For over a century the leaders of Muslim reform movements have been clamouring to bridge the gulf between the ancient and the modern disciplines. Time and again they have dreamt of a group of scholars who could combine a thorough grounding in Arabic and Islamics with European education and a scientific outlook. The successive generations from Sayyid Aḥmad Khān to Dhākir Ḥusayn in the Subcontinent, and from Muḥammad ‘Abduh to Aḥmad Amin in Egypt have longed for this. The latter has called this group of scholars ‘the missing link’ in which “the Arabic language and the spirit of Islam would be forcefully and firmly entrenched. One would find in it,” he writes, “whatever the Europeans have produced of fascinating means of presentation and elegant methods of composition as well as a stimulating comparison between the works of the ancient and those of the modern scholars.”

It can only be hoped that now, since this ‘missing link’ has finally been forged and come to fruition the community, which needs it badly, will accord it due recognition. The book by Dr. Rashīd Aḥmad (Jallandri) is the outcome of the hard labour of a Deobandi ‘ālim who has spent eight years in Egypt for his M. A. degree from the Al-Azhar University and another eight years in England for his doctorate in philosophy. On his return to Pakistan after sixteen years he assumed the dual charge of Education and Publication adviser to the Aqwaf Department, Government of Panjāb, and Director, ‘Ulama’ Academy, Lahore. During his first year in office he has left his impact on the religious life of the country by publishing, inter alia, the bilingual magazine Din-w-Dānish. His thesis has been rendered into Urdu by the well-known author and translator of Lahore, Professor Muḥammad Sarwar, another graduate of the Egyptian University. It has been revised by the author himself who has made numerous additions and improvements in the Urdu version rendering it more useful than its English original. It is thus one of the first Urdu works of this type with a well-prepared bibliography and index with hardly any printing mistakes.

That the book under review is the outcome of a mature and responsible scholarship has been testified by the late Professor Arberry in a letter published at the end of the book where he writes that “Dr. Rashid Ahmad, my former pupil, whom I supervised when he was preparing his thesis......is destined to become one of the leading scholars of Islamic studies.”

With most religions the scientific study of the exegesis of their Holy Script is more often than not an academic sanctuary reserved for their own followers, though not exclusively. There are hardly any non-Christian scholars who excel the Christian authorities in the field of serious Bible studies, especially in regard to the history of exegetical trends. Hitherto Islam was an exception to this general rule. Interpretation of the Glorious Qur‘ān is one of the outstanding major sciences in the field of religious studies. But the historical analysis of the ideas underlying this exegesis, and the comparative study of Qur‘ān-interpretation through the ages is a domain where European orientalists as against Muslim researchers rose to greater heights. This fact certainly
posed a challenge to real scholars among the believers. The present book by Dr. Rashid Ahmad (Jallandri) meets this challenge adequately.

So far the unparalleled *opus magnus* in the field under discussion is *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung* (Tendencies of Muslim Qur'an-Interpretation) by the ingenious Hungarian orientalist, Ignaz Goldziher. Rashid Ahmad, who mainly draws on Muslim sources, makes use of Goldziher as well. But there is a vast difference in the approach of the two writers. In his extremely comprehensive and most exhaustive study the European scholar of Islam can afford to analyse at length and go into the minutest details, draw his comparisons to similar phenomena in the history of other religions, point out mercilessly conceptual inadequacies and evaluate the various trends with their intellectual achievements and inherent failings without bothering about the direction in which the swinging pendulum comes to rest in the end. Besides, Goldziher's apparent non-mystical temperament lends quite a sarcastic tone to some parts of his analysis.

The Muslim scholar, and Director of the 'Ulama' Academy, has to keep a twin objective in mind. While trying his best to keep up the standards of scientific research he has, at the same time, to be careful in striking a balance between divergent viewpoints so as not to hurt any of the living schools and to present a synthetic result which, though certainly accentuating a positive tendency, is nevertheless acceptable enough to all so as to provide an orientation for the community as a whole. In the preface to his rather concise book Rashid Ahmad states that "according to the Qur'an the object of this life is to unveil the absolute beauty." The question he poses in this context is how far the classical Muslim literature has given expression to the message of the Qur'an. The answer to this question, he believes, can best be found in the commentaries. Moreover, tracing out ideological treasures hidden in these *tafsir* serves the purpose of establishing "our national identity."

