. Vicaire, *St Dominic and His Times*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964, p. 27.

² *Ibid.*, p. 36. Key issues that needed to be addressed were the insufficient education of the clergy and the poor observance of celibacy. Linked into these issues was also the excessive wealth of some clergy. A prevailing spirit amongst the popes of this time, particularly Leo IX (1002-1054) and Gregory VII (1020-1085) was for diocesan clergy to live communally and soberly. This spirit is certainly demonstrated in the acts of the Synod of Rome (1059).

persuade the Canons of the cathedral to embrace the religious rule of St Augustine. Both the bishop of Osma, Martin, and his vicar general, Diego de Acebo (d. 1207) later Bishop of Osma succeeding Martin, favoured this action in the hope of bringing into line errant clergy. Jordan of Saxony notes that the reform was met with some opposition.³

The use of the Rule of St Augustine stemmed from the monastic regulations formed by the early Christian bishop Augustine of Hippo (354-430) for communities of men and women he had founded within his own diocese. The rule itself is quite short and very adaptable to circumstances, it is by far the most widely used monastic regulation in the Church, its only rival being the Rule of St Benedict (d. 547). The Rule of St Augustine was influential in the life of Dominic de Guzman, and it is this rule that was used as the basis for Dominic's own religious community.

Dominic found at Osma a community of priests varying in ages, talents, occupations and ministries. The clergy in this community were the *crème de la crème* of Osma's clerical ranks and it was to these priests that fell the task of governing the diocese. Coupled with the administrative functioning of this bishopric, the Cathedral housed a theological school. Amongst the clergy, there were many academically inclined and these taught the theological sciences. This academic ministry is evidenced when one glances at the catalogue of the library located in the Cathedral precincts.⁴ No doubt this milieu influenced Dominic when it came time for him to develop his future community of preachers. In fact, the prevailing ignorance in Theology amongst the rural clergy caused Dominic to devise the band of preachers as we shall see.

Because the clergy in former times were often the most learned group in society, they were periodically seconded by the Crown to assist in diplomatic affairs and affairs of State. It was quite common for clergy to hold secular government roles, for instance in England, where Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (1473-1530) during the reign of Henry VIII was both a leading churchman, Lord Chancellor of England and the King's chief adviser. So too we find in 17th century France the involvement of Cardinal Armand du Plessis duc du Richelieu (1585-1642) as foreign minister and finally chief adviser to Louis XIII (1601-1643), and he was succeeded in this role by another eminent churchman Jules Cardinal Mazarin (1602-1661).

Similarly, in Dominic's time the administrative abilities of the clergy were put to use by the kings of Castille. Jordan of Saxony writes in his biography of the saint that:

it happened that Alphonso VIII, King of Castille was, at that time, making plans for a marriage between his son Ferdinand and a princess of Denmark. He approached the Bishop of Osma and asked that he consent to arrange this matter. The bishop agreed to the king's request and, since it was fitting that he had a companion... he took with him the man of God, Dominic, and set out on his journey.⁵

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵ Jordan of Saxony, *The Lives of the Brethren*, tran. P. Conway, London: Blackfriars Publications, 1955, p. 13.

It was this journey that was to change Dominic's life forever and set him on the path to create not only a new religious order within the Church but also revolutionise religious life. *En route* to Denmark the Bishop of Osma, Diego de Acebo, and Dominic travelled through the south of France stopping in the city of Toulouse. It was here that the companions encountered a strange sect that had eaten away at the prevailing Christian fabric of the area, the sect was known as the Cathars.

In the history of ideas, we often see that the same concepts periodically raise their head, fall away, and then come back again, and this is the case with the sect Diego and Dominic encountered. Catharism was a European version of a philosophical/theological system which had arisen in the Byzantine Empire, or possibly earlier, if one subscribes to its relationship with Manichaeism. And, indeed many contemporaries did see it as a European version of Manichaeism, particularly in its dualist philosophy.⁶ This system found its way to southern France from the Balkans 'and spread to Western Europe during the 12th century, becoming well-established in southern France and northern Italy. The first clear evidence of ... Cathar heresy in the south of France comes from the 1140s.'⁷ Catharism, as earlier also Manicheism, was a response to the problem of evil. The Catharist system answers this problem simply, in a dualistic manner: that is, all created material things were made by an evil god, and all spiritual things, such as the human soul and the angelic realm, were created by a good god.

