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Al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī:

A dā‘iyah caught between
traditionalism and modernity

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Islamic Studies

2013

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Declaration for PhD thesis

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ABSTRACT

Shaykh Muhammad Al-Ghazali (1917-1996) was one of the most influential figures of twentieth century Islamic activism. He was an Azharite who embodied the traditional teachings of Al-Azhar and was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood until his expulsion in 1954. He described himself as a *dā'iyyah*, while his followers considered him a thinker and reformer. His career has spanned more than half a century during which he wrote more than sixty books covering many aspects of Islamic thought, mainly the dilemma faced by Muslims in modern times due to their lack of understanding of the sources of their religion. This thesis will show how al-Ghazali presented his critique of the Muslim mind, and explore as well as analyse his life, the forces that shaped and exposed him to the issues he would later tackle, the development of thematic interpretation of the Qur'ān and his contribution to this field through his thematic commentary of the Qur'ān. His views on *sunna* is examined as well as the way he re-evaluated certain *aḥādīth* considered by the *muḥaddithūn* as sound, thus putting him at odds with *salafī* forces in Saudi Arabia. Al-Ghazali's views on theology, namely *kalām*, Sufism, *salafīyya*, the place of reason in Islam, issues concerning women and their rights in Islam, as well as his views on women's participation in public life, their political rights, women's testimony and the status of Muslim women's marriages to non-Muslims will also be looked at. This thesis explores how al-Ghazali revised his ideas over time to take into account the events unfolding before him and developments in the world, as well as in reflection of his own maturity as a thinker. It propounds the view that with the advent of the recent Arab Spring his outlook is now needed more than ever before.

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DEDICATION

For my father Khalid, my mother Nawwal, my mother-in-law Kartina, my sons Bilaal and Baasil, and my wife Adlin. In memory of my late father-in-law, Adnan.

IJMES TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM FOR ARABIC, PERSIAN, AND TURKISH

CONSONANTS

A = Arabic, P = Persian, OT = Ottoman Turkish, MT = Modern Turkish

	A	P	OT	MT		A	P	OT	MT		A	P	OT	MT
ء	ʔ	ʔ	ʔ	—	ز	z	z	z	z	ك	k	k or g	k or ñ	k or n
ب	b	b	b	b or p	ژ	—	zh	j	j				or y	or y
پ	—	p	p	p	س	s	s	s	s				or ğ	or ğ
ت	t	t	t	t	ش	sh	sh	ş	ş	گ	—	g	g	g
ث	th	s	s	s	ص	ʔ	ʔ	ʔ	s	ل	l	l	l	l
ج	j	j	c	c	ض	ʔ	z	z	z	م	m	m	m	m
چ	—	ch	ç	ç	ط	ʔ	ʔ	ʔ	t	ن	n	n	n	n
ح	ʔ	ʔ	ʔ	h	ظ	ʔ	ʔ	ʔ	z	ه	h	h	h ¹	h ¹
خ	kh	kh	h	h	ع	ʔ	ʔ	ʔ	—	و	w	v or u	v	v
د	d	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	g or ğ	g or ğ	ي	y	y	y	y
ذ	dh	z	z	z	ف	f	f	f	f	ة	a ²			
ر	r	r	r	r	ق	q	q	ʔ	k	ال	³			

¹When h is not final. ²In construct state: at. ³For the article, al- and -l-.

VOWELS

ARABIC AND PERSIAN

OTTOMAN AND MODERN TURKISH

<i>Long</i>	ā or	آ ā	ā { words of Arabic
	ū	و ū	{ and Persian
	ī	ي ī	{ origin only

<i>Doubled</i>	īy (final form ī)	يِ īy (final form ī)
	ūw (final form ū)	وِ ūw

<i>Diphthongs</i>	au or aw	اَوْ au	ev
	ai or ay	اِي ai	ey

<i>Short</i>	a	ا a	a or e
	u	و u	u or ü / o or ö
	i	ي i	i or i

For Ottoman Turkish, authors may either transliterate or use the modern Turkish orthography.

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INTRODUCTION

Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazali (1916-1996) was one of the most influential figures of the Islamic movement of the twentieth century. He was an Azharite who, in his life and thought, embodied the ideal of this renowned school of learning. A Muslim activist and a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, he left a huge body of work which includes books, speeches and newspaper articles. During the closing stage of his life al-Ghazali, along with others, came to represent a new tide of thinking within the Islamic movement in Egypt in the face of a more fundamental and radical interpretation of Islam. His ideas regarding the rule of text and method of interpretation were subject to continuous debate amongst the moderates and militant camp alike.

More than fifteen years after his death, al-Ghazali's work and ideas continue to elicit debates and engender controversy in many Islamic circles. To his disciples he was a *mujaddid* (reformer) and a Muslim modernist who followed the traditions of the Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905) school of thought. However, to his opponents he was an anti-*sunna* figure and a leading rationalist (‘*aqlānī*). He tried, throughout his life, to navigate his way through many channels by assuming the role of *dā‘iyah*, scholar, Islamic activist and critic of modern Muslims and their practices.

Al-Ghazali exerted a huge influence on generations of Muslim youths and activists, and established his voice through his literary legacy although he never held a prestigious post that would give him religious authority. Neither was he ever appointed as Rector of Al-Azhar. His time as an activist within the Muslim Brotherhood was cut short when he was expelled from the movement in 1953 despite being an office bearer of high rank. Nevertheless, the influence of al-Ghazali stems from his dedication to the causes he set

himself up to defend, and his emotional and fierce attacks on those who claimed to represent Islam such as governments, the *'ulamā'* and some of the Islamic movements.

The importance of al-Ghazali's works lies in their emphasis on the need to revisit Muslim traditions and purge them from "unhealthy" ideas which have accumulated through centuries of stagnation. In line with what most modern Muslim reformers have done before him, al-Ghazali made efforts to locate the essence of Islam which seemed to him to be buried under the rubble of ignorance, bigotry, blind imitation and intellectual shallowness. It is unfair at this stage to speak of his "project" as one which is rooted in the past because he was, as his works indicate, concerned with the present. He has often said in his books that Islam faces challenges both internally and externally. According to him, it is the internal challenge that poses a grave threat to the religion and its future.¹ He would usually present the external challenge in the context of Muslim defeat and loss of fortune on many different fronts in the modern world.

Since his death, al-Ghazali has been the subject of many studies mainly in Arabic. These studies cover most aspects of his thought such as his views on *sunna*, exegeses, *da'wa* (proselytization), and his literary output and reform ideas. In addition to the many books written about him, either during his life or after his death, are all the studies discussed below which form a body of literature of various academic merit. These post-graduate studies are a recognition of his legacy and achievements. In the Western world, al-Ghazali is recognized as a Muslim fundamentalist, a moderate scholar and a Muslim Brotherhood ideologue. His works are usually debated in the context of the Islamic movement and Islamic activism. It

¹ Al-Ghazali, *Qadhā'if al-Ḥaqq*, p.7.

would appear that al-Ghazali's works, as with most Islamists,² are merited by association with a particular group or trend rather than as being representative of the activist himself.

There are calls in recent years from some experts on political Islam to review the old assumption about the aims of the Islamists who, according to the old understanding, are engaged in a battle to implement the *sharīʿa*, and wish to recreate the Golden Age of Islam. Some, such as Ibrahim Abu Rabi', believe that the core concern of the Islamists is rooted in the present even though the Muslim past figures heavily in their writings.³ Dina Abdelkader identifies activists such as Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī and Rachid Ghannouchi among others as "Populist Islamists". She defines them as Islamic political leaders who are engaged in dialogue with their respective societies. She goes on to say that in their writings and political expression, these activists are "the interpreters of civil grievances and definers of the ideal governance".⁴

If one were to apply this understanding to al-Ghazali it would be seen that he, from the beginning of his life as a popular Islamist, was not only engaged in the problems of his society in Egypt be it political, moral or social, but also with the fate of Muslims everywhere. Understanding al-Ghazali through this definition does him more justice than looking at him as a preacher who represents what Emmanuel Sivan calls the "conservative periphery" in which he describes powerful preachers in Egypt such as Muḥammad Mutawālī Sha'rāwī (1911-1998), 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Kishk (1933-1996), Aḥmad al-Maḥalāwī (b.1925) as well as al-Ghazali himself. They, according to him, "share basic beliefs with the hardcore and

² The term "Islamists" is commonly used to describe the activists in Islamic movements, social and/or political. It is also used by some as a parallel to the word "fundamentalists". See Edmund Burke, "Islam and Social Movements: Methodological Reflections" in *Islam, Politics and Social Movements*, edited by Edmund Burke III and Ira M. Lapidus, I. B. Tauris, London, 1988, pp.17-37. Also, Charles Kurzman and Ijlal Naqvi tried to provide an answer to the question, "Who are the Islamists?" in Carl W. Ernest and Richard Martin, *Rethinking Islamic Studies: from Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, The University of South California Press, 2010, pp.133-134.

