

The Theological and Spiritual relationship between Jesus Christ and John the Baptist in Sufism

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The blessed prophets Yahyā (John the Baptist) and 'Īsā (Jesus Christ), peace be upon them both, are not only considered in the Muslim tradition as the two penultimate prophets of God, but their appearance is also intended to herald the sacred history of the End of Time. In the paper under the title topic, we tried to recognize a somewhat neglected dimension of their prophetic mission from the point of view of Muslim theology, especially as initially observed by the great teachers of Sufism. It reveals to us their fundamental spiritual endowment, which especially shaped their prophetic mission. These endowments are manifested through the rhythms of the two wings of God's revelation in the sense of His understanding, and are revealed to us in the concepts of God's transcendence i.e. non-comparability (ar. tanzīh) and His immanence i.e. comparability and His anthropomorphism (ar. tashbih). These two givens or realities will be personified in the personalities of these two voice-bearers as never before, and as such will be side by side, simultaneously interpenetrating, but still separate. Their metaphysical beginning will not only be clearly reflected throughout the entire sacred history, but will also shape the deepest individual human intimacy, which is ruled by fear and hope.

Key words: *Yahyā (John), 'Īsā (Jesus), transcendence, immanence, tanzīh, tashbih.*

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Introduction

There is almost nothing new to say about the life path and mission of these two messengers of God, either from the point of view of a devout Christian, or from perspective of Muslim spirituality, but also from a completely secular point of view. Therefore, in this text, we do not intend to repeat commonly known facts, except as much as is necessary in the context of the topic, which itself is a direct result of the brilliant observations of the famous Sufi teacher Muḥyi-d-din Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240), which touch the deepest questions in theology. It is about modes of God's self-disclosure and understanding in the world. In the holy prophetic history, they can be traced from the earliest times, from God's first messenger, Adam, peace be upon him, through Noah (ar. Nūḥ), all the way to Jesus (ar. 'Īsā) and John the Baptist (ar. Yaḥyā), and finally Muhammad, peace be upon him, who with his mission and fullness of speech (ar. *jawāmi' al-kalim*) unites into a single and unique form what until his time was manifested and understood separately, through two opposing arms or streams in understanding dear Allah.

These are two key categories in Islamic theology, known as *tanzīh* and *tashbih*. The first implies God's transcendence and absolute incomparability, while the second one implies God's immanence (comparability and anthropomorphism). Strictly speaking, both of these types of understanding of God can be traced back to the Primordial Time, i.e. »The first Table«, when all spirits (ar. *arwāḥ*, sing. *rūḥ*) were gathered in one »place«, as the constitutive Muslim tradition (Qur'an and Sunnah) teaches.

However, we are particularly interested here in the role of the two last messengers of God on Earth in the wake of the arrival of the last one, Muhammad, peace be upon him. Therefore, at the very beginning, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of these two theological concepts. We will see, according to Muslim belief, that they are closely connected with the deepest human intimacy. Ultimately, they also regulate human spiritual growth and the education of the soul (ar. *nafs*, lat. *anima*) on the way to its perfection.

The category of *tanzīh* (derived from the ar. verb *nazzaha*, which means to transcend, to be clean of something, etc.) is a concept that is also defined in theology by the term so-called negative speech about God, i.e. the impossibility of presenting Him in any way. Therefore, His Attributes, as well as His Beautiful Names, are only reduced to His Essence, and it is impossible to speak about the Essence. It is elusive and indescribable. Therefore, this concept is addressed as His transcendence.

On the other hand, the category of *tashbih* (derived from the ar. verb *shabaha*, which means to connect with something, to be like something, etc.) is a concept defined in theology as the so-called positive talk about God. The dear God is understood within the framework of the very human gifts. As His At-

tributes directly refer to His Essence, from which everything stems, they also have their own special determinations, which are not necessarily interpreted in the language of metaphors, etc. Therefore, this concept is also addressed as God's immanence.

Both modes of understanding the dear God have their extremes. Even Muslim theological thought was not immune to them, and crossing the boundaries of God's rhythms as a rule led, and still leads today, to stepping outside the framework of balance and harmony. This disharmony further produces a whole series of other imbalances, which in the last instance directly spill over into the everyday life of the community and the individual. It is very simple and clear that every form of aggression is the result of crossing some boundaries, so it is not strange that crossing these boundaries in theology also produces an unfortunate aggression towards the other and the different.