To understand why this system was seen as a threat to all concerned we see that the sect's teaching had devastating consequences for some of its adherents.⁸ Furthermore, the context in which this sect flourished challenged the overall power and teaching of the Catholic Church. In a letter to the King of France, the Archbishop of Narbonne, Pons d' Arsac, wrote: 'the Catholic faith is receiving tremendous attacks in our diocese and the barque of Peter is undergoing such buffetings from the heretics that it is almost sinking.'⁹ To challenge the Church in any way was seen as a challenge to the authority not only of the religious realm but of the temporal as well. In short to believe other than what was the common belief was dangerous to the fabric of society.

The Catharist beliefs, as have been enunciated briefly, spawned a number of strange behaviours. Vicaire notes that the *Cathari* (or pure ones) 'were of undoubted purity of morals, for they practiced absolute continence, sober to the point of abstaining from all food produced by carnal intercourse, such as meat, milk products and eggs, poor indeed,

⁶ W. Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order: Origins and Growth to 1500*, Vol. I, New York: Alba Press, 1965, p. 22. See also S. Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947.

⁷ Peter of les Vaux-de-Cernay, *The History of the Albigensian Crusade*, trans. by W.A. Sibly and M.D. Sibly, Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998, p. xxxiv.

⁸ Apart from the extreme penances enacted by the *Perfecti*, who were equivalent to the Catharist priesthood, some practitioners who were close to death would often suicide by refusing any sustenance, following a practice known as the *Endura*.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1156&context=aujh> – retrieved 29 August 2023.

⁹ Vicaire, *St Dominic and His Times*, p. 49.

but having at their disposal very large financial resources.¹⁰ Superficially, the Catharist clergy mirrored their Catholic opponents but practiced celibate chastity, veganism and poverty for very different reasons. Fundamentally these behaviours arose from their suspicion of anything material, for as has been said, anything material was connected to a malevolent god.

It was this confrontation with Catharism that provoked Dominic's turn to the world of learning to combat this philosophy. Yet, the reasons for the unfortunate growth of Catharist ideals occurred because, at that time, the Christian message was not clearly presented or preached. Most priests had a modicum of learning, and enough Latin to offer the Mass and supply the sacraments.¹¹ Often these men were ordained to provide the liturgy and not to preach. Many bishops at that time, too, neglected their spiritual duties which included amongst other things the preaching of the Christian faith. It was the case that sometimes these prelates did not even reside in their dioceses. Thus, with the decline in the preaching of Christianity, other philosophies soon took root and challenged the overall Christian *status quo*.

To remedy this situation Dominic resolved to bring the people back to their Christian heritage. The first thing Dominic did was to imitate the Cathars in their disciplined way of life in so far as this did not compromise the Catholic faith. Key to Catharist success was the fact that the Catholic representatives in those areas did not represent the simplicity of Christ's gospel. The Church in these areas had become corrupt. In short, the people resented the Church. The Catharist practitioners, who practiced what they preached, who lived disciplined lives and who appeared sincere in what they believed, capitalised on popular discontent with the Church. In the Church's favour, as we had seen in Osma, reform had begun, but this renewal took years to bear fruit, and indeed many churchmen were obstacles to the reform process.¹²

The apostolic way of life was to be the pattern for Dominic and the men who had joined him. Diego, Dominic's bishop, led the way and three other monks from a group who had tried to debate with the Cathars followed this new project. Like the Cathar preachers these new Catholic preachers travelled around on foot, begging their bread from door to door. Bishop Diego, however, died in 1207 and the future of the whole enterprise fell to Dominic. We know that Dominic's work in the south of France in the Albi region clearly began to have some effect.¹³ Integral to this success was Dominic's frequent debates with leading Cathars. This practice evidenced Dominic's learning and the importance of study. Hinnebusch remarks, 'the fact that his [Dominic's] summary of the debates held during a fifteen-day

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ W. Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order: Intellectual and Cultural Life to 1500*, Vol. II, New York: Alba House, 1973, p. 10.

¹² Vicaire, *St Dominic and His Times*, p. 36.