³ Ibrahim Abu Rabi', *The Contemporary Arab Reader On Political Islam*, Pluto Press, London, 2010, p.ix

⁴ Dina Abdlkader, *Islamic Activists: The Anti-Enlightenment Democrats*, Pluto Press, London, 2010, p.8.

collaborate with various realms of life".⁵ Sivan's definition does not take into account the differences between those *khuṭabā'* or scholars who used the *minbar* (pulpit) to call for the overthrow of the government or to support it. Al-Ghazali was not merely a "cassette preacher" as described by Hirschkind who used the term "Islamic counterpublic" for those preachers who used cassette tapes and whose faces adorn their covers. On the contrary, al-Ghazali was also a serious scholar and debater.⁶

On the intellectual level, al-Ghazali was engaged in a debate with forces within Islam and sought to keep the religion away from incompatible foreign ideologies. It is this internal battle that would consume his intellectual energies. At this level al-Ghazali's works are full of self-criticism and are a call for the proper understanding of the sacred text – the Qur'ān. According to al-Ghazali the proper *fiqh* of the Qur'ān will lead to a proper understanding of the *ḥadīth* and other *sharī'a* sources. By placing emphasis on the Qur'ān, al-Ghazali was trying to highlight the role that reason can play in understanding religious text, and hence continuing the tradition of rational thinking in Islam.

Reason and scientific revolution figure heavily in al-Ghazali's writings. Muslim decline is often linked to the absence of Muslim participation in the field of scientific investigation and exploration of the universe. Al-Ghazali, more than any other Muslim scholar of his generation, celebrated modern discoveries and called for the revival of rational thinking in Islam, so long as it is preconditioned and conforms to Qur'ānic principles. Through the emphasis on reason al-Ghazali was able to criticize and evaluate Muslim understanding of the religion. His main concern was the literalist understanding of the religion, which in turn

⁵ Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1985, p.130

⁶ Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2006, pp.6-8.

led to a ritualistic form of religiosity (*tadayun*). His battles with representatives of this trend are well known, and he did not conceal his disagreement with them.

Al-Ghazali also attacked Sufi practices and the Westernised elites in the Arab world. As will become clear in the course of this dissertation, his criticism of the Sufis hovered between condemnation and appreciation. However, it never amounted to total rejection. Conversely, his criticism of Western modernity and Western minded Muslim intellectuals is characterized by a polemic tone. Al-Ghazali in his life and in his books at times appears as an enlightened scholar who celebrates reason and reform while also appearing in other instances as conservative and uncompromising. The way that he vacillated between these two poles gave al-Ghazali the opportunity to claim at being both a *salafi* and a modernist. However, some might accuse him of double-speak, but this would depend on how al-Ghazali understood the meaning of modernism and *salafiyya* – whether or not they are two sides of the same coin. This thesis will endeavour to address such questions.

Aims and objectives

This study seeks to examine al-Ghazali's views on some problematic issues which recur not only in his writings, but were a hallmark of twentieth century Muslim thought. The difference between al-Ghazali and his contemporaries lies in emphasis, scope and reference point. Al-Ghazali's point of reference was his activism and daily engagement with the problems of his time.

We aim to highlight the way in which al-Ghazali presented his critique of the Muslim mind; and explore as well as analyse his life, the forces that shaped and exposed him to the issues he would later tackle, the development of thematic interpretation of the Qur'ān and his contribution to this field through his thematic commentary of the Qur'ān. This thesis will show that despite undergoing phases of radicalism, al-Ghazali remained faithful to his

Azharite roots in that he reflected the spirit of Islamic reform heralded by Muslim intellectuals such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā. He also continued the traditions of reform of the eminent scholars of the Great Mosque (Al-Azhar) such as Maḥmūd Shaltūt and others. Most of them continued the traditions of the Abduh reform school.

This study is an attempt to understand al-Ghazali's achievements and failures in the light of the social and political forces that helped to shape him. From very early on al-Ghazali's writings carried the germ of reform. He may be studied as a representative of what may be termed the "neo-*salafīs*", meaning the second generation of intellectuals who promoted the ideal of the early *salafī*.⁷ The issues which occupied intellectual modernists are all related to the impact of modernity on the Muslim mind and Muslim communities in general. They tried to tackle issues ranging from the relation between Islam and science, education, the status of women to reformation of the state and legal systems.

Further, our aim is to show that al-Ghazali was a *dā’iyah* who was caught between traditionalism and modernity. By this we mean he worked hard to emphasise the importance of Islamic sources and protect them from any form of misinterpretation on the one hand, and on the other to encourage their interpretation in the spirit of modern times. Once again what we mean is that al-Ghazali was caught between the two impulses of Islamic thought in his life and work – the literal or traditional impulse and the modern impulse which seeks to revive the role of reason in interpreting the sources. We believe that the tension between these two forces presented al-Ghazali with a challenge that he sought to address. He

⁷ Rahman referred to these early *salafīs* as the "Intellectual Modernists", a term he used to differentiate between them and a group of Muslim scholars from the early reform movements of the eighteenth century whom he termed as the "Pre-Modernists". They include the Sanūsī Sufi Order, ‘Uthmān bin Fodī of Nigeria and Moḥammad Ahmed al-Mahdī of Sudan. See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of Intellectual Tradition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984.

emphasised the significance of reason, thus making it worthwhile for us to understand its role in shaping his outlook.

In addition, as al-Ghazali often claimed that he is an independent minded scholar and a man who charted his own views through careful reading of Islamic texts, this study will show through the analysis of his work that he was faithful to what he termed as his "own school" despite having great respect for the founders of the main schools of *fiqh* and other illustrious figures in Islamic scholarship.

In order to check the validity of these assumptions we will examine al-Ghazali's views on some important issues which shaped his thought and made him a controversial figure and a reformist voice among the Islamists. It should be noted here that al-Ghazali kept the young generation of the Islamic revival movements always in his mind when writing most of his books, although the term "Islamic movement" is loose for it could also mean a specific Islamic movement such as the Muslim Brotherhood (which al-Ghazali continued to have relations with after he was expelled) as well as the general mood which dominated Islamic activism in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat. In this respect his works are the works of a *dā'iyyah*. This, however, is not to say that he was a popular preacher partial to using emotional language suited to the moods and the feelings of the congregation. Rather, al-Ghazali's works display a deep knowledge of Islamic law, *ḥadīth* and theology. Despite this he was not qualified in some circles to be an *'ālim* in a specific sense. It is this situation, problematic as it may be, that will be highlighted in this thesis.

Al-Ghazali's books

Al-Ghazali started writing essays in the late 1930s for the magazine called *Muslim Brotherhood*, an official publication by that movement, and his first book was published in 1947. This was, in effect, the start of his career as a writer. He would continue to publish and

write for magazines and newspapers throughout his life, producing more than sixty-two books covering a wide range of topics.⁸ His interests ranged from *ḥadīth* to *tafsīr*, theology, politics, ethics and Sufism. His books are a testament of Egyptian cultural life in the twentieth century. They document Muslim affairs as well as Islamic activism, and reflect the concerns of Muslim scholars in the twentieth century. However, al-Ghazali's books also pose a challenge for researchers as most of them are a collection of articles which he published in newspapers and magazines, or lectures he delivered during conferences. It is because of this that they defy categorization.

Although some of al-Ghazali's books are devoted to one topic, others contain a mixture of issues. This is somewhat problematic as it usually means that one would have to read a great many of his books, if not all of them, in order to follow his thought process. A book on *sunna*, for example, may contain discussions on women's issues, politics and economics.⁹ This is because al-Ghazali utilised articles he had written earlier to develop a book on a certain issue by including them. Al-Ghazali's essays often start with a particular topic after which he would move on to discuss others. It is therefore difficult to draw a list of his books according to subject matter. However, if one were to take the titles of his books as a lead, one may then be able to compile a list of his books in such a manner.

Another problem related to the categorization of his books is the date of the publication of each of them. Al-Ghazali rarely dated the completion of his books, and it was left to the publishers to do so. The situation is complicated by the fact that many of his books were

⁸ The list drawn up includes books compiled from his articles either by his disciples or with his approval, such as the series of his sermons which was published and edited by Quṭb Muḥammad Quṭb.