Although, according to Muslim belief, the pervasive universality of this manifestation of God was completed only with the last Messenger of God, peace be upon him, that is, the Qur'an, however, Muslims will not always cultivate this balance equally. The most striking example from the recent past, unfortunately still from the present, is the savage theology of so-called Islamic state, from which the Muslims themselves suffered the most pain and damage. Such an interpretation of God's Names and Attributes is typical of rigid literalists, which the early Muslim community still referred to by the common name *al-ḥashwiyya* (lit. »those who slander«). Today they are recognized in the Wahhabi movement.

Without going into the deeper genesis of this isolated problem, we will only state that their theology is founded precisely on an extreme and sclerotic understanding of the category of *tashbīh*, known as corporealism (ar. *taḡsīm*). It is paradoxical that the bearers of such an ideology are apparently the greatest defenders of the concept of God's oneness (ar. *tawḥīd*), so they see the silhouettes of the mortal sin of polytheism (ar. *shirk*) in everything and everyone around them, for which it is valid to take one's life, the greatest sanctity in this world.

On the other hand, developing the givenness of God's *tanzīh* as His omnipresence also has its extremity. In the history of Muslim thought, the most striking example was the theological school of the *mu'tazila*, who, again paradoxically, called themselves *ahl al-'adl wa al-tawḥīd* – »followers of God's Justice and Oneness«. They were one of the early theological schools among Muslims, which strongly promoted apophatic theology, the result of which was the renunciation of God's Attributes, i.e. their equating with God's Being. Another great postulate for which they were known is their teaching about God's justice, where God is guided in his actions exclusively by man's progress. Imam al-Ash'arī (d. 945 in Baghdad) and Imam al-Māturīdī (d. 944 in Samarkand) opposed this school with the teaching of God's voluntarism. This second extreme is known in theology as *ta'īl*, which would mean taking away all positive talk

about the dear God. In such a theology, absolutely all of His anthropomorphic Attributes with which He describes Himself must be interpreted allegorically, so for example the expression for His Hand should refer to His Power, etc. Just like corporealists, the bearers of such understandings of religious truths did not hesitate to raise their swords against dissenters, and even for trivial things. History clearly testifies to this.

The Ḥanafī (related to Imam Abū Ḥanīfa, d. 767) understanding of the postulates of the Faith, later shaped in the Māturīdī school of theology, to which the Muslims of Balkans, Turkey and many others have declaratively belonged for centuries, observe these two aspects of God's vision in the human heart in perfect harmony, without giving priority to one or the other consideration. Imam al-Ash'arī developed an almost identical theology, so we can freely call the al-Ash'arī and Māturīdī schools of theology sisters. Any exaggerated »turn« always led to an extreme and unnatural dogma.

This perfect balance was established for Muslims only with God's last Revelation, where God's revelations and general speech about God are delivered in the form of harmony between Him as »the One to whom nothing is similar« (Qur'an, 42:11) and »the One whom the eyes cannot reach« (Qur'an, 6:103), on the one hand, and the One »Who hears and sees everything« (Qur'an, 17:1) and the One »Wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah« (Qur'an, 2:115), on the other side. The first verses clearly refer to the concept of *tanzīh* (His transcendence), as the latter simultaneously refer to the concept of *tashbīh* (His immanence). After all, such was the overall speech of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, who put each thing in its place. This is the very meaning of the saying when he says that he was given the »fullness of speech« (narrated by Muslim and the others from Abū Hurayra).

Before him, the sacred history of the apostles had never had this harmony so balanced in one person, in such a way that at no time could one consideration be given priority over another. This surely means that their mission was truncated, but simply that the spirit of the times did not allow the development of this absolute interpenetration, in the same way as the Seal of all prophets could not appear before it did. This spiritual paving of the path to the »fullness of speech« was entrusted to each of God's messengers in a special and unrepeatable way. These »variegated« reflections of their individual apostolic missions are reflected in the spiritual following behind the time of the Seal of Apostolate. Sufi teachers especially teach about this, so it is said that someone can be »in the heart« or »in the footsteps« of this and that prophet, regardless of whether he is from the Umma (nation) of Muhammad, peace be upon him.

1. The theological plan of God's transcendence and His immanence in sacred history

The above-mentioned indications are important for what we need to recognize in the deepest spiritual position of the mission of the two penultimate prophets. They are also in the title of this topic. With these two, both dimensions of the spiritual experience of Faith, which we recognized in the categories of *tanzih* and *tashbih*, will be compared to each other in an unprecedented way. The two of them not only originate from a unique metaphysical source, but the entire spiritual path on the path of soul education also develops from them. This co-education will thus be one of the signs that announce the arrival of the Seal of Prophethood.