¹³ Due to this heresy's growth in the region of Albi the adherents of the Catharist cult were also known as Albigensians.

period at Montreal in 1207 was chosen as the best statements of the Catholic position demonstrates his theological acumen.¹⁴

A major cause of the Catharist sect's popularity was the ignorance of the Catholic clergy, as has been mentioned earlier.¹⁵ In order to resolve this situation, Dominic's new foundation emphasised the development of studious preachers following the mindset of Dominic himself. Hinnebusch comments that, 'the study of Theology was an integral, daily duty of the community. Dominic led his companions to the lectures of Master Alexander Stavensby in the cathedral school of Toulouse. This was a permanent measure; the brethren continued to attend the course for a long time.'¹⁶ Dominic was adamant that learning enabled the preacher to present the truths of the faith credibly and reasonably so that the Christian people could satisfactorily conduct their faith, not in a superstitious way, but in a way which held faith and reason together.

Continuing with his desire to have intelligent preachers, on 15 August 1217, Dominic dispatched seven of his followers to the great university centre of Paris to establish a priory focused on study and preaching. The Convent of St Jacques would eventually become the order's first *studium generale*. Dominic was to establish similar foundations at other university towns of the day, Bologna in 1218, Palencia and Montpellier in 1220, and Oxford just before his death in 1221 as Hinnebusch, once again remarks: 'In founding priories in university cities, Dominic intended to enroll the friars for the university courses and to seek vocations from among the students and the professors. He saw the success of this vocational plan at both Paris and Bologna.'¹⁷

Thus, from the Order's earliest days the commitment to the academy, to learning, and to teaching was thoroughly present. Though, at the very beginning, this academic interest was not for the sake of research or human progress as such, but primarily for the salvation of souls. All of Dominic's energy in getting his brothers into the university towns was not to make them academics but to give them the grounding of reason inspired by faith to preach with conviction, and with coherence. That having been said, the intellectual life of the individual houses of the friars was an important thing. Crucial to the life of the early Dominicans was the requirement that every priory had a professor of Theology in its ranks and this requirement was instantiated in the early legislation of the Order.¹⁸

The importance of the intellectual life continued earnestly into the Order's second generation. Dominic died in 1221, but a new light was rising on the horizon. The growth in the intellectual life of the Order was carried on by two of the 13th century's leading thinkers, Albert of Cologne (1200-1280) and his protégé Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274). Both Albert, and to a greater extent Aquinas, combined faith and reason to give intellectual cachet to

¹⁴ Vicaire, *St Dominic and His Times*, p. 4.

¹⁵ Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order: Intellectual and Cultural Life to 1500*, Vol. II, p. 10.

¹⁶ Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order: Origins and Growth to 1500*, Vol. I, p. 40.

¹⁷ Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order: Intellectual and Cultural Life to 1500*, Vol. II, p. 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Christianity's claims. Yet, even Aquinas himself realised that study without prayer would become a purely academic pursuit which could easily lead to a major intellectual vice, namely, *curiositas*. Aquinas acknowledged that his true source of learning came not from books, or the dry lectures of academics, but from the Cross of Christ!

Aquinas's contribution to the Catholic intellectual enterprise was so vast that he was later given the title of *Doctor Communis* (Universal Teacher) of the Church. Thomas' approach to *Sacra Doctrina* was novel for his time in that he began incorporating the newly introduced works of Aristotle as a means of explaining Catholic doctrine. A recent biographer of Aquinas, Pasquale Porro, remarks that Thomas first became acquainted with Aristotle in 1239 in the *studium* that had been set up in 1224 by Frederick II.¹⁹ Here it was that Aquinas became slowly one of the trailblazers in synthesising faith and reason, using the metaphysical language of Aristotle.

Aquinas was not the first to use the language of philosophy to articulate the truths of the Catholic faith. In fact, Aquinas's predecessors in this project were often in the fashion of using Platonic ideas as a means with which to translate the Christian story to a sophisticated world. This project reached its apogée in the works of Augustine of Hippo (354-430), and up to the time of Aquinas, Augustine would have been seen as the premier Christian philosopher/theologian.