⁹ Muḥammad Waqī' Allah thinks that this is not a sign of weakness on al-Ghazali's part. Rather, it is something good as it gives readers of al-Ghazali's books a comprehensive insight into his thought – which is organic – that is connected to the political, economic, cultural, educational and spiritual aspects of Islam. See "Malāmiḥ al-Fikr al-Siyāsi li'l-Shaykh al-Ghazālī" in *Islāmīyat alMa'rifah*, IIIT, (January 1997) Vol. 7, pp.107-108.

published in several editions and by different publishing houses in Egypt,¹⁰ Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Qatar and Kuwait. It is therefore difficult to list his books in chronological order when it is important to do so as it would enable the development of his thought and the shift of his interest in each phase of his intellectual life to be followed. An attempt is made to compile a list based on the Library of Congress collection, the list compiled by *Islāmīyat alMa'rifah*, reading al-Ghazali's books in order to find clues and various other lists (some complete and others not) compiled by different researchers or publishers. Based on this, al-Ghazali's works is then divided into seven categories:

1. Qur'ānic studies,
2. *ḥadīth* studies,
3. political thought,
4. *da'wa* and Islamic revivalism,
5. theology and Sufism,
6. current affairs, and
7. general books on Islam and Muslims.

These categories do not indicate a clear-cut division as one finds them all in one title or in his other books which contain his essays and sermons. These latter are compiled by his students either during or after his lifetime. As the list indicates, al-Ghazali in the first phase of his career was interested in freedom, tyranny, social justice and the corruption of the social and political life in Egypt. This is perhaps easier to understand if the political milieu and his experiences during the monarchy as well as after the Free Officers' revolution of 1952 are taken into consideration. During this period al-Ghazali was an activist and an angry

¹⁰ It is noted that Dār al-Shurūq, which publishes some of his book, has its own dates for the first and the second editions etc.

young man who had experienced prison life. He lived the euphoria of the revolution and the disillusionment that followed.

In the sixties and early seventies, which is effectively the second phase of his career, al-Ghazali was concerned with confronting modern ideologies such as socialism, pan-Arabism, secularism and cultural invasion (*al-ghazw al-thaqāfī*) as well as their impact on Islam and Muslims. During the third phase of his career in the 1970s and early 1980s, al-Ghazali was concerned with Islamic revivalism (*ṣaḥwa*). The fourth and last of these phases, from the late 1980s until his death, saw his preoccupation with issues concerning the moderation of Islamic revivalism, Islamisation of knowledge and the rethinking of women's status in Islam, and witnessed the publication of his most provocative books. According to Kamāl al-Ṭāhir, al-Ghazali concentrated on writing articles from the late 1930s until the 1960s. In the 1970s he started to concentrate on writing books on a specific subject rather than producing collections of his articles and compiling books. Al-Ghazali continued in this vein until his death, although he returned to writing in newspapers – especially those published in Egypt or published by Saudi publishing houses – at some point before he died.¹¹ Al-Ṭāhir may be right, but by characterizing al-Ghazali's early works as mainly journalistic he overlooks other books such as *Fiqh al-Sīra* and *‘Aqīdāt al-Muslim* which were not based on journalistic material.

Any attempt to arrange his work in a chronological order risks leaving many issues unaccounted for, and it is not a sufficient tool with which to understand the main strands of his thought because al-Ghazali's intellectual life did not witness a gradual development of one phase into another. Rather, they seem to overlap. In terms of maturity, it may be easy to assume that his last books contained his more mature thoughts. However, this is not the case

¹¹ Kamāl al-Ṭāhir in the introduction to *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 4, Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, Cairo, 2002, pp.4-6.

as some of his best books were published early during his career and others during the middle of his career as well as late in his life.

Al-Ghazali produced books that vary in their quality. Some are apologetic in nature, others journalistic and emotional, while others still are well planned and well executed. Al-Ghazali also wrote scholarly books which are both critical and provocative. These often provoked debate, criticism and condemnation from various religious circles. It is in them that al-Ghazali expressed his authoritative voice and displayed a deep understanding of Islamic sources. As he was writing for a general readership, he did not work laboriously on referencing or attributing quotations to their authors. In most cases referencing is done either by his publisher or the editors of his books. One final comment relates to the terminology al-Ghazali employed in his writing. He liked to suggest or use new and different terms, especially Islamic ones. For example, he did not see any harm in using the word *'aṭīfī* (emotional) to describe the Sufi experience. When it comes to Western concepts, he often confused them with (other) Islamic concepts (such as the way he used the term "democracy" in his books). He also had an early enthusiasm for socialism (*'ishtirākīyya*).¹²

Faced with this situation it was decided in most cases to identify the main books in each topic and use them as representative of his thoughts on the issue. This effort involved consulting most of his books. The only exception is *ḥadīth*. A decision was made to pin down his views on this issue by following his thoughts throughout his books rather than by just depending on his famous book *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*.

¹² Later he acknowledged that he was mistaken in using the term, because he thought that there was no contradiction between socialism and Islam. However, the Arab socialists wanted socialism without religion. Al-Ghazali was not alone in this belief. The leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī wrote a book titled "*Ishtirākīyyat al-Islam*". See *Al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya fi 'l-Qarn al-Ḥāfī*, pp.100-101, and *Min Khuṭab al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 1, pp.221-222.

Research Material

The study will consult al-Ghazali's major works – a journey through more than fifty books he wrote as well as his numerous published sermons and newspaper articles. It will utilise a number of works to examine al-Ghazali the man and his intellectual world. This thesis will highlight his major controversial works that marked a shift from his political and social approach to the dilemmas faced by Muslim nations in the twentieth century. Major works on Islam and the West, and the works of his contemporaries as well as the works of modern Muslim activists and intellectuals will also be consulted.

A comparative approach will be adopted throughout this study by following the development of his thought and comparing his early ideas with what he later adopted, as well as by comparing and contextualising his ideas and attitudes with that of his contemporaries from within the Islamist camp and those of his teachers and others who influenced him – such as ‘Abduh and Shaltūt – to show his loyalty to his Azharite roots and that he was independent minded. This will be examined in the chapter devoted to his views on women and theology that charts the development of his thoughts on these problematic issues which we believe to be the hallmark of twentieth century Muslim thought. His ideas will be contextualised within his life and times, and compared with the writings of other Islamists and Azharite scholars.

In addition, his work on *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* will be analysed in the light of developments pertaining to *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū‘ī* (thematic interpretation) and *matn* criticism of *ḥadīth*. We will highlight his lengthy experimentation in the field of *tafsīr* to show how he lauded the role of reason while keeping the essence of the sources close at heart.

This study will also analyse and discuss the social, political and intellectual forces that helped in the shaping and making of the modern scholar. This will be discussed in the

chapter on his life where we will try to show how his experiences, activism and relationship with the political establishment were shaped until his death in 1996 by the events in Egypt either between the two Great World Wars or after the Free Officers Revolution of 1952.

Review of the literature

The interest in al-Ghazali's works and life stems from the fact that his latest writings challenge some of the existing norms and perceptions, especially of the role of tradition and hermeneutics exegesis, of the Qur'ān and *sunna*. Al-Ghazali's writings on the status of women and on the *sunna* have earned him the ire of certain circles. The followers of Wahhābīsm in Saudi Arabia organised many seminars and published many refutations to correct what they saw as the misrepresentation of prophetic traditions. The literature available on al-Ghazali may be divided into two categories:

- i. academic studies; and
- ii. non-academic studies.¹³

Academic studies

As said earlier, al-Ghazali is the subject of many studies in works submitted to universities or published by research centres. However, there is only one PhD dissertation in English on him that has been submitted.¹⁴ The submission was made in 1999 to Georgetown University in the United States of America. This dissertation concentrates on the genesis and

¹³ Some of these titles are included in Appendix (2) which tries to give a full picture of what has been published on al-Ghazali.

¹⁴ A search was made of PhD databases of universities and reputable libraries in Britain such as the British Library. Electronic Theses Online Services (ETHOS), the Library of Congress in the United States and universities Malaysia were also consulted, and it was established that the above is the only such thesis to date to have been submitted to a Western academy. Some of the Arabic theses are included in the list of books on al-Ghazali in the appendix mentioned in footnote (13) above.

evolution of Islamic legal traditions. The author, Haifa Khalafallah pays much attention to the phases of al-Ghazali's life and the transformation that occurred at each stage.

