

Dr Halim Calis

From the One to the Many: Divine Speech, Revelation, and Prophethood in Akbarī Thought

In the Akbarī School of Philosophical Sufism, revelation (*wahy*) is understood not merely as a historical event but as an ontological process—a manifestation of the Divine within the very structure of existence. This ontological framework situates divine revelation as a progressive self-disclosure (*tajallī*) of the Divine Essence through the attribute of *kalām* and the divine name *al-mutakallim*. Following the hierarchical descent through ontological levels (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-khams*), divine speech gradually unfolds from its pre-eternal reality into the perceptible form of the Quran, mirroring the process by which existence emanates from the One into multiplicity in Akbarī ontology.

This paper explores the philosophical implications of Akbarī prophetology, particularly in light of the School's nuanced theory of divine speech and revelation. I analyze how Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240), Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1270), and Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī (d. 1431) conceptualized prophecy within a framework that integrates ontology, epistemology, and spirituality. Central to this discussion is Ibn al-ʿArabī's distinction between *risāla* (messengership) and *wilāyah* (sainthood), a key component of his prophetology developed within the broader metaphysical paradigm of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. This distinction has often been misinterpreted as asserting the superiority of *wilāyah* over *risāla*, leading to accusations of heresy against Ibn al-ʿArabī. However, through closer examination, I argue that he envisioned *risālah* and *wilāyah* as two complementary aspects of prophethood: *wilāyah* represents the Prophet's inherent capacity for divine communication, while *risāla* refers to the externalized manifestation of this capacity in the form of scripture and guidance.

The paper also discusses the contemporary relevance of Akbarī hermeneutics in addressing modern debates on the nature of prophecy and revelation. By reframing revelation as an ontological unfolding rather than a mere historical transmission, Akbarī thought provides a unique epistemological model that bridges traditional Islamic perspectives with contemporary philosophical inquiries into the nature of divine communication. Ultimately, this study contributes to broader discussions on the philosophy of revelation by demonstrating how *waḥdat al-wujūd* informs Islamic prophetology, Quranic hermeneutics, and theological discourse on divine speech. It offers a fresh perspective on how Ibn al-ʿArabī and his intellectual successors engaged with the Quranic text—not merely as scripture but as an extension of Divine Reality itself.



Dr Halim Calis

Respect Graduate School

Halim Calis is Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies at Respect Graduate School in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (USA). He received his PhD from the University of Chicago Divinity School, where he focused on Akbarī hermeneutics in the Quranic commentary of Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī (d. 1431). His research interests include Quranic studies, Sufism, Islamic theology, and Ottoman intellectual history. Dr. Calis regularly publishes in scholarly journals and edited volumes, and he presents at international academic conferences. His current projects include a multi-volume textbook on Quranic Arabic and a critical edition of al-Fanārī's Quranic commentary.