What did Aquinas contribute then to this ongoing project? Porro remarks for Aquinas his use of Aristotelian philosophy could be summarised into:

three principal functions: (a) to demonstrate certain presuppositions or 'preambles' of the faith accessible to natural reason, such as the existence and oneness of God; (b) to illustrate, through appropriate likenesses, certain truths of the faith that are otherwise hard to communicate and understand; (c) to refute rationally every possible argument against the faith. A good part of Thomas' output, in effect, aims at doing these three things, and obviously justifies its broad use of philosophical argumentation.²⁰

Yet, Aquinas never sought to be a philosopher as such and he would not have called himself one. For Aquinas, philosophy was always the handmaid of theology, giving theology a credible voice and helping this science be viewed, not as a fanciful superstition or as an anti-intellectual discipline, but rather a way of seeing the world through another type of lens. This then is Aquinas's legacy within the Dominican Order, that is, following the plan devised by Dominic to preach the truth with credibility and intelligibility. The vigorous study of human philosophy could assist ultimately in the preaching of Christ's gospel and ensure that it be taken seriously in the public square.

¹⁹ P. Porro, *Thomas Aquinas: A Historical and Philosophical Profile* trans. Joseph G. Trabbic & Roger W. Nutt, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2016. Frederick II was a Holy Roman Emperor (1194-1250; reigned 1220-1250).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. x.

It would be easy to say reading Aquinas that he was merely a speculative philosopher/theologian, yet this accusation cannot stand. Porro acknowledges that roughly one third of Thomas's works were:

written in response to requests from confreres, friends, superiors (even the pope himself), but also from sovereigns, countesses, and other lay persons. This fact alone gives the lie to the ill-informed belief that the Scholastic theologians were isolated researchers, removed from the social milieu and historical events of their own age.²¹

For Aquinas, and the later Dominican tradition, the cause of learning, study, the academy and research, were not for purely intellectual ends but always for the service of the Church and its mission. To conclude this brief survey of Aquinas's contribution to the Dominican tradition of learning, we must mention briefly the two great works produced by this medieval thinker, the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Summa Contra Gentiles*.

The *Summa Contra Gentiles* was written between 1259 and 1265. This text follows the spirit of Dominic in that it was aimed as an intellectual defense of Christianity in its dialogue, not now with Catharism, but with Judaism and Islam; evangelisation, one might say, through ideas. Aquinas used the common ground of Aristotelian philosophy to dialogue with the Islamic philosophical tradition which was evidenced in the works of such thinkers as Avicenna [known as Ibn Sina (980-1037)] and Averroes [Ibn Rushd (1126-1198)]. So too, he engaged in conversation with the Jewish philosophical tradition highlighted in luminaries such as Maimonides.

In his *Summa Theologiae* written between 1265 and 1273 we see a compendium of theology. The text was originally written as a primer for those embarking on studies for priesthood. The greater part of this work is given over to the moral life, covering such areas as habits, virtues and vices. These subjects were germane to the hearing of confessions and to general spiritual direction. One might gather from reading these sections of the *Summa* that not only was Thomas Aquinas a gifted theologian and philosopher but that he also had opened the door to a very sophisticated Christian understanding of psychology.

Furthermore, the very composition of this work also merits comment in that the sources Thomas Aquinas used for his intellectual articulation of Christianity were not limited to Christian learning alone. For Aquinas, truth could be found anywhere and hence we notice that elements of his work include the thought of Avicenna, Averroes, Al-Ghazali, Maimonides, and Cicero.

Over the centuries, the path marked out first by Dominic, and then by Aquinas, in providing a credible synthesis of faith and reason became the Dominican Order's contribution to the life of the Church. Yet, the Dominican commitment to the life of the mind at the service of the Church and the world has manifested itself in a variety of ways. One can point to a variety of academic hubs around Europe which had significant Dominican contributions; one may first include the University of Paris where Aquinas himself was a lecturer.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