Among the earliest prophets in whose mission, at least vaguely, we can recognize this dual approach to speaking about God, was Noah, peace be upon him. The first to notice this brilliantly is the aforementioned Ibn 'Arabī. Complaining about the weak response among his people, Noah, peace be upon him, says: *Rabbi innī da'awtu qawmī laylan wa nahāran* - »O my Lord, I called my people both night and day« (Qur'an, 71:5). Interpretation of this verse at the level of *ḥaqīqa* (deepest secrets and true reality) is that the night symbolizes *tanzih*, while the day symbolizes *tashbih*. It will be said that his call encompassed both dimensions of speaking about the exalted God, but in completely separate frameworks. When he spoke about God in the manner of *tanzih*, it did not include *tashbih* at all, while when he spoke in the manner of *tashbih*, it was then exclusively in the sign of *tashbih*.

However, starting from the principle that the human spirit is, by its fundamental nature, absolutely free, their spirit sought speech in a manner of simultaneous *tanzih* and *tashbih*, the way we look at one picture with two eyes. According to external or exoteric observation (ar. *zāhiran*), they were punished with a Great Flood, but in that punishment, as for all other peoples who were punished during the lifetime of their prophets, there was also a kind of liberating grace. In the Muslim tradition, Ibn 'Arabī will probably be the first to speak openly in such a bold way. Many centuries will pass in prophetic history until this speech with the Qur'an is no longer *laylan wa nahāran* (night and day), but *laylan fī nahārin wa nahāran fī layl* (night in day and day in night). As one of the special subtle Qur'anic examples of this permeation is the Qur'anic passage that reads: *Laysa ka-mithlihi shay'* (Nothing is like Him). The particle »like« is already a symbol of *tashbih*, which is here in the embrace of *tanzih*, between the word *laysa* as negation and the word *shay'* (lit. something, anything) as both definiteness and indeterminacy.¹

¹ See IBN 'ARABĪ, *Fuṣūṣu-l-ḥikam*, Bayrūt, Al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li-t-turāṭ, 2003, 68-92.

In further passing through the sacred prophetic history, we can almost clearly observe how these two concepts, conditionally speaking, are separated from each other, that is, that in individual prophetic missions this or that vision is extended. Thus, for example, in the prophetic mission of Moses (ar. *Mūsā*), peace be upon him, faith in an unknowable God is fostered, that is, a distinct *tanzīh*, which in this case theologians call the already mentioned term *ta'īl*. His Torah (ar. *Tawrāt*) is consequently a sign of strict Religious Law. Already with David (ar. *Dāwūd*), peace be upon him, several centuries later, and his Psalms (ar. *Zabūr*), which is still in the sign of the Law of Faith, even now this talk about an unknowable God is more about a transcendent God, but still on the unique trail that was outlined by blessed Moses (ar. *Mūsā*), peace be upon him.

In this regard, there are very interesting observations that we read in an almost lost work that Ibn 'Arabī wrote near the end of his life, so we do not find its title in his bibliography, nor does he mention it in his other works that he wrote earlier. However, considering that we have a preserved autograph, which is kept in Baghdad, we can say with certainty that the work is authentic. We mention all this because many works are attributed to the authority of Ibn 'Arabī which he really did not write. In any case, it is a work entitled *al-Raddu 'ala al-Yahūd* (»Answer to the Jews«), supplemented by two manuscripts with the separate titles *Ḥātima al-radd 'ala al-Yahūd* (»Conclusion of the Answer to the Jews«) and *Baḳīyyatu Ḥātima al-raddi 'ala al-Yahūd* (»Appendix to the Conclusion of the Answer to the Jews«). The work is written in an extremely complex language.

Here, we will single out only one very interesting detail in the context of the religiosity of the people of Israel, who are fundamentally linked to Moses. The veil that the Most High lowered in front of their heart's vision is the veil of seeing as such (ar. *ḥijābu-l-'ayn*), and as a result, they ended up in *ta'īl*, i.e. an overemphasized form of God's unknowability. Ibn 'Arabī wants to say that in understanding the Law of Faith of Musa, peace be upon him, they covered themselves with that other spiritual eye, which observes the Most High under the sign of *tashbīh*, i.e. His immanence. We dare to say that the musicality of the blessed David could also be observed in this context. Although both of them, like all the other messengers of God, were inheritors of both ways of speaking about the dear God, the people of Moses, peace be upon him, closed the gates of looking at the other side of a singular and unique reality.