The method, however, resembles that of Goldziher quite closely: after the initial chapters on the phenomenon of Qur'an-commentary as such, the sources and historical role of *tafsir*, chapters on Traditional and Rational Commentary follow. As in the study of Goldziher, *Mystical Commentary* has been given a more elaborate treatment; in fact, half of Rashid Ahmad's thesis is devoted to *Sufi* *Tafsir*. Unlike Goldziher, however, he discusses neither the commentaries of heterodox sects nor those of the modernists as a group, although there are frequent references to — or rather from — Abū l-Kalām Āzād. This makes it rather a bit difficult to place the book, especially since it is something like a first — or preparatory — volume in a study on al-Qushayrí, whose work proper is to be dealt with in the second volume. Rashid Ahmad's treatise runs, therefore, partly parallel to Goldziher. But, unlike his precursor, he does not proceed beyond what he considers to be classics. It is probably for this reason that he has not even taken note of the existence of *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation* by J.M.S. Baljon (Leiden 1961) or the studies of J. Jomier who specialises on Tantawi Jawhari (cf. MIDEO, Cairo 1958). Considering this limited purview, Rashid Ahmad ought rather to have stuck to the original title of his thesis: "Qur'anic Exegesis and Classical Tafsir" (under this title it was published in *The Islamic Quarterly*, London 1968).

It is not quite correct to say that the mystical commentary of al-Ḥallāj can only be reconstructed from that of Al-Sulami. Professor Massignon has extracted more than that which in turn has enabled Professor Annemarie Schimmel to present specimens from the Baghdadi saint's commentary in her German anthology of Al-Ḥallāj (cf. the review...
by the present writer in *Islamic Studies*, September 1970). Rashid Aḥmad's command of Urdu, Arabic, and English is appreciable indeed. Now it is time for him to take to French too. This is bound to turn him into an accomplished scholar as promised by his thesis — a thesis that could still be improved after getting the proper access to the material available in French.

His differentiation between rational and mystical interpretation of the Qur'ān has more clarity and is more conclusive than that of Goldziher. In return he pays less heed to intermediary tendencies like that of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā whom it is difficult to place decisively in one or the other category. This may look like over-simplification on the part of the author, but is justified by the size and scope of his treatise which compels him to proffer a more clear-cut picture of the issue.

The writer is taking up the cudgels for the Sufis by emphasising that they did not go against the Ṣarī'ā but merely beyond it while maintaining it as their base. About Al-Ghazālī he writes that "he states that the ultimate ideal is to keep a balance between the two aspects of the verse: the outward and the inward." (p. 75) That this stand can hardly be considered sincere, at least with regard to quite a number of the mystics, has been amply demonstrated by Goldziher — with special reference to Al-Ghazālī. Here it would have been useful to devote some more space to a discussion of the arguments advanced in this context. As it stands now, Rashid's statement appears more like a confession of faith. This subjective element in the thesis under review is even more evident in the discussion of Ibn 'Arabi where we find the following phrase: "How true is Ibn 'Arabi's claim that neither tanzīh alone nor tashbih alone is sufficient to enable man to comprehend the Divine." (p. 86; here one only misses the exclamation mark).

On the other hand it is in expounding the thoughts of the much-maligned Ibn 'Arabi that Rashid Aḥmad's scholarly ability to dissect and differentiate reaches its zenith. His summary is an able and courageous effort to present a comprehensive picture of the controversial Spanish mystic as it emerges from the research of generations of serious scholarship:

"It is clear that Ibn 'Arabi often employed very complicated language. His speculative interpretations, in spite of their originality and depth, are frequently at variance with the normal interpretation of the Qur'ān. Thus the common reader as well as the traditionist is liable to misunderstand them and to react accordingly. Ibn 'Arabi himself was aware of this fact when he said: 'We are the people whose books should not be read'. Perhaps this was the reason why distinguished 'Ulama' warned the people not to read his books. Ibn Khaldūn urged the authorities to burn Ibn 'Arabi's books in the interests of the general public.