One may also point to the notable theological school at the University of Salamanca in Spain at the Convent of San Esteban which arose in the late 15th century. This locus of Dominican thought produced such luminaries as Francisco De Vitoria (1483-1546), Dominic de Soto (d. 1560), Melchior Cano (d. 1569) and Dominic Banez (d. 1604). These Dominicans served the church as theologians especially during the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and their works provided a Catholic intellectual response to the critical questioning of Protestantism. It was de Soto who wrote voluminously on the Natural Law and it was his reflection on that most basic understanding of law that assisted the Bishop Bartolomeo de las Casas of Chiapas in Mexico (1484-1566) to defend the full human status of the native American peoples.²² Similarly, earlier on, De Vitoria, in his theories about International Law, also sought to defend the rights of the Indigenous peoples of South America against their Spanish invaders, who were intent on forcing them to become Christian.²³

Into the 19th and 20th centuries the Dominican tradition of learning and teaching continued. Despite the Order's heavy losses in personnel and institutions, which had been incurred during and in the aftermath of the French Revolution (1789-1799), a catalyst for renewal, particularly in Thomistic theology, occurred with the advent of the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) of Pope Leo XIII. This encyclical broke new ground as it invited the Church to return to the sources of Thomistic thought by reading the works of Aquinas, rather than relying on manuals of theology which offered only a condensed form of 'Thomism.' Coupled with this new movement was also the rejection of Cartesian thought which had slowly influenced the teaching of philosophy even in Catholic seminaries. Pope Leo was adamant that the Thomistic understanding of the human person resonated more harmoniously with Christian revelation than the problematic conclusions of Descartes.²⁴ The clarion call for this renewal was heard by a number of Dominican thinkers. Of interest around the late 19th century and into the 20th was the towering figure of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange.

Garrigou-Lagrange (1877-1964), a Frenchman, was the one of the foremost Dominican thinkers from the early 1900s to the 1960s. Most of this time, from 1909 to 1959, was taken up in lecturing at the Dominican Order's university in Rome, the Pontifical University of St Thomas, or the *Angelicum*, as it is familiarly known. Garrigou-Lagrange cut his teeth in the secular environment of the Sorbonne taking philosophy lectures under the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941). Bergson had pioneered a philosophy of understanding reality which was possibly viewed as subjectivist. Garrigou-Lagrange took aim at Bergson's thinking in his first publication, *The Common Sense: The Philosophy of Being and the Dogmatic Formulations* (1909). In the words of Aidan Nichols, this work 'was at once an affirmation of Thomistic Ontology against Bergsonian vitalism, for which becoming is more significant than being.'²⁵ Garrigou-Lagrange's first publication set the scene for his

²² R. Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism*, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003, p. 73.

²³ R. de la Rosa, *Beginnings of the Filipino Dominicans*, Quezon City: Dominican Province of the Philippines, 1990, p. 25.

²⁴ Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism*, p. 85.

²⁵ A. Nichols, *Reason with Piety: Garrigou-Lagrange in the Service of Catholic Thought*, Naples, Florida: Sapientia Press, 2008, p. 9.

ongoing work which mainly rested on the metaphysical teachings of St Thomas and the Thomist tradition. His contribution to the Dominican tradition of defending the Catholic faith in a rational and objective way is evidenced in his many popular philosophical/theological publications. *Reality*, published in English in 1950, is one of his most accessible texts, making Thomistic philosophy available to all. However, Garrigou-Lagrange also contributed significantly to an intellectual spirituality combining his knowledge of the Thomistic tradition with the Carmelite spirituality as epitomised in the thought of the Spanish mystic St John of the Cross (1542-1591). Garrigou-Lagrange's most important work in mystical theology is his three volume, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (1938).

Roughly around the same time as Garrigou-Lagrange, another group of French Dominicans were slowly making their mark as contributors to the Order's intellectual tradition. Of note are Yves Congar (1904-1995) and Marie Dominique Chenu (1895-1990). Both Congar and Chenu were acquainted with the thought of Garrigou-Lagrange; in fact, Garrigou Lagrange had supervised Chenu's doctoral dissertation. Yet, these Dominicans were to be in some way opponents of their compatriot's approach to the Thomistic tradition and to the science of Theology. Whilst Garrigou-Lagrange had become the acme of neo-Thomist thought and saw himself as one in a long line of commentators of Aquinas, Congar and Chenu challenged the ahistorical approach in which Garrigou-Lagrange had presented Thomas. This intellectual confrontation reached its crescendo when Roman authorities banned a publication of Chenu's titled *Une école de théologie-Le Saulchoir*.²⁶ This publication had become Chenu's theological manifesto and had argued for a more historical and biblical approach to theology as opposed to the highly philosophical outlook practitioners such as Garrigou-Lagrange pursued. Nichols in his short biography of Congar notes that the Dominican papal theologian Mariano Cordovani (1883-1952) 'protest[ed] that the emphasis of the Saulchoir men on historical context would end up turning theology into cultural anthropology, deprived of any real hold on its divine subject-matter, revelation.'²⁷

