God's relation to body and space in the theology of Ibn Taymiyya

Dr. Jon Hoover, University of Nottingham

Abstract

This paper will provide a preliminary exploration and contextualization of Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 728/1328) Bayan talbis al-Jahmiyya, a vast refutation of the book Ta’sis al-taqdis by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606/1210). Al-Razi’s book sets forth the case for the incorporeal and non-spatial existence of God that stood behind the widely followed late-Sunni hermeneutic of either delegating (tafwid) the meaning of texts speaking of God’s hands, sitting on the Throne and the like to God alone or reinterpreting (ta’wil) them in an incorporeal sense. In opposition to al-Razi, Ibn Taymiyya deploys an empiricist epistemology to assert that God must be accessible to the human senses, and he carves out the intellectual space needed to conceive of God as a body with spatial extension even as he resists using the terms ‘body’ and ‘spatial extension’ because they are not found in the Qur’an and the Hadith literature. The paper will examine how Ibn Taymiyya makes his case, focusing especially on the rational aspects of his argument.

Dr. Jon Hoover is Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Nottingham. His publications include Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism (2007), several articles on the theology of Ibn Taymiyya and his foremost student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and essays in Christian-Muslim relations. His current project focuses on Ibn Taymiyya’s interpretation of God’s report-based attributes and his conflict with the dominant Ash‘ari theology of his day.