Khalafallah's work is an assessment of al-Ghazali's life as an activist and a preacher, with special attention given to the impact of the Muslim Brotherhood on him. The rest of her dissertation is devoted to examining al-Ghazali's legal outlook. The author bases her analysis on the primary sources, i.e. his books and articles, and the interviews that he gave. Hers is the first serious attempt to assess and examine the value of his achievements. Her study indicates the kind of transformations that occurred during his life. She notes that many of his critics could not – or would not – understand his actual contributions, and that they would often only select bits and pieces from his writings. His critics could not grasp why a writer who produced a piece of text in the 1950s would then change or review its contents in the 1990s. Khalafallah does make a very good presentation of the life and work of al-Ghazali. Her decision to tackle one aspect of his work means that the door is still open for further examination of the other aspects of his career. Her thesis is of value to this current work in terms of his life and the evolution of his ideas. Furthermore, she was able to bring into her thesis material this current thesis is not able to look at.¹⁵

Another study is the one by Daniel Brown who examines among others, al-Ghazali's views on *ḥadīth* (prophetic traditions). The novelty of the approach suggested by al-Ghazali is that more attention is paid to the text of the tradition (*matn*) than to the chain of narrators (*sanad*). He was more concerned with the legal and semantic implications of tradition on legal matters than the authenticity of the *ḥadīth* itself. Brown notes that unlike Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī who took a pragmatic stance, al-Ghazali pressed ahead with his views which

¹⁵ Haifa Khalafallah, *Re-thinking Islamic Law: Genesis and Revolution in the Islamic Method and Structure. The Case Study of a 20th Century 'Alim's Journey Into His Legal Tradition, Muḥammad al-Ghazali (1917-1996)*, a PhD thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University in 1999.

eventually earned him the criticism of the conservative camp.¹⁶ The same examination of his approach is found in Abou El-Fadhl's work.¹⁷ Needless to say, this current examination of al-Ghazali's views on *sunna* benefits from Brown's study.

Raymond William Baker, on his part, considers al-Ghazali to be amongst others who represent the New Islamists (*Wasatiyya*). He describes this new Islamic trend and its representatives as a group that thrives on dialogue and democracy, which is quite unlike what he believes to be ignorant militants. The group emerged in the 1980s and the 1990s as a trend with a manifesto as most of its members, such as al-Ghazali, al-Qaraḍāwī and Aḥmad Kamāl Abū al-Majd, were either affiliated or ex-members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Baker acknowledges that the representatives of this school are virtually unknown or unheard of in the West.¹⁸ Baker's analysis, especially his assessment of al-Ghazali's famous book *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, is relevant to this study.

There are many studies in Arabic which were submitted to universities especially in Egypt, Algeria, Jordan and Malaysia. They vary from one to another in terms of academic merit. Among these works, this study has benefited from that by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Fataḥ Fatūḥ. Although he examines the concepts of democracy and *shūrā* (consultation) in al-Ghazali's thought, his work also adds to the understanding of the political forces that shaped al-Ghazali's life. Others such as Ramaḍān al-Khamīs, who examined al-Ghazali's contribution to *tafsīr*, give a good insight on how al-Ghazali approached the Qur'ān. This is relevant to this thesis, especially to Chapters Two and Three.¹⁹

¹⁶Daniel Brown, *Re-thinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

¹⁷ Khaled Abou El-Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2001.

¹⁸ Raymond Baker, *Islam Without Fear in Egypt and the New Islamists*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2003.

¹⁹ MA thesis submitted to Al-Azhar University (published in 2003).

It is worth mentioning here that most of the academic works (in Arabic), such as the ones cited previously, choose one aspect of his thought to examine. Little wonder then that a degree of repetition is detected in them all. Another type of writing on al-Ghazali is the collection of proceedings of conferences on his life and thought, such as the one edited by Fathī Malkāwī.²⁰ Additionally the journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), or *Islāmīyat alMa'rifah*, devoted a special issue on al-Ghazali upon his death with contributions from many eminent scholars.²¹ These materials have been included in this category because they contain some serious pieces about his thought, some of which are referred to in this thesis. Laṭīfa Al-Kinderī and Badr Mālik's paper, *Tarbiyat al-Mar'a min Manzūr al-Ghazālī* is useful to the current analysis of al-Ghazali's views on women's education.²² Ibrahim Abu Rabi's chapter on al-Ghazali and Muslim self-criticism is important in terms of the evolution of al-Ghazali's thought after the 1967 defeat. He devotes one chapter to examining al-Ghazali's ideas as representative of what he calls "Muslim self-criticism in contemporary Arab thought".²³

Al-Ghazali's name is often mentioned in books on political Islam.²⁴ Writers in this field vary in their treatment of al-Ghazali. According to Ayubi, al-Ghazali represents a militant trend in the Muslim Brotherhood after Ḥasan al-Bannā's death in 1949. Ayubi contends that the movement lost its coherence after al-Bannā, which led to the ascendancy of a radical trend expressed by Sayyid Quṭb and al-Ghazali.²⁵ Although the books of the French scholar

²⁰ Fathī Malkāwī, (ed.), *Al-'Aṭā' al-Fikrī li'l-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, IIIT, Herdon, 1997.

²¹ *Islāmīyat alMa'rifah*, Vol. FI, No. 7, 1997.

²² Laṭīfa Al-Kinderī and Badr Mālik, "Tarbiyyat al-Mar'a Min Manzūr Al-Ghazālī", *Majallat al-'Ulūm al-Tarbawīyya*, Cairo University, Vol. 4, 2003.

²³ Ibrahim Abu Rabi, *Contemporary Arab Thought Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History*, London, Pluto Press, 2003.

²⁴ James Piscatori (ed.), *Islam in the Political Process*, Cambridge University Press, 1983 and *Islam in the World of Nation States*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986.

²⁵ Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, Routledge, London, 1991. Ahmed Moussili, *Historical Dictionary of Islamic Fundamentalist Movements in the Arab World, Iran and Turkey*, Lanham Ma, Scarecrow, London, 1999, and John Cooper, Ron Nettler and Muḥammad Mahmud (eds.), 2000, *Islam and Modernity, Muslim Intellectuals Respond*, I. B. Tauris, London.

Gilles Kepel are of a journalistic nature, his analysis of "political Islam" is accepted by academics. He often associates al-Ghazali with the petro-dollar and the Saudis. He states that al-Ghazali and the 'ulamā' who represent this school saw themselves as the state's ideological rampart against religious extremism, and they sought to gain advancement of their status from this role.²⁶ There is a scathing reference to al-Ghazali in some books on Islam and modernity. The editors of *Islam and Modernity* state that, "Muḥammad al-Ghazali, a former member of the *Ikhwan*, feels that he can accept certain elements of the modern West, but very selectively." This is in the context of Muslim intellectual responses to modernity.

Among the critics of al-Ghazali is Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, who singled him out in his book *Dawā'ir al-Khawuf*²⁷ and Khalil Ali Ḥaydar,²⁸ who included al-Ghazali in his assessment of the attitudes of moderate Islamists with regard to women. Both books are useful in this discussion of al-Ghazali's view on women.

Non-academic studies

Books in this category are mostly in Arabic. One is therefore not short of material on al-Ghazali. In this group, one can discern two moods of writing on al-Ghazali. One is critical of him and comes from the Wahhābī camp, mainly Saudi scholars from religious establishments as well as those close to the political establishment who launched a fierce attack on al-Ghazali. They accuse him of distorting the *sunna*. Examples of this mood may be found in the critical writings of Salmān al-'Aūda and Rabī' bin Hādī al-Madkhālī.²⁹ Some aspects of their criticism have been presented in the chapter devoted to al-Ghazali's treatment of *sunna*.

²⁶ Giles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (trans. Anthony F. Roberts), London, I. B. Tauris, 2002 and Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (trans. Carol Volk), London, I. B. Tauris, 1994.

²⁷ Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Dawā'ir al-Khawuf*, al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-Arabī, Casablanca, 2004.

²⁸ Khalil Ḥaydar Afī, *Itidāl Am Taṭruf: Ta'mulāt Nāqdiyya fī Tayār al-Wasaṭiyya*, Kuwait, 1998.

²⁹ Most of the responses from this camp are concerned with his two major works in *sunna* and women (see the second part of this study).

The other mood is one that praises al-Ghazali's ideas.³⁰ Such praise may be found in articles on and interviews with al-Ghazali, who towards the end of his life came to represent the moderate camp amongst the Islamists. Some of al-Ghazali's supporters view his achievements in the light of contributions made by 'Abduh.³¹

Among the books that have been written in defence of al-Ghazali, one can point to Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqa's *Daf' al-Shubuhāt 'an al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, Muḥammad Shalabī's *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī wa Ma'rakat Al-Muṣḥaf* and Amīr al-Najā'r's *Nazarāt li Fikr al-Ghazālī*. This last, unlike the others, is an attempt to chart al-Ghazali's intellectual development. It was decided that Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī's book *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī kamā 'Araftuhu Riḥlat Niṣf Qarn* should be included in the category of non-academic works because although it gives a very good and important insight into al-Ghazali's life and work, it was written as a tribute to and in defence of al-Ghazali and his ideas. It is noted that al-Qaraḍāwī includ³²es long quotations from al-Ghazali's works.