Nevertheless, these setbacks did little to deter Chenu and Congar in their bid to revolutionise Catholic Theology and make it more outward looking. Chenu worked in the background somewhat after his condemnation from the Roman authorities, yet he still continued to teach and publish. Chenu was also very influential at the Second Vatican Council, particularly in the Council's document *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) which reflected on

²⁶ *Le Saulchoir, A School of Theology*, a book written by Marie Dominique Chenu, published in 1937 – <https://www.abbey.com.au/book/a-school-of-theology-le-saulchoir-9781922737922.do> – retrieved 28 September 2023. *Le Saulchoir* was the House of Studies for the Dominican Province of France, established in 1904. After the expulsion of the Dominican Order from France in 1880, French Dominican friars went into exile in Spain and Austria; they were allowed to return in 1895, establishing themselves in the convent of Flavigny-sur-Ozerain. The Order was once again banished from France in 1903, the Dominicans then were exiled to Belgium, residing at Kain (now a part of Tournai). Here, they established a *studium generale* in 1904, in a former Cistercian abbey called *Le Saulchoir*.

²⁷ A. Nichols, *Yves Congar*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989, p. 6.

the Church in the modern world.²⁸ In the aftermath of the Council, he became a co-founder of the theological journal *Concilium* along with Congar and a host of other important theological figures of the time including Hans Küng (1928-2021), Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) and Karl Rahner (1904-1984).

On the other hand, Congar made great advances in the Catholic intellectual tradition regarding ecumenism and ecclesiology. Congar, in his important work *Tradition and Traditions*:

written as the Second Vatican Council was proceeding, ... began to shift from a Christologically-oriented picture of the Church to one which, though by no means neglecting the dominical determination of the Church's life made by the Word Incarnate... gave greater weight to the Holy Spirit, by whose agency the gifts of Christ to the Church are concretely realised in the lives of believers.²⁹

These ideas were revolutionary for the contemporary Church of Congar's time, yet this Dominican theologian always sought to ground his insights in the Patristic witness, thus ensuring that an accusation of novelty could not be sustained.³⁰ Congar's belief in the importance of the people of God, graced by the Holy Spirit, can be read in other works such as his earlier *Lay People in the Church* (1953), which 'insisted the laity are not simply the objects of ministrations of the hierarchy, but are, on the basis of their baptism and confirmation, acting subjects in their own right of the threefold office of Christ, Priest, Prophet and King.'³¹ This thought was indeed revolutionary but has bearing for the Church of today, where the laity are seen as partners with the ordained in the life of the Church, not just passive spectators.

Lastly, Congar, in his ecumenical work, particularly assimilated the spirit of Dominic in his attempt to dialogue with and understand those of other Christian churches. This project in its context can be understood by the situation of wartime France in which Congar suffered alongside other Christians of various denominations. It was in solidarity with these fellow Christians that the pursuit of a genuine ecumenism grew. Congar's work in this area is illustrated in his *Divided Christendom* (1937)³² which 'laid down the basic principles [for the ecumenical movement].'³³

²⁸ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/chenu-marie-dominique> – retrieved 28 August 2023.

²⁹ Nichols, *Yves Congar*, p. 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9. Nichols here refers to Congar's work *The Mystery of the Church* (1941), but this remark epitomized Congar's methodology of *ressourcement* [French term for return to the sources - Editor].

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³² Congar's other outstanding text on ecumenism was *Dialogue between Christians* (1964).

³³ Nichols, *Yves Congar*, p. 96.

Concluding our reflection now on the Dominican tradition of learning and we see that this discipline was, and is always at the service of the Church for the salvation of souls. From the very early days of Dominic's dialogue with the Catharist sect, the importance of learning and the intellectual life have taken centre-stage in the Order's life. This was evidenced quite clearly in Dominic commanding his first friars to attend university courses in Theology.

