In his provocative book *Iqbal’s Conception of God*, Salman Raschid challenges the received view about Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938)—a poet and philosopher from British India who is generally regarded as the official philosopher of Pakistan—as a great religious thinker. He does this by examining Iqbal’s conception of God as presented in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (hereafter *Reconstruction*), especially in its second chapter. This examination, according to the author, does not vindicate Iqbal as a great religious thinker. The author finds Iqbal wrong in two ways. First, Iqbal draws extravagant conclusions of a metaphysical nature, which lack any solid foundation, from his superficial reading of science and philosophy. Second, Iqbal tries to find support for his intellectual findings in the Qur’an. Thus, he is guilty of misunderstanding both the Western tradition and the Islamic tradition. In addition to this, the author finds a tension between panentheistic and pantheistic conceptions of God in Iqbal. In the final analysis, we are told that “Iqbal has produced no original or independent argumentation.” To put it strongly, we have a picture of a man here who fails to impress as a serious thinker.

This is the book’s second edition, the first having been published in 1981. In the present edition, the author has appended a timeline from the arrival of Islam in India to the establishment of Pakistan and a biographical note on Iqbal, which may be helpful to the reader. The substantial part remains the same. The book has three sections: the first deals with the Western tradition and the second with the Islamic tradition, and the third, which is very brief, tries to go beyond Iqbal. The writing style is similar to that of a dissertation; the treatment is piecemeal and brief with occasional repetitions.

The author begins with a summary of Iqbal’s treatment of the scholastic arguments for the existence of God. These arguments are shown by Iqbal to be logically inadequate on several accounts. Very briefly, the cosmological argument goes from the finite to the infinite, the teleological argument is consistent, with a finite external designer, and the ontological argument begs the question. Iqbal maintains that these arguments fail to prove the existence of God because they assume the disunity of thought and being, and are not sensitive to the distinction between the finite and the infinite. According to the author, these themes assume Hegelian epistemology and ontology. The unity of thought and being can be fully appreciated, according to Iqbal, if and only if one examines and interprets experience in the light of the Qur’an. The author finds this to be problematic on two accounts, one philosophical and the other religious. On the philosophical side, this approach is not consistent with Hegel. Here Iqbal is trying to prove Hegelian ontology, we are told, with a method that is characteristically anti-Hegelian. Iqbal, therefore, is guilty of distortion. On the religious
account, Iqbal is accused of misinterpreting the Qur’an. The interpretation of experience allowed Iqbal to delve into science, but the author questions Iqbal’s understanding of the subject; he is criticized for not having a proper understanding of Einstein, Whitehead, and Bergson.

The author does not find much support for Iqbal’s view of God in traditional Islamic thought. Here he takes al-Ghazali and Abul Kalam Azad as the key thinkers and goes on to show that Iqbal’s conception of God is very different from theirs, and, as mentioned above, Iqbal has been criticized for not being careful in quoting the Qur’an. The author succinctly employs the conception of God held by al-Ghazali and Abul Kalam, in which anthropomorphism is rejected and His Transcendence is affirmed—with an underscore on His Uniqueness, making it clear that God need not be construed in any way similar to us or His Creations. One would have thought that Iqbal’s conception of God would agree with this in principle if not in detail. The author argues that Iqbal has a finite conception of God, and his position is described as panentheistic. There are some references, though, which presuppose pantheism as well. A more in-depth discussion of this issue would have been greatly beneficial here. This is especially important in the light of Iqbal’s rejection of pantheistic Sufism.

One would also have liked to see a discussion of how Iqbal’s claim regarding the infinite creativity of God coincides with his finite conception.

The author has rigorously argued his case and has made some important observations and criticisms of Iqbal with respect to science, philosophy, and traditional Islamic thought. However, one feels that he has not been sensitive to Iqbal’s overall program. At the core of Iqbal’s thought is the idea of the primacy of experience. Whatever the merit of this position, Iqbal sees experience to be the primary source of knowledge, whether it is knowledge of the world or knowledge of God. So, in a manner of speaking, Iqbal is seeing how science should be taken from a religious perspective, as well as attempting a reconstruction of religious thought from the Islamic perspective. As far as the former is concerned, Iqbal tries to show that nature needs to be seen as reflecting the “habits of God” and not in terms of causal relations only. As far as the latter is concerned, Iqbal makes it clear that religion is based on direct experience. Raschid’s Hegelian interpretation of Iqbal is based mainly on his analysis of the second chapter of Iqbal’s Reconstruction. Before dealing with the scholastic arguments, Iqbal has made it clear that religion is based on direct experience. In his discussions of the scholastic arguments, he tried to move from the cause-effect relationship to a person-habit one, from designer-designed to person-purpose, and from an ideal (logical)-real dualism to a person-consciousness relation (p. 122). The transformation from the former to the latter is essentially a transformation from a mechanistic standpoint to a more person-oriented standpoint that can be appreciated in experience. Thus, far from basing his conception of God on Hegelian metaphysics and epistemology and using experience as a clue to validate this approach, Iqbal may be seen to have done exactly the opposite. His discussions of science and Western philosophers may be seen in the light of his own comment on page 2 of Reconstruction, where he says that the ages of faith are the ages of rationalism. In his system, serious religious thought needs to consider the developments in science and philosophy.
As far as the gap between Iqbal and traditional orthodoxy is concerned, a number of things need to be taken into account.

1. It is true that Iqbal does not follow the traditional ways of Qur’anic exegesis, yet this does not, by itself, render him a non-serious thinker. (This needs to be seen in the light of his overall outlook.)

2. The conception of God as Unique, Transcendent, and unlike any other is not inconsistent with Iqbal’s thought.

3. Despite a well-argued position in favor of panentheism and a finite conception of deity, Iqbal talks about God’s infinite creativity.

4. In the concluding paragraph of the book, which is also the conclusion of the last part, the author says that “The knowledge of God granted in Revelation is understood, and partially confirmed by Reason, but its full nature is disclosed adequately in the many verities of religious experience” (pp. 112–113). This seems consistent with Iqbal’s overall project.

There is an interesting point made by Raschid on page 111: “Thus, for the Muslim, God reveals himself in the Quran (the Word becomes Book), and for the Christian, God reveals himself in Christ (the Word becomes Flesh).” Though he himself maintains that this does not necessarily prove the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, this seems to be the biggest concession in favor of incarnation that one could expect from a committed Muslim.

It may also be observed that the author has set aside Iqbal’s other works while dealing with his conception of God. It may be argued that a study of Iqbal’s poetical works from the same period in which he was involved with Reconstruction could have provided some insight in this discussion. This is particularly important since there is a well-argued position that there is an internal consistency in Reconstruction and a parallel between Reconstruction and Javidnama.

By critically examining Iqbal’s conception of God, the author has given us a new perspective on Iqbal. Though the book is brief, it is a good addition to the literature on Iqbal, which does not always offer a critical analysis of Iqbal’s thought.


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In world philosophy, philosophical movements in Turkey are an ignored area. Until recent times, most world histories, or general surveys of world civilization, while exploring a vast area of the globe and many cultures, have sometimes ignored entire regions. In this context, Ian S. Markham makes a very good contribution to this field. His subject is Said Nursi, in his new study Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: A Model of Interfaith Dialogue. For Markham, “Nursi’s thought has challenged Christian theology in a way that invites us to tap into an aspect of our tradition that many contemporary theologians are too quick to dismiss” (p. 41).