The turning point occurred with the mission of the prophet Jesus, peace be upon him, who was therefore not favorably received by the conservative Jewish community, especially the clergy, who did not recognize spiritual impulses and a slightly different understanding of God's manifestation in the Holy Texts they held in their hands. Blessed Jesus, peace be upon him, now comes with the Law of Love and Faith in the immanent God. In other words, his parliamentary

mission was fundamentally about *tashbih*. Therefore, it should be relatively easy for Muslims to understand the especially cherished attitude towards images and visual representations in Christianity. However, they also close the gates of the other side, or, as Ibn 'Arabī puts it, the Most High lowers the veil of listening as such (ar. *ḥijābu-s-sam'*) in front of their heart's vision, and as a result they lean into an overemphasized form of God's immanence and anthropomorphism.²

Where is the place of John the Baptist, and for what reason is their relationship important? We know that they were both children of two sisters. Ibn 'Arabī will be the first to point out their relationship in an indirect way. Several moments stand out as particularly important. The first is that Jesus and John, peace be upon them both, were always together, considering that the former is a manifestation of God's Spirit, and the latter is of His Life. Spirit and Life are always inseparable, one implies the other. This is a well-known postulate in theology.

Another important moment is Ibn 'Arabī's comparison of John, peace be upon him, and the venerable Virgin Mary (ar. Maryam). It was as if they were each other's mirrors. The first one was given to God's Messenger Zachari (ar. Zakariyyā) for his sigh at the chastity of Mary, when he asked the dear Allah for a birth that would be like her. Just like Mary, who was never touched by a man's hand, so the hand of John, peace be upon him, was never touched by a woman. Ibn 'Arabī says that this is also the meaning of the Qur'anic word *wa ḥaṣūran*, which refers to him, and which is usually translated as »chaste« (Qur'an, 3:49).³

The next interesting moment is one of Ibn 'Arabī's *mushāhada* (direct revelation from the higher, hidden world), in which he talked with John, peace be upon him.⁴ He asks him why he doesn't have »his own heaven«, why is he the only one visiting the other heavens and the other prophets? We have to understand this in the context of the Prophet's, peace be upon him, sayings in which he informs us about his meeting with God's others prophets on the blessed night of Isrā and Mi'rāj (the night journey with the angel Gabriel) through the heavenly heights. Then, as he passed through the heavens, he met one of the prophets in each of them. At the end of the narration from this vision, the blessed John explains to him the kinship ties between himself and them, and it is as if he was specially entrusted with keeping those ties, visiting the family. Also, John, peace be upon him, explains to Ibn 'Arabī that everyone has their own path, that no path is the same as someone else's.

Finally, he gives us another interesting tradition. Namely, it is reported that dear Allah was once asked: »Who do you prefer, Jesus or John?« He answered: »The one who has a better opinion of Me, i.e. 'Īsā.« Ibn 'Arabī interprets this

² See IBN 'ARABĪ, *Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabī Šarḥ Muḥtadā'i-t-ṭūfān*, Al-Qāhira, 'Ālamu-l-fikr, 313.

³ See IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥātu-l-makkiyya*, Bayrūt, Dār iḥyā'i-t-turāṭi-l-'arabī, Vol. III, 493.

⁴ See IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt...*, Vol. III, 337.

as their fundamental spiritual states which are like two wings. John, peace be upon him, was dominated by a state of fear, which means that hope prevailed with Jesus, peace be upon him.

All the mentioned details reveal several very important features of their prophetic mission, then their fundamental spiritual nature, and finally the perception by believers. We'll start in order. The first thing that dawns is that John, peace be upon him, is the bearer or host of *tanzih* (God's transcendence), just as Jesus, peace be upon him, is the bearer or host of *tashbih* (God's immanence). However, what is more than important to emphasize is that the two share similar fates, that they grew up together and were inseparable in life. It is also significant that John, peace be upon him, was several years older than Jesus, peace be upon him.