Later on, Dominic sought to strategically place his communities in the university towns where they would be close to the sources of knowledge as well as enabling the recruitment of lecturers and students to the Dominican movement. Finally, in the early legislation of the Order the importance of a professor of theology as a key member of the community was noted, hence underlining the importance of ongoing study in a Dominican establishment.

The thought of Aquinas, rising in the Order's second generation, further grounded the importance of study and learning as a part of the Order's and the Church's mission. Using Aristotelian language, Aquinas found a new way to articulate the faith and offer that articulation to an increasingly sophisticated world.

In the Dominicans of Salamanca, we witnessed once more the commitment to study as a means of engaging with intellectual adversaries, always reasonably and at the ministry of unifying the Church not further dividing it. Likewise, the Salamanca school worked on reflecting how humanity's understanding of the very basic law of the heart, the Natural Law, can help uphold the rights of all human beings.

Lastly, in the life and teaching of the French Dominicans, we saw a diverse way of presenting the Catholic faith. In the method of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange we saw a way which rested on traditional metaphysical principles, objective, clear, and always at the service of defending the Church's teachings. On the other hand, the project of Yves Congar and Marie Dominique Chenu saw a new, bold approach to the narrative of the Catholic faith, a narration which has animated and inspired the Church in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, Congar's thought regarding the ecumenical movement and the role of the laity in the Church are apt for the ongoing understanding of the Church and its mission in the world. All these reflections, however, stem from the very fundamental commitment of the Dominican Order to study so that in doing so the fruits of that study, fashioned by the fire of prayer, may assist men and women of good will to reflect on what is true, noble and good.

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**St Dominic's Feast Day & ACU Canberra Campus's 60th Anniversary
2 August 2023**



Picture 1: The address by Virginia Bourke, Pro-Chancellor of Australian Catholic University, to audiences, comprising Holy Rosary School students and teachers; ACU staff members; and the Canberra-community churchgoers in general on St Dominic's Feast Day celebration.



Picture 2: Fr Mannes Tellis OP, Parish Priest, Holy Rosary Church, Watson, Canberra, and Ms Anna Masters, Principal of Merici College.



Picture 3: The celebration of ACU Canberra Campus's 60th Anniversary on 2 August 2023.



Picture 4: (from left to right): Associate Professor Darius von Güttner, FRHist FRSA, ACU Canberra Campus Dean, Virginia Bourke, ACU Pro-Chancellor, and Professor Zlatko Skrbis, ACU Vice-Chancellor and President.

Background and Objectives of the Journal

During the 2018 year-end gathering, the FTP Research Seminar Group's members suggested that we should have a newsletter/journal created and circulated to foster a closer link among us. Associate Professor Patrick McArdle, then Canberra Campus Dean, also suggested that academic papers presented by our group's members should be published and extended to wider audiences who are interested in what we have been doing. I have taken these suggestions into consideration and come up with a journal entitled: *The Canberra Chronicles: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Seminar Group (JHSSRSG)*, or the so-called: *The Canberra Chronicles* which aims to:

- ❖ Foster a closer link among the FTP Research Seminar Group's members in addition to the monthly seminar organised all year round;
- ❖ Be a forum for the members to exchange ideas, to discuss further issues arising from the monthly seminar, and to make announcements on research projects and other activities relating to humanities and social sciences disciplines; and
- ❖ Provide an open space for young academics to 'test the water' and for veteran scholars to continue 'polishing their craft' among critical and supportive friends and colleagues.

Following the agreement of the group's members met on 10 May 2023, this triannual journal is to be published as detailed below:

- ❖ Year 5, Volume 1 – 30 April 2023;
- ❖ Year 5, Volume 2 – 30 August 2023; and
- ❖ Year 5, Volume 3 – 10 December 2023.

Accordingly, an original copy of contribution (e.g., essay, lecture note, book review, and report) is to be submitted at least ten days prior to the release of the journal. Please consult the guidelines for the author's contribution so as to ensure the quality, writing style and consistency of your submission.

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Please note that the due date of the 3rd Volume is 20 November 2023. Could you please send your contribution copy to: rapin.quinn@acu.edu.au by the due date – Thank you!