Another book that is included in this category covers the proceedings of the first meeting on al-Ghazali organised by the Student Union of the Islamic University at Qusantīnah in Algeria. Most of the papers in the book were written by academics who covered many aspects of al-Ghazali's thought. However, these papers lack critical analysis of al-Ghazali's works, which may perhaps explain the hesitation to include them in the category of academic studies.³³ The book compiled by Naṣr al-Dīn La'rāba and published in Algeria also belongs to this category. He collected some of al-Ghazali's articles in Egyptian newspapers, and interviews with him by the Arabic Islamic press in Egypt, Algeria and London. The book is

³⁰ This include the biographies of the leaders of the Islamic movements such as 'Abd Allah al-'Aqīl, *A'lām al-Da'wa wa al-Ḥaraka al-Islamiyya*, Cairo, Dār al-Tawzī' al-Islamiyya, 2005, pp. 39-47.

³¹ As an example of this tendency is Muḥammad 'Imārain his book *al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, al-Mawq' i al-Fikrī wa al-Ma'ārik al-Fikriyya*, 1st edition 1992, the second 2008, Dār al-Salām, Cairo.

³³ Rafiq Khalifi, *Manhaj Al-Shaykh Al-Ghazālī fi 'l-Iṣlāḥ wa Al-Tajdīd*, Dār al-Yumn, Qusantīna, 2003.

of importance to this study because the author has put together many interviews in which al-Ghazali spoke about himself and his life.³⁴

Thesis outline

This study will cover a number of themes, and consists of four parts. The first part will examine the life and times of al-Ghazali and the forces, both social and political, that shaped his intellectual development. This study will examine certain trends and streams of thought that dominated his time as a student and Muslim activist. His relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood and his career at Al-Azhar, as well as his views on the Free Officers, will be discussed. This study will show how, despite being censored and forced to leave Egypt, al-Ghazali believed in working with the system or governmental religious institutions.

The second part will chart al-Ghazali's works in the field of exegesis and his views on thematic interpretation. Linked to his efforts in the field of *tafsīr* are his views on *ḥadīth* which made him many enemies as well as gained him friends. An attempt will be made to discuss the way al-Ghazali approached issues relating to Muslim theology in the third part. The fourth part will discuss his views on women and the text on their rights and obligations. Throughout the discussion of these selected issues one will see how al-Ghazali put great emphasis on *fiqh* (understanding) as a proper way to approach sacred text.

³⁴ Naṣr al-Dīn Larāba, *Al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī: Ḥayā wa 'Athār wa Mawāqif*, Dār al-'Umma, Algeria, 1998.

Organisation of the thesis

This study is organised in six chapters as follows:

i. **Chapter One**

This will be a study of the life and times of al-Ghazali and the social environment in which he lived, and will follow his career.

ii. **Chapter Two**

This chapter will introduce the topic of thematic interpretation and give a historical preview on its development in the interpretation of the Qur'ān. It will highlight the main trends in the field of interpretation, and discuss the different definitions and types of thematic commentaries.

iii. **Chapter Three:**

This chapter will discuss al-Ghazali's contribution to the field of *tafsīr* and provide an analysis of *Naḥwa Tafsīr Mawḍū'ī*. It will, in effect, examine al-Ghazali's contribution to the field of Qur'ānic studies. His work will be discussed in the context of the contribution of his predecessors and his contemporaries.

iv. **Chapter Four**

This chapter will discuss al-Ghazali's views and efforts on *ḥadīth al-āḥād* (solitary) and his views on *sunna* in general.

v. **Chapter Five**

This chapter will discuss and assess al-Ghazali's views in his writings on theology, *kalām*, Sufism, free will and predestination, and *salafiyya*.

vi. **Chapter Six**

Stagnant traditions relating to women in closed societies will be examined here.

CHAPTER ONE

Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazali: The life of a *dā'iyah*

Introduction

During his lifetime, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazali liked to refer to himself as a *dā'iyah* (missionary) or *wā'iz* (preacher)¹. This is apparent in his works, including numerous articles, public lectures and regular *khuṭab* (Friday sermons). This chapter introduces the thesis that al-Ghazali the activist embodied Azharite traditions in his life and career despite his early and later association with the Muslim Brotherhood. It is hoped that this introductory chapter will give some understanding of al-Ghazali's life from a social and political perspective.

The premise from the outset is that he remained faithful to his Azharite roots. By this we mean that al-Ghazali stayed faithful to being what Muḥammad Fathī 'Uthmān terms "the intellectual Azharite"² despite heavily criticising his alma mater. In attempting to study al-Ghazali's life, this thesis will endeavour to benefit from theoretical tools applied by Diyāb in his study of the discourse and ideology of Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966) in the way that he (Diyāb) understood the influence of social and political events in Egypt on Quṭb. Diyāb also tried to look at Quṭb as an active agent whose life history shaped the latter's overall experience and writings.³

¹ *Da'wa*, from which "*dā'iyah*" is derived, means "to call, guide or explain". In modern times "*dā'iyah*" has become synonymous with those who call people to return to Islam, or to explain the truth about Islam. However, the word has a different meaning in the Qur'ān, i.e. "to invite" as when prophets were called to invite people to the Right Path [Qur'ān (16:125) and also (22:67)]. As a public speaker, al-Ghazali represents the traditional preacher compared with what is now known as "*Al-Du'ā al-Judud*". Patrick Gaffney describes al-Ghazali's writings as a source for new preachers in modern Egypt. See *The Prophet's Pulpit: Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994, pp.27-56 & p.240. On the new preachers, see Wā'il Lutfī, *Zāhirat al-Du'ā al-Judud*, Al-Hay'a al-'Āma li'l-Kitāb, Cairo, 2005, p.28.

² Muḥammad Fathī 'Uthmān, *Al-Fikr al-Islamī wa al-Taṭawur*, Al-Dār al-Kuwaitiyya, Kuwait, 1969, p.295.

³ Muḥammad Ḥāfiẓ Diyāb, *Sayyid Quṭb: Al-Khiṭāb wa al-Aydulūjyā*, Dār al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīda, Cairo, 1988, pp.2731.

His father's auspicious dream before al-Ghazali's birth and his encounter with Ḥasan al-Bannā (1906-1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, strongly influenced his life. Al-Ghazali tells of his father's dream in his short incomplete autobiography, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*⁴ where al-Ghazali senior dreamt that *Ḥujjat al-Islam* Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d.1111), the great Muslim scholar, mystic and Ash'arite theologian asked him to name his new born son after him. Thereafter, al-Ghazali's father made choices almost in reverence to the significance he attached to this dream. Throughout his life, al-Ghazali strived to fulfil his father's expectations of him, and to emulate the example of the great theologian he was named after. The significance of meeting with al-Bannā lies in the fact that al-Bannā instilled in him a sense of responsibility. It was al-Bannā who taught al-Ghazali to preach by the pen,⁵ and he would stay faithful to the former's vision even after he was forced to leave the Muslim Brotherhood in 1953. What follows is a reconstruction of the main phases of al-Ghazali's life, charting his journey from the time he left his village to his death in Saudi Arabia in 1996.

The time of al-Ghazali

Muḥammad al-Ghazali was born in 1917 at the end of the First World War, and two years before the Egyptian Revolution of 1919. He grew up during a very significant time in the history of Egypt and the Middle East. His early life was shaped by events in his homeland where he lived during his first thirty-five years under the Egyptian monarchy. However, his thinking and writings would be shaped by the period between the 1919 and 1952 Egyptian

⁴ Muḥammad al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā, Islāmīyat alMa'rifah*, IIIT, (January 1997), Vol. 7, pp.150-230. See also "Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Bi-Qalamihī" in *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. III, p 164, where he says that the name became part of his personality.

⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, pp. 169-170.

revolutions. In a sense, it provided him with the kinds of theme that he would pursue throughout his life.⁶

The history of Egypt between the 1919 Revolution and the Free Officers Revolution of 1952 is one of political strife; a struggle against British domination on the one hand, and the battle of ideas between the liberal camp and the Islamists on the other.⁷ Egyptian history provided a reference point for al-Ghazali that enabled him to understand the conditions of Muslims worldwide. This was the case with all Muslim intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who believed in Pan-Islamism and the unity of the Muslim *umma*.⁸ Interestingly, al-Ghazali's concern was forged by the Muslim Brotherhood's view that Muslims everywhere belong to a single homeland – *Al-Waṭan al-Islamī*⁹ – rather than his work outside Egypt when he was forced to live in exile.