Both of them did not have their own progeny, which again can be very significant that with them both the concept of God's transcendence and that of His immanence experience their fullness, if they are seen as separate, which means that there is no further development of them. With the Seal of all Prophets, blessed Muhammad, peace be upon him, these two concepts, as we have already seen, return to their unique meeting. In the same common life path of these two blessed messengers of God, another detail is revealed to us, equally important, perhaps even more important. It is that they respected each other and showed honor to his mission in all its fullness. Simply put, they did not deny each other. The message of John, peace be upon him, could also be understood in this direction, that every person has his own path, unrepeatable, just as God's manifestations in the world are also unrepeatable, because »every moment He is interested in something« (Qur'an, 55:29).

If things are set in such a way, then respect is shown not only to the chosen ones, but to all God's creatures. Then man sees God's manifestations in everything around him, no matter how mysterious they may appear. This is traditionally simply called *adab*, the highest form of trade according to everything that surrounds us. We can also define this sublime category by giving each thing, phenomenon, person, event, etc., its full right. The lack of *adab* in any segment of life, including theology, is very clearly manifested by overstepping the boundaries by which one gets out of balance. This deviation from balance is wonderfully pointed out in detail in the book »Religion and theology before the challenges of the new world order«,⁵ which the authors substantiated with concrete examples, both from the new freakish system of education, all the way to the imbalance in the understanding of Primer book of postulates of *Īmān*, *Islām* and *Ihsān*, more specifically theirs pillar as the very foundations of belief and orthopraxy. The key link that should connect everything, which escapes modern man, and which is not learned from dead books, is and exactly *adab*.

⁵ The book is published in Bosnian language: Samir BEGLEROVIĆ et al., *Religija i teologija pred izazovima novog svjetskog poretka*, Tuzla, Off-Set, 2023.

We have the opportunity to witness this etiquette in a very refined way in the relationship between Jesus and John, peace be upon both of them. Even more, his »detour« the other heavens is also very significant considering that in this act he gives priority to another in relation to himself, as he does not dwell on one spiritual level but rather he has the honor of teaching us a constant spiritual bending and taking as many different reflections as possible from one single and unique source.

2. Spiritual reflections of God's transcendence and His immanence on the state of the human soul

The life paths of these two noble messengers of God reveal to us how the concepts of *tanzīh* (transcendence) and *tashbih* (immanence) also have their own special spiritual reflections in the deepest human intimacy through which man perfects his soul (ar. *nafs*, lat. *anima*) on the way to complete spiritual realization, which can only be given to the Perfect Man (ar. *Al-Insānu-l-kāmil*). Thus *tanzīh* corresponds to the state of fear (ar. *Hawf*), which we find again in God's Attribute of His Majesty (ar. *Al-Ġalāl*), while *tashbih* corresponds to the state of hope (ar. *raġā'*), which springs from God's Attribute of His Beauty (ar. *Al-Ġamāl*).

God's Beautiful Names are in their inner meanings between these two fundamental theological concepts, which compare His Majesty and His Beauty, and on which the total exchange of God's manifestation in the world, His understanding and general experience of Faith is conceived. His Majesty is unattainable and transcendent, and therefore corresponds to the spiritual state of fear, which on the way of spiritual maturation further develops into a state of »spiritual compression« (ar. *al-qabḍ*), and finally into a state of complete awe (ar. *al-hayba*). This last and most mature sight corresponding to the concept of *tanzīh* is simply defined as seeing of His Majesty completely with the heart. This reflection of His Majesty was manifested in the person of John, peace be upon him, even in his childhood. Traditions testifying to this tell us that even at an early age he was extremely serious. The Qur'an also refers to this indirectly: »And We gave him wisdom while he was still a boy« (Qur'an, 19:12).

From this, the wisdom of the fact that John, peace be upon him, did not have his *Ummah* (people and folk) as they are associated with the other great prophets of God, simply for the reason that he did not come with a new religious law. His parliamentary role is just following the trodden path of a lineup of his predecessors, a path he walks with the inner power of *tanzīh*. Even more, with his mission, the concept of God's omnipresence and unknowability reaches its culmination. In addition, his fundamental spiritual state of fear, according to

divine etiquette, did not allow him to be placed above the state of hope, with which Jesus, peace be upon him, was to be gifted.

His spiritual orientation is indirectly indicated by a saying of the noble Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Namely, on one occasion the honorable Companions were discussing the value and merit of certain prophets, so Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, appeared before them, while one of them said: »Moses spoke with Allah.« The other said: »Jesus is the spirit of Allah and His word.« The third one said: »Abraham (ar. Ibrāhīm) was His friend.« They said so, until the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to them: »And where is your martyr, the son of a martyr, who, fearing sin, wore sackcloth and ate leaves from trees?!« Most commentators agree that he meant John (ar. Yaḥyā), peace be upon him.

