

IBN AL-‘ARABĪ ON FUNDAMENTAL
RELIGIOUS NOTIONS:
NATURAL DISPOSITION (*FIṬRAH*), DIVINE LAW
(*SHAR’*), TRUE FAITH (*ĪMĀN*) AND DISBELIEF (*KUFR*)

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Introduction

Ibn al-‘Arabī (560/1165–638/1240) claims for himself ‘the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood’ (*khātim al-walāyah al-muḥammadiyyah*). Whatever the role and function of this Seal may be, its effect is discernible in his life and works, whereby he comes into his own and wins the recognition of the *ummah*. He is indeed acknowledged as ‘the Supreme Master’ (*al-Shaykh al-Akbar*) by later Muslim scholars—Sunnis and Shi‘is alike—who consist of the mystics, theologians, philosophers, Qur’anic exegetes, traditionists, jurists, philologists, etc. There is no wonder that Ibn al-‘Arabī is arguably the most celebrated Muslim scholar studied in the present West in various philosophical and religious disciplines: ontology, theology, angelology, prophetology, hagiology, cosmology, psychology, epistemology, exegesis, hermeneutics, ethics, politics, soteriology, philosophy of religion, philosophy of law, philosophy of science, ritual, and so forth.¹

Ironically enough, Ibn al-‘Arabī is considered by several authors from the West as a religious inclusivist. He is even held as the one who prepared in great detail a foundation for the belief in a unity of the inner contents of all religions—the approach bet-

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¹ Numerous works on Ibn al-‘Arabī, especially those written in English, are listed in the bibliography of our “Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Conception of Religion.” (M.A. diss., International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1998), henceforth cited as *Ibn al-‘Arabī*, 180–211. The dissertation is supervised by Prof. Bilal Kuşınar.

ter known as the 'Transcendent Unity of Religions'. In order to examine such Transcendentalists' representation of Ibn al-'Arabī, one must refer to, and understand correctly, every detail of the original sources they allegedly claim to represent. One must thereafter thoroughly retrace the path of their intellectual activities, and carefully scrutinize their way of thinking, their basic ideas, inferences and judgments.²

Human Natural Disposition

According to Ibn al-'Arabī, mankind, in their natural state of being (*fiṭrah*), affirm the existence, oneness and transcendence of their Creator.³ Originally, this affirmation consists in the Primordial Covenant between them and God (*al-mūthāq*),⁴ which pertains to the event when He brought forth the Children of Adam's offspring from their loins, and called upon them to testify concerning themselves: "Am I not your Lord (*Rabb*)?"—to which they answered: "Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!" (*al-A'raf*, 7: 172).⁵ In other words, mankind had expressed

² We trust that a preliminary—yet solid—foundation of Ibn al-'Arabī's understanding of the issue at hand can be provided by our master's thesis, see *supra*. Some of the points mentioned therein, especially the ones that refer to religious faith and unbelief, are summarized in the present article.

³ See, for example, *Futūḥāt*, II, 70: 7. All mankind hence was once 'a single community' (*ummah wāḥidah*, as per *al-Baqarah*, 2: 213) as, primordially, each and every one of them concurrently affirmed the existence of God [throughout this article, the term 'God' refers to *Allāh*]. See, for example, *Ījāz*, *al-Baqarah*, 2: 213, p. 318.

⁴ The fact that human affirmation of God is based on the Primordial Covenant is the reason why the understanding of *fiṭrah* must be based on—as Ibn al-'Arabī made it quite clear in his works—the Revealed Sources, i.e., the Qur'ān and Prophetic Traditions, particularly *al-Baqarah*, 2: 214, *al-A'raf*, 7: 172, *al-Rūm*, 30: 30, and a Prophetic Tradition that "Every child is born in the *fiṭrah*. But his parents turn him into a Jew or a Christian or a Magian". See also below, nn. 5 and 8.

⁵ This verse frequently appears in the *Futūḥāt*. It is quoted, whether fully or partially, in not less than thirteen occasions: I, 381: 28, 670: 15; II, 70: 11,