From one revolution to another

Egypt gained a conditional form of independence in 1922, when a national movement led by Sa'd Zaghlūl (1857-1927) raised the slogan "Egypt for the Egyptians". The Egyptians under this partial independence drafted their first constitution in 1923,¹⁰ which was scrapped in 1928 by Ismā'īl Ṣidqī's government.¹¹ The period between the 1920s and the 1930s is

⁶ Moḥammad 'Abd al-Fatāḥ Fatūḥ, *Al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya fī 'l-Fikr al-Islami: Dirāsa fī Fikr al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, Maktabat al-Shurūq al-Dawliyya, Cairo, 2006, pp. 105-112.

⁷ Massimo Campanini, *Storia dell'Egitto Contemporaneo Della Rinascita Ottocentesca a Mubarak*, the Arabic translation by Emād al-Baghdādī, Cairo, 2006, pp.75-88.

⁸ A glimpse of Ridā's *Al-Manār* magazine, or Muḥib al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb's *Al-Fatḥ* magazine, gives an idea about this concern. It was al-Khaṭīb who summarised an article published by A. le Chatelier in *The Muslim World* under the title "La Conquet du Monde Musulman" (1910). The title of the translation is *Al-Ghāra 'alā al-'Alam al-Islamī*. Many editions have appeared since its publication in 1911.

⁹ Ḥasan al-Bannā, *Majmū'at Rasā'il al-Imām al-Shahīd Ḥasan al-Bannā*, Dār al-Da'wa, Cairo, 1988, p.160.

¹⁰ It was endorsed during the reign of King Aḥmad Fuād, was modelled on the Belgian constitution (1830) and was influenced by the French constitution of 1791. See Shawqī al-Jammāl and 'Abd Allah 'Abd al-Razāq, *Tārīkh Miṣr al-Mu'āsir*, Dār al-Thaqāfa, Cairo, 1997, pp.32-38, and Ira Lapidus, *A History of Muslim Societies*, Second Edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p.519.

¹¹ P. J. Vatikiotis, *Egypt from Muḥammad Ali to Mubarak*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1980, p.286.

usually referred to in Egypt's modern history as "the liberal age"¹² because freedom of thought and expression were encouraged. From a political viewpoint, there were four groups that shared power between themselves: the British, the Palace, the Wafd Party and the minority parties; in particular the Liberal Constitutional Party, the Sa'dists, the *Al-Sha'b* (People's Party) as well as the *Al-Itihād* (Unity Party). Egyptian politics of this period was based on broad national issues – the need to liberate the country and to assert the distinct feature of Egyptian identity.¹³ It was understood by all the local participants that Egyptian independence was a suspended project which had to wait until 1956.

It is worth mentioning here that debates between Egyptian intellectuals at the time wrestled with three main ideas with regard to the components of Egyptian identity – the local/national, the Arabic and the Islamic. Most of the writers of this age were students of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh and, to a lesser extent, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's reform school. Those influenced by Riḍā would direct the reform school towards more a conservative form of *salafīyya*.¹⁴ Writers of all stripes of this period clearly expressed the nature of the changes Egypt was undergoing in relation to its ancient history as well as its Arabic and Islamic heritage. The question of Egyptian ancient history served as an ideological base for the proponents of the territorial nationalism or what some call the movement of Pharaonism.¹⁵ It was seen as a way of exploring the distinctive Egyptian

¹² Selma Botman, *Egypt from Independence to Revolution, 1919-1952*, Syracuse University Press, 1991, pp.135-147.

¹³ Ibid., pp.15-16

¹⁴ John Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, Syracuse University Press, 1984, pp.63-64.

¹⁵ For more elaboration on this term, see Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp.14-15 and Jamal M. Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, London, 1960, pp.85-113.

identity by the liberal writers of the time such as Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal.¹⁶

The defenders of the Islamic character of Egypt saw the proponents of Egypt's past and their ideas as an expression of the Western mind associated with colonial power. It is clear from this that the reform ideas of Muslim modernists informed both the Egyptian nationalists and the Arab Islamic nationalists.

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed the publication of many controversial books¹⁷ which expanded the literary scene, enriched cultural debate and became an emblem of change in a rapidly changing society.¹⁸ Despite increasing cultural activities, the political scene remained tense due to strained relations between the Palace and the parties. British heavy-handedness in Egypt continued with the British ambassador, Sir Miles Lampson who marched to the Palace on February 4, 1942 with a large armed force to deliver an ultimatum to King Farouk to abdicate, thus landing a humiliating blow to the Egyptian national pride.¹⁹

The time between the two revolutions witnessed the entrance of new political players such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the *Miṣr al-Fatah* (Young Egypt, a right-wing group founded in 1933 by the lawyer Aḥmad Ḥusayn (1911-1982) and the communist movement (in addition to the Egyptian Communist Party). The student movement in schools and

¹⁶ On Ḥusayn's and Haykal's views on Pharonism, see Charles Smith, "The Crisis of Orientation: The shift of the Egyptian Intellectuals to Islamic subjects in the 1930s", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 4 (1973), p.383-384.

¹⁷ For example, Ḥusayn's *Fī al-Shi'r al-Jāhili* (On pre-Islamic Poetry) and *Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfa fī Miṣr* (The Future of Culture in Egypt) and 'Alī 'Abd al Rāziq's *Al-Islam wa Uṣūl al-Ḥukum* (Islam and the Principles of Governance).

¹⁸ Albert Hourani provides a good historical background to the debate in his two books, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983 p.324-340 and *History of the Arab People*, Faber and Faber, 1991, pp.341-43.

¹⁹ On the impact of this event on the course of the Egyptian national movement, see Muḥammad Anīs, *4 February fī Tārīkh Miṣr al-Siyāsī*, al-Mu'sasa al-Arabiyya li'l-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, Beirut, 1972.

universities also played an active role in the politics of this period, as all parties had a youth movement or wing.²⁰

The period between 1952 and Nasser's death in 1970, is characterised by the ideological struggle between East and West, between Communism and Capitalism. This was when Egypt turned into a laboratory where the government tried to form a state ideology which came to be known as "Arab Socialism". Nasser emerged as the leader of the Arabs after the Suez Canal War (1956), and the United Arab Republic was formed in 1958 only to be dissolved a few years later. In 1967 the Egyptian army, as part of a tri-Arab force, suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Israelis. All of Palestine and a considerable portion of Egypt, Syria and Lebanon were lost to Israel. This was an indication that Arab nationalism had failed. Nasser died three years later and was succeeded by Sadat, marking the start of a new era.²¹

The 1970s would become the decade of Islamic revival (*ṣaḥwa*). If Nasser tried to control and blend Islam into his social Arabism, Sadat tried to distance his regime from Nasserism and sought to give the state a more Islamic character by attempting to manipulate the Islamic movements as well as the religious establishment, mainly the '*ulamā*' of Al-Azhar.²²

In 1979 an Islamic republic was established in Iran. In Afghanistan an international *jihād* would ensue after Soviet forces occupied the country. In the same year armed Wahhābīs occupied the Holy Sanctuary in Makka. The decade that followed started dramatically with Sadat's assassination in 1981. The drama intensified with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the

²⁰ For more information on the students' role see Ahmed Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, Al-Saqi Books, London, 1985, pp.46-49

²¹ Al-Ghazali, in recounting his life, did not pay much attention to these political developments. According to him, he passed these events as a train traveller passes scenes on the way. Furthermore, he acknowledged that the political developments in Egypt then shook what he called "the Islamic identity of Egypt" and marginalised the role it played in serving Islam. See *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p. 205.

²² This does not mean that the Islamists themselves were not keen to use the system in their pursuit of legitimacy. See Hesham Awadi, *In Pursuit of Legitimacy: The Muslim Brothers and Mubarak 1982-2000*, Tauris Academic Studies, London, 2004, pp.35-45.

Iran-Iraq war, the Palestinian *Intifāda*. In the early 1990s the *Jihādī* members of Islamic Jihād declared war on Egypt. At the same time a war erupted in a new frontier in Europe which saw Bosnian Muslims trying to stop the genocide committed against them by the Serbs during five years of atrocities.

Al-Ghazali, a man of his time, was moved to engage in all these critical events through his books, articles, sermons and lectures. His works are his spontaneous reactions and were a means to inform the public of the state of the *umma*. This may be why he did not see fit to edit his writings before publication. In the final analysis, his writings are a record of the events that he observed or which captured his imagination. According to Khalafallah it is this that made al-Ghazali a modern version of his twelfth century namesake.²³

Before delving further into his life story, it is worth noting that al-Ghazali represents a generation who took the mantle from the old generation of ‘*ulamā*’ and Sufi brotherhoods²⁴ who were seen to be the interpreters and the representatives of Islam. They seemed to dominate Islamic scholarship, but their fortunes appear to have turned with the emergence of the Islamic revival movements at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was the new Islamic elite which al-Ghazali belonged to that challenged their authority. This will be explained in the following section.