On the other hand, God's Beauty is comprehensible, we constantly witness beauty all around us. It is immanent to man. Therefore, it corresponds to the mentioned spiritual state of hope, which on the way of spiritual maturation further develops into a state of »spiritual desolation« (ar. *al-baṣṭ*), and finally into a state of complete and ultimate bliss (ar. *al-uns*). This highest consideration in which hope ends is also defined as the action of His Beauty on the heart. That Beauty washed over the heart of Jesus, peace be upon him, even in his mother's womb. Therefore, they tell us that Jesus, peace be upon him, conditionally speaking, unlike John, peace be upon him, was always smiling, and at the same time they loved each other very much and respected each other. In the framework of his spiritual gift, one can also understand taking on the »burden« of standing up for his Ummah, however it is defined.

One tradition tells us how refined the relationship between the two was, in which it is said that on one occasion John, peace be upon him, told Jesus, peace be upon him, not to be angry. Jesus, peace be upon him, answered him: »How can I not be angry! I am only a man.« To that, John, peace be upon him, replied: »Don't own property!« »Then maybe I can control myself,« he replied. Our late Dr. Samir Beglerovic beautifully commented on this tradition with the words: »Praise be to God, we know that Jesus, peace be upon him, had nothing, he slept on the ground, and he put a stone under his head instead of a pillow. Eventually he got rid of it too.«

Finally, we have a much clearer tradition which says that John, peace be upon him, will have »honor« for slaughtering Death in the hereafter, not only because he was a reflection of God's Attribute of Life, but also his state of fear, so that through him that greatest fear would disappear. This act is represented in Sufi literature as the penultimate great abode (ar. *al-mawṭin*) of post eschatological events, before the Beautiful Vision of looking at the Lord from the White Hill.⁶

⁶ The *hadīth* that informs about the White Hill (ar. *Al-Kaṭību-l-abyaḍ*) was transmitted to us by Anas ibn Mālik and Ibn Mas'ūd.

Namely, the only discomfort that the inhabitants of Paradise will have is a subdued fear of death, that the end of everything is still possible. Then, in that almost last act of the hereafter, the blessed John, peace be upon him, appears and kills Death, depicted in the form of a ram. We have already pointed out that the very name John in the Arabic comes from the root of the word »life«. At that moment, indescribable joy and tranquility overwhelms the heavenly people. There is no more death. One would say that here it is the absolute death of nothingness. Nothingness loses even its illusion. It is no longer even in the theory of imagination. It's as if it never existed. Things are set as they have always been. That death, in this context, is negative. We want its final annulment. On the other hand, death in this world is quite different. A believer should look at her with longing.

Jesus and John, peace be upon both of them, introduce sacred history in the finest way to its very end, which for Muslims is to happen with Muhammad, peace be upon him. The pervasive universality of God's revelation is completed with it. The message of the Qur'an was conveyed to humanity in this spirit. In it, God's revelations and general speech about the Only One are delivered to us in a form that establishes a perfect balance between Him as »the One to whom nothing is similar« and »the One whom the eyes cannot reach«, on the one hand, and the One »who hears and sees everything and »Wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah, on the other hand.

This discussion of these two key concepts in theology is nowhere near exhausted. Although it is treated in a special way in official theology, more precisely in the apologetic discipline known as *'ilm al-kalām*, it has its most complete realization in Sufi discipline. Namely, the great teachers of Sufism (ar. *taṣawwuf*) will also make a completely new step forward, in the context of the metaphysical pattern known as »divine breadth« (ar. *al-ittisā' al-ilāhī*). To put it very succinctly, this key to understanding God's infinite manifestation could simply be addressed as removing every form of limitation (ar. *al-taqyīd*). This linguistic coin, under the emblem of which the deepest exegesis of God's revelations is developed, was formulated by Ibn 'Arabī in the mentioned formula *al-ittisā' al-ilāhī*, or in another place *al-si'a al-ilāhiyya*, both in the meaning of »divine breadth« or »width«.