However, if we take an impartial view of Ibn 'Arabi's work, it is difficult to deny his virtue and deep mystical experience and his merit as a writer, needless to say the charge of heresy against him is quite unfounded. It is clear from his works that he was sincere in obeying the Ṣarī'ā, but this does not prevent a gifted man from indulging in speculative and philosophical thought. To challenge the 'Ulama's authority over religious questions is by no means the same thing as challenging the Ṣarī'ā. Ibn 'Arabi himself refuted the 'Ulama's claim that his views were directed against the Ṣarī'ā." (p. 88-89)
This balanced attitude enabled the author to view many a controversial issue in its true perspective which makes it acceptable to the objective historian. At present too many Muslim writers betray a propensity to go the easy way of ascribing each and every ill that befalls their society to the conspiracies of outsiders. It is, therefore, refreshing to find a more critical appreciation of the diverse factors at work. Dilating upon rational commentaries and free-thinkers, Rashid Ahmad writes:

"It is difficult to say that this school was a reaction to the traditionists' rigid attitude and that it had come into existence as a result of some well-planned scheme; rather it would be nearer the truth to say that it was the result of natural internal forces of growth in a new society. On the other hand, the role played by external forces cannot be denied." (p. 29)

The same should also hold true of the development in mysticism; therefore it amounts to lack of consistency when in this context the author says:

"While the conflict was going on, some people, disguised in Sūfī cloaks, penetrated into the Sūfī circles; unlike the true Sūfīs they did not observe rituals and made this known publicly." (p. 59).

Here it is not quite convincing that Sufism should have abandoned the 'golden mean' because of the subversion of conspirators sent by some foreign agency. That the 'deterioration' of 'true mysticism' was a quite normal development conditioned by the intricacies of human nature is stated by the author himself with his usual clarity:

"In the search for spiritual certitude, the Sūfīs having revolted against the rigid opinions of the 'Ulamā', now created their own idols to be worshipped. The system of Pīr-Murdi, which is still being practised in the Muslim countries, is similar to a bond between master and slave. It is very difficult to estimate the extent of the damage done to Muslim society by decadent mysticism." (p. 60).

Considering the fact that the book under review comes from the pen of a Deobandi Mawlwi one cannot but welcome the spirit of sound self-criticism that permeates it throughout. To cite an example:

"Although the Qur'ān emphasized the concept of the brotherhood of mankind and referred to man as made in the image of God and His masterpiece, the theologians unconsciously worked against this noble idea. They created hatred and tension, not only between Muslims and non-Muslims, but also amongst Muslims themselves. The history of religion written with tears and blood has not forgotten the role played by the theologians. Even in the modern age their contentions serve as quite a rich soil for mutual hatred. It was not the theologians but the Sūfīs who glorified man as divine in origin, and gave him hope and confidence. The greatest service of taṣawwuf was that it was the only tolerant system in a world from which tolerance had been ruthlessly outlawed!" (p. 57-58)

The author, however, errs when he believes that the idea of love is a contribution of the Sūfī movement, where, as he says, in course of time "the fear of God was gradually replaced by the love of God, but for a long time both ideas existed side by side in Sūfī circles." (p. 56) The concept of divine love was in fact expounded by the Mu'tazila as a corollary to or rather apogee of their insistence on justice as one of the major attributes of God. This association of justice with love distinguished their concept of 'adl from
that of other religions like the Jewish, where there is otherwise a similar emphasis on
justice. In this context it is important to pay more attention to the transition from the
*i'tizāl* school of thought to *tasawwuf* especially since the key figure, Abū Ḥayyān al-
Tawḥīdī, has been made so easily accessible to modern scholarship through the tireless
efforts of the painstaking editor Ahmad Amīn. There is, of course, no doubt that the
idea of divine love finally crystallised with the pure mystics.

Rashīd Alīmad’s colleagues of the dialectical type will find it hard to swallow so much
of his conclusions, especially when he answers the question posed at the beginning of his
book by saying: “Ṣūfism alone unveils the Beauty of Beauties.” (p. 53) The fact that
this statement comes from one of them, from a theologian who received a thorough training in the traditional disciplines of our Muslim pseudo-clergy, makes the book under
review truly important. Still more significant is the pointer toward what may serve as
orientation for the thinkers among his compatriots who have not yet come to grips
with their national identity: “From his mystical experience, Ibn ‘Arabi emerges as a
Muslim humanist who glorifies man, regardless of his faith and creed, in a way that
is unprecedented in the history of theology.” (p. 81)

Within the purview of his study Rashīd Alīmad (Jallandri) has brought all the rele-
vant material together, has evaluated it critically, and has illuminated it with his own
lifelong knowledge of the Glorious Qur’ān, its language and exegetes. He is lucid and
persuasive as an exponent of the Ṣūfī outlook. Much of what seemed all too esoteric in
its ways and means has become consistent and intelligible in the light of the Holy Scrip-
ture and the personality of the Prophet. The thesis under review, though only brief, is an
exceptionally readable book and must be considered authoritative.

*Detlev Khalid*