The new Islamic intellectuals

The retreat of secular or liberal voices of the inter-war period led to the emergence of popular Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. As a sign of the changing

²³ Haifa Khalafallah, *Re-thinking Islamic Law: Genesis and Revolution in the Islamic Method and Structure. The Case Study of a 20th Century ‘Alim’s Journey Into His Legal Tradition, Muḥammad al-Ghazali (1917-1996)*, pp. 64-65. She provides more details on the comparison between the two.

²⁴ Elizabeth Sirriyeh charted the mixed fortunes of the Sufi orders in the twentieth century in *Sufi Thought and its Reconstruction in Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Suha Taji-Farouki and Basheer M. Nafi, I. B. Tauris, London, 2004, pp.104-128.

times, Ḥasan al-Bannā laments in his memoir that he had sought the help of the leading ‘*ulamā*’ to discover ways of resisting the growing corruption. However, they advised him to keep silent instead.²⁵

It was al-Bannā's disillusionment that led him to organise his own group away from the ‘*ulamā*’ establishment. Furthermore, al-Bannā and his disciples were a product of modern/secular education as the majority of them were educated in modern non-religious schools. It is a common assumption among historians and social scholars that the modernisation of Muslim societies, notably in Egypt, Syria and Palestine, led to social changes in terms of the character of the Arab city.

The changing mode of communications resulted in the migration from the countryside to the cities of large numbers of the population. Mass education and the explosion in population led to the emergence of a new class which shared the taste for travel, education and the new media.²⁶ Arguably, the most important factor that helped in raising the influence of the new Muslim elite was the erosion of the role normally played by the traditional ‘*ulamā*’, (that is, the graduates of Zaytouna in Tunisia, Al-Qarawiyyīn in Morocco and the famous Al-Azhar in Egypt).

It is interesting to note that the move from village to city affected not only the character of the Arab city, but it also led to the increasing role of the new elite in politics.²⁷ Little wonder then, that historians from the Left considered the history of Egypt of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a history of the countryside and peasants' revolutions.

²⁵ Ḥasan al-Bannā, *Mudhakārat al-Da’wa wa al-Dā’iyah*, Al-Maktab Al-Islami, Beirut, 1974, pp.49-54.

²⁶ Albert Hourani, *History of the Arab Peoples*, p.339. See also *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, p.75.

²⁷ The emergence of this new class is interpreted differently in the literature of the Left. The writers of this camp often portray the Islamists as representatives of the forces of the countryside trying to establish legitimacy among the city elites. See Rafiq Ḥabīb, *Al-Iḥtijāj al-Dinī wa al-Ṣirā’ al-Ṭabāqī fī Miṣr*, Sīnā li’l-Nashr, Cairo, 1989, p.189. -

Al-Ghazali himself acknowledged that the anti-colonial movements rose from the ranks of the Azharites who were the sons of peasants who "were never part of the feudal class of this country".²⁸ By "feudal class" he meant the Egyptian elite who were, at the time, made up of land owners, aristocrats and political party leaders.²⁹

The decline of the traditional *'ulamā'* establishment therefore forced modern Muslim intellectuals such as al-Ghazali to interpret and present Islam in a new way. Thus his disciple, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī could not contain his astonishment when he discovered that the writer of a column in the *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* magazine was a young Azharite who wore the costume of the Azharites. Al-Qaraḍāwī believed that the writer could not possibly be a traditional *'ālim* because of the topics he tackled.³⁰

What makes al-Ghazali a different breed altogether is that he came to be at the heart of the new Muslim elite once he joined the Muslim Brotherhood.³¹ Balqazīz, who in his analysis of the idea of state and democracy in modern Islamic thought, differentiated between five generations of the new Muslim elites considers al-Ghazali to be a part of the third generation of intellectuals alongside al-Bannā, Ibn Bādīs (Algeria, 1889-1940), 'Alāl al-Fāsī (Morocco, 1910-1974) and Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī (1891-1972).³² According to Olivier Roy the new Muslim intellectuals, namely the elite of the Islamic movements, represent a different group from the clerics namely the Azharites and the Westernised elites.³³

²⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Ḥaṣād al-Ghurūr*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, 2003, p.90.

²⁹ Derek Hopwood, *Egypt: Politics and Society 1954-1981*, pp.17-18.

³⁰ Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī kamā 'Araḥūhū: Riḥalat Niṣf Qarn*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, 2000, p.13.

³¹ Esposito believes that the *'ulamā'* in general played an important role in "modern Islam". He did not differentiate between Muslim activists and the *'ulamā'* who they associate with the establishment. However, he differentiated between the "Islam of the state" and that of the *'ulamā'*. See *The Oxford History of Islam*, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp.680-682.

³² 'Abd Ilāh Balqazīz, *Al-Dawla fi 'l-Fikr al-Islamī al-Mu'āṣir*, Markaz Dirāsāt al-Wiḥda al-Arabiyya, Beirut, 2005, p.10.

³³ Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, I. B. Tauris Publishers, London, 1994, pp. 89-106.

About the sources

The previous sections attempted to put in context and give a historical background to the milieu in which al-Ghazali lived. The next task is to look at al-Ghazali's life as reflected in his incomplete memoir and the fragments of himself which he presented in his works. Doubtless there is much information on him in the books devoted to his life and career written by his contemporaries or by his disciples as well as material about his life included in books and articles he wrote in newspapers and magazines.³⁴ However, one difficulty confronting any attempt to re-construct his life is not the lack of information about al-Ghazali. Rather, it is the lack of sources that give an insight into his private life. In addition, the challenge in attempting to study him and his work from a new perspective is the task of selecting the relevant and appropriate material given the vast amount that is available.

Al-Ghazali gave many interviews to the press about circumstances surrounding his views, comments and attitudes, but he was economical with details of his private life. Once, during an interview with a Saudi television channel, his host steered himself to ask whether al-Ghazali's marriage was a love or arranged marriage. Al-Ghazali responded sarcastically saying, "Love or no love, I married the daughter of my father's friend." He added that he was a committed Muslim activist who did not have time to entertain such things.³⁵

In fact, Al-Ghazali described his marriage as a happy one, despite the fact that it was arranged. Although he said in the same interview that he married the daughter of his father's friend implying that the marriage met with everyone's approval,³⁶ he gives a differing account in his short autobiography where he speaks of objections from the girl's father, a

³⁴ Such as *Ta'mulāt fi'l-Dīn wa al-Ḥayā, Kayfa Nafam al-Islam, Qaḍāyā al-Mar'a Bayna al-Taqāfid al-Rākida wa al-Wāfida, Qadha'if al-Ḥaqq* and *Humūm Dā'iya*.

³⁵ Interview with Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazali with Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) satellite television channel, available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWUKUihw_pw.

³⁶ See above. The video is available on YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWUKUihw_pw.

native of his village and who worked at the Justice Ministry, on the grounds that al-Ghazali was not wealthy. It would appear that al-Bannā acted as the go-between, and helped to convince the girl's father. The private ceremony was simple so that even his mentor, al-Bannā was not aware and only learnt of it later, teasing his protégé for the secrecy. Al-Ghazali lived with his wife for thirty years, initially at her father's house, until her death.³⁷ Needless to say, he was grateful to her for her patience and dedication to her family. She was to bear him nine children, two of whom died young.³⁸ Having said that, on the rare occasions when he did write about his private life, he was brief and selective.³⁹

This is clear in his autobiography *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā* (hereinafter *Qiṣṣat* which is 74 pages long) where al-Ghazali tells his own story. In trying to build a profile it has been decided that *Qiṣṣat* would be taken as the basis because it is the only source available that gives a personal insight into his life. Al-Qaraḍāwī's *Al-Ghazālī' Kamā 'Arafutu*, will also be used as a reference in understanding al-Ghazali's intellectual development as it contains much information about al-Ghazali's life (due to the fact that al-Qaraḍāwī's relationship with him spanned half century) even though al-Qaraḍāwī tends to eulogise about him. In addition, an acknowledgement given by al-Ghazali's his son 'Alā' to a conference organised to celebrate his father's career will also be drawn upon.⁴⁰ Other sources that have been assessed in the introduction will also be consulted.⁴¹

³⁷ In one interview, he said that the death of his wife was the worst day of his life. See Naṣr al-Dīn La'raba, *Al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, p.129.

³⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.180.

³⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, compiled by 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Hassanīn Ḥasan, Naḥḍat Miṣr, Cairo, 2002, Vol. 3, pp.164-168.

⁴⁰ Faṭḥī Malkāwī (ed.), *Al-'Aṭā' al-Fikri li'l-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Amman, 1996, pp.193-205.

⁴¹ A new documentary produced by Al-Jazeera Network entitled *Bawaṣalat al-Ḥuriyya* (2011) will be referred to.