The theological basis of this formulation is first of all God's Beautiful Name al-Wāsi' (Which encompasses everything), of the same linguistic root, and then also the words of God: »My mercy encompasses everything« (Qur'an, 7:26), and the *ḥadīṭ qudsī* (the holly narration that is attributed to God but the actual wording was credited to the Prophet Muhammad): »Only the heart of My servant embraces Me... «⁷ This existential postulate will be taken as the basis for the overall understanding of all reality. In it, in fact, the core of the true experience of Faith is revealed, in which nothing is in vain, without meaning,

⁷ Narrated by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal from Wahb ibn Munabbah.

nor is it rejected. This pattern of one enormous breadth can clearly be followed through all segments of confession of Faith, understanding of reality, spiritual education, etc. One of the particularly vivid examples is Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation of Sharia regulations in the domain of worship (ar. *al-'ibādāt*), about which he writes very minutely. in his »Meccan revelations« (ar. *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*). Sticking to an established pattern, he brilliantly goes through all the fundamental articles of Islamic orthopraxy, opening completely new horizons in the understanding of concrete deeds.

The form mainly starts from citing different legal opinions on a certain issue, and then giving your own judgment about the predominance of one of them. Right after that brief introduction, he goes into a detailed analysis of the inner side of each of the above positions or *fiqh* (Sharia law) solutions. In each of them, he discovers their metaphysical beginning, and thus, in a peculiar way, gives it a certain legitimacy. Such an approach reveals to us a huge breadth in understanding, where the basis of any knowledge or personal experience of Faith is to be sought in the world beyond.

The same principle applies in the Sufi understanding of the Qur'an. When we talk about the interpretation, hermeneutics or exegesis of the Qur'anic text (ar. *tafsīr*), in such cases we usually invoke different approaches in its interpretation, so we talk about *fiqh* (law) commentaries, thematic, linguistic, etc. Human nature, by its mutual diversity, gives an advantage to one of them, like everything else in life. Unfortunately, people are often inclined to deny the value and validity of a different understanding. The Sufi teachers teach in a wonderful way that, in this case, the interpretations of the Qur'an should never be limited by anything, so one should refrain from denying even the most rigid ones. and limited interpretations. The Qur'an is God's revelation, which in its breadth transcends all human boundaries. We have no right to set them. He even very clearly advises us that even if the opponent cites a Qur'anic verse to support his position, we should not respond to it and interrupt him.

Concluding thoughts

Every understanding, no matter how different it is, has its specific sanctity (ar. *al-ḥurma*). The strength of that sanctity is not the same. True spiritual teachers and noble men, as all the great teachers of Sufism emphasize, will never contradict each other. This is what the relationship between John and Jesus, peace be upon both of them, teaches us. Respect for everyone's attitude and understanding is part of that »divine breadth«. Unfortunately, the apparent discrepancy is often the cause of exclusivity, and then, as a result, the devaluing of someone else's understanding and interpretation of the same postulate, verse, *ḥadīṭ* (Prophet's saying), theological concept, etc. Talking about differ-

ent understandings of theological treatises Sufis say this beautifully for official theologians, literally: *Law-ittasa'a nazaruhum la-aqarrū ġami'a 'aqā'id al-muwahhidin* (»If their horizons were a little wider, they would confirm all the dogmas of those who believe in the One God«).

They go further, they do not stay only in the field of mere interpretation, so they clearly point out one of the biggest intellectual and spiritual barriers in accepting, or at least respecting, different speech. Namely, it is about the speech of God's *awliyā* (God-pleasing, saints), who, according to the fundamental truth, should speak freely just as all God's messengers did. They do not do this simply for reasons of misunderstanding, accusation of heresy, unintentionally causing trouble, etc. But the point is that their speech, considering their inner quality of *walāya* (holiness), which they are the heirs of and all the prophets of Faith, can never be in contrary to the message that all of them have been conveying since Adam, peace be upon him. The life of Faith has never been and must never be static. Setting the framework is necessary, especially because of human progress in this world, given that its absolute absence would lead to the relativization of absolutely everything, and consequently would lead to anarchy and chaos.

This relationship between necessary frameworks, especially in Sharia-legal issues, and »divine breadth« that eludes any type of framework, is like the relationship between *tanzīh* (God's omnipresence, incomparability, transcendence) and *tashbīh* (God's comparability, anthropomorphism, immanence). According to the deepest Sufi teaching, even the teaching of *tanzīh* is also a kind of limitation, because we determine God as he cannot be, and in that way we limit Him, all in the desire to describe Him as limitless. It is similar with the other wing of interpreting God's Presence, that of *tashbīh*. For the Sufis, official theology opened the gates to talk about God without restrictions. On the one hand, this does not necessarily mean that it is bad, even more, on the one hand, it is necessary.

This is confirmed by Ibn 'Arabī himself, for the simple reason of possible abuse by liars and their ilk. However, at the same time, this places indescribably heavy shackles on the hands of all God's disciples to speak the way God's messengers and His messengers spoke, without the slightest limitation. In this sense, Ibn 'Arabī cites an example in which the blessed Prophet, peace be upon him, uses the attributes of laughing, wondering, coming down, etc. for God. If God's friends and saints (ar. *al-awliyā'*) spoke with such »freedom«, they would be declared unbelievers right away.

Man, for a serious Sufi, should constantly simultaneously look at his shadow and the One from whom it arises, and with one eye to look at the Light and with the other at the shadow of his existence. This is the inner meaning of the verse in which the Most High says: »Didn't We give him two eyes« (Qur'an, 90:8). Consequently, those two eyes look at the unique image of God's Self-disclosure

manifested under the form of *tanzīh* and *tashbih*. Only in such harmony can the human soul move away from every kind of persecution and transgression, and we have seen that it consequently leads to a deviation from absolute Good and Beauty.

In this direction, the answer to probably the most complex question not only of theology but also of philosophy, the question of the origin of evil, suffering and pain, must be sought. Without going deeper into that field here, and starting from the theological axiom that evil is directly related to nothingness (ar. *al-'adam*), the question is rightly raised whether evil is really a lack of perfection, as some theologians, not only Muslim, observe?

Sufi teachers will also be deeply affected by this phenomenon. Ibn 'Arabī himself does not see it in black and white. In one place in his »Meccan revelations« he unequivocally says that from the perfection of being (ar. *kamālu-l-wuğūd*) is also the existence of the deficiency in that same being (ar. *wuğūdun-naqṣi fih*), because when not if it were so, then the perfection of being or existence would be phallic for the absence of truncatedness in it, where the Most High says about the perfection or completeness of everything apart from Allah: »To everything He created He gave what is necessary« (Qur'an, 20:50), so He did not deprive anything, so to the truncatedness He gave it's right, what it needs.

From further reading, it can be concluded that this truncatedness in the world as a Macrocosm, meaning everything beyond man, is not the same truncatedness that appears in man, that is, it can appear, even though man is the succus of the whole world (ar. *al-muḥtaṣar al-wağīz*). Perfection in the cosmos is in each and everyone's degree (ar. *al-martaba*), it is complete in itself, it neither lacks nor exceeds anything. Stuntedness or deficiency is only really shown in man. The reach of reason is a partial knowledge of God, and that is in what is called transcendence (*tanzīh*). That is why confusion and bewilderment (ar. *al-ḥayra*) arise, because if it were not for it, then He would be under the judgment of the created.

Kenan Čemo**Teološko-duhovna veza Ise (Isusa Krista) i Jahje (Ivana Krstitelja) u sufizmu*

Sažetak

Blagoslovljeni se vjerovjesnici Jahja (Ivan Krstitelj) i Isa (Isus Krist), mir neka je na obojicu, u muslimanskoj tradiciji ne smatraju samo kao dva pretposljednja Božja vjerovjesnika, nego njihova pojava natkriljuje i svetu povijest Kraja vremena. U ovom smo radu pokušali prepoznati jednu donekle zanemarenu dimenziju njihove glasničke misije iz vizure muslimanske teologije, posebice na onom tragu kojeg su prvi prepoznali veliki učitelji sufizma. Ona nam otkriva njihovu temeljnu duhovnu datost koja je navlastito oblikovala i njihovu poslaničku misiju. Te datosti se manifestiraju kroz ritmove dva krila Božjega objavljivanja u smislu Njegova poimanja, a otkrivaju nam se u konceptima Božje svenadilaznosti ili transcendencije (ar. *tenzih*) i Njegove usporedivosti ili imanencije (ar. *tešbih*). Ove dvije danosti će biti personificirane u osobama ove dvojice glasonoša kao nikada do tada i kao takve biti jedna uz drugu, istovremeno se prožimati, no još uvijek biti odvojene. Njihovo metafizičko počelo ne samo da će se sasvim jasno odražavati kroz cjelokopnu svetu povijest, nego će oblikovati i najdublju pojedinačnu ljudsku intimu kojom ravnaju fenomeni ili kategorije straha i nade.

Ključne riječi: Jahja (Ivan), Isa (Isus), transcendencija, imanencija, tanzih, tashbih.

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