Early life: From village to Alexandria

Al-Ghazali was born in 1917 in a village called Niklā al-‘Inab in the Itāyy al-Barōūd District of the Al-Buḥaira region west of the Delta. He was the son of a Sufi trader. He remarks that his little village was not a mere spectator of the national struggle. It participated in inflicting damage on telegraph lines, thus incurring the wrath of the British forces.⁴² His father put his trust in him by virtue of him being the eldest of seven children.⁴³

In order to enable his son to continue his studies in the city, al-Ghazali senior made the difficult decision to sell his business, uproot his family and start anew in Alexandria. He enrolled the eleven year old al-Ghazali at the *Al-Ma’had Al-Shar’ī* religious institute.⁴⁴ Despite the upheaval, al-Ghazali senior was convinced that it was the right thing to do by virtue of his auspicious dream before his son's birth. He was further encouraged by the latter's grades, emerging as one of the hundred students who passed the enrolment examinations.

Al-Ghazali's early life was marked by hardship and poverty, especially when his family moved to Alexandria. He was forced, at a tender age, to work as a private tutor to help supplement his family's income.⁴⁵ Even when he went to Al-Azhar, he spent four years without the means to buy books.⁴⁶ He developed the love of reading during his childhood and found solace in books. "I used to read anything. There was no specific science that I used to

⁴² Ibid., p.155.

⁴³ Al-Gharib, *Al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī: Ḥayātuhu wa Athāruhu wa Abrazu man T’athra Bihim*, p.14.

⁴⁴ This was a kind of preparatory school where students were prepared for enrolment at Al-Azhar University. It was established in 1903. Muḥamad al-Baḥī refers to it as *Al-Ma’had al-Thānawī fi l-Iskenderia* (Alexandria Secondary Institute) in his memoir, *Ḥayātī fi Riḥāb Al-Azhar: Ṭālib, Ustādh wa Wazīr*, Maktabat Wahba, Cairo, 1983, pp.29-31. Among those who studied at the school was Muḥammad Aḥmad Shākīr (1892-1958). Muḥammad Rajab al-Bayūmī says that the head of the school was known as the head of Alexandria scholars. See M. Rajab al-Bayūmī, *Al-Nahḍa al-Isāmīyya fi Sīratī ‘Alāmiḥā*, Majam’ al-Buḥūth al-Islamiyya, Cairo, 1980.

⁴⁵ He told an Algerian newspaper that he gave Arabic lessons to the children of an Armenian merchant. See *Al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī: Ḥayā wa Athar, Shahādāt wa Mawāqif* compiled by Naṣr al-Dīn La’raba, Dār al-Umma, Algeria, 1998, pp.77-82.

⁴⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, pp.173-174.

read, but I used to read all the time – while I was moving and while I was eating," he recalls.⁴⁷

Although al-Ghazali was proud of this achievement, he was nonetheless uncomfortable with the institute's requirement that students must wear the prescribed uniform of a cloak and turban. He recalls his peculiar appearance, certain that this new attire robbed him of his childhood. People started referring to him as "*Shaykh*" Muḥammad which meant that he was no longer allowed to play with his peers. He found solace in the books in his father's shop. He was more interested in reading Western novels and Arab epics such as *The Arabian Nights*, than in reading religious books.⁴⁸ He was taught at the institute by several teachers who left their mark on him. He speaks of Ibrahim Al-Gharbāwi and ‘Abd al-Azīz Bilāl, who greatly influenced him by their dedication to their work and by their piety.

At Al-Azhar

As al-Ghazali was preparing to travel to Cairo to pursue his studies at Al-Azhar University in 1937 upon receiving the *al-Shahāda al-Thānawīyya*,⁴⁹ he encountered Ḥasan al-Bannā by chance for the first time. He recounts, "I was sitting in the ‘Abd al-Raḥmān bin Hurmoz Mosque in the Ra’s al-Tīn neighbourhood. I was reading my daily portion of the Qur’ān waiting for the evening prayer before leaving when a man stood after the prayer and gave a very comprehensive talk which was clear, moving and sincere."⁵⁰ After this encounter he "decided to follow him, and follow his road to serve Islam and Muslims".⁵¹

⁴⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt*, Vol. 3, p.164.

⁴⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.159.

⁴⁹ This is the certificate allowing students to continue their studies at Al-Azhar. He says that his class was the last to gain such certificates. The educational system was later reformed and a new syllabus introduced (*Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p. 163).

⁵⁰ *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.164.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.164.

Al-Ghazali enrolled in the Faculty of *Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Principles of Religion) at Al-Azhar University. He started his first academic term in 1938, and completed the requirements for the ‘*Alimiyya* (doctorate) degree in 1941⁵² for which he would need two additional years to complete.⁵³ Al-Ghazali would speak fondly of his years at Al-Azhar despite his criticism of the Rector, Shaykh Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī, especially during the second term of al-Marāghī’s tenure as the "Shaykh Al-Azhar".

The story of al-Marāghī and Al-Azhar started when he was first appointed as Rector in 1928. Being a student of ‘Abduh, al-Marāghī tried to introduced reforms at Al-Azhar. However, these were not supported by the Palace, and he was forced to resign in 1929, clearing the way for the appointment of Shaykh, Muḥammad al-Aḥmadī al-Zawāhirī (1878-1944).⁵⁴ The latter continued al-Marāghī's reform programme⁵⁵ with the support of the monarch, King Fu’ād, as well as the Al-Azhar establishment. Although Doge states that al-Zawāhirī only sought to change the textbooks, al-Ghazali nevertheless describes his stint as Rector as Al-Azhar's Golden Age, where modern subjects such as chemistry, mathematics and engineering were also taught alongside religious subjects.⁵⁶

It was not until al-Marāghī convinced the King to issue the appropriate legislation on March 26, 1936 (after he, Marāghī was appointed as Shaykh Al-Azhar for the second time) that he was able to gather support for his reform programme.⁵⁷ Although al-Ghazali admired the Shaykh's reforms, he was nevertheless unhappy as he felt that Shaykh al-Marāghī by this

⁵² Ibid., p.178.

⁵³ This award is roughly equivalent to a Ph.D. See J. Jomeir, EI2 and Bayard Dodge, *Al-Azhar: A Millennium of Muslim Learning*, p.136.

⁵⁴ Al-Zawāhirī himself was a student of ‘Abduh. On his life and reform programme, see Muḥamad ‘Abd al-Mun’im Khafājī, *Al-Azhar fī Alf ‘Ām*, ‘Ālam al-Kutub, Beirut and Maktabat al-Kuliyāt al-Azhariyya, Cairo, 1988, pp.259-263

⁵⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.160.

⁵⁶ According to Bayard Doge, al-Marāghī was deemed a radical as he sought a more liberal interpretation of Islamic thought. See *Al-Azhar: A Millennium of Muslim Learning*, The Middle Institute, Washington D. C., 1961, p.149.

⁵⁷ The reform bill of 1928 and the legalisation are considered by some to be the constitution of Al-Azhar. See Khafājī, *Al-Azhar fī Alf ‘Ām*, pp.265-279.

time he had become bored and was too tired to pursue the "academic struggle".⁵⁸ Al-Ghazali believed that the Shaykh had chosen a life of comfort, preferring instead to cultivate his relations with the Palace and political parties.⁵⁹ In one sense, al-Ghazali's view reflected the attitude of the Muslim Brotherhood towards al-Marāghī at the time, whose appointment they initially welcomed and who they hoped would revive the role of Al-Azhar as the leading institution at the heart of Muslim life (it is worth noting that the Brotherhood's relationship with al-Marāghī was influenced by political events and the rector's conduct).⁶⁰

Moreover, al-Ghazali's criticism of al-Marāghī was, in many ways, a reflection of his concerns with the conditions at Al-Azhar, for he was anxious about the quality of education he received at Al-Azhar. Despite the fact that he was taught at the university by many renowned scholars such as Muḥammad Abū Zahra (1898-1974), 'Abd al-Wahhāb 'Azzām (1894-1959), 'Abd al-Wahhāb Khalāf (1888-1956), Shaykh Muḥammad al-Khiḍr Ḥusayn (1876-1958), Muḥammad Al-Bahī (1905-1982) and Muḥammad 'Abd Allah Dirāz (1894-1958), he was adamant that the university lacked qualified lecturers to properly teach the curriculum.⁶¹

He mentions the Qur'ānic Studies teacher, Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zarqānī (d.1947), author of a well-known book on Qur'ānic sciences (*Maṅāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*), as someone to whom he felt indebted and who had influenced him. Another teacher important to him was the renowned scholar, Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt⁶² who became the Rector of Al-

⁵⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.163.

⁵⁹ On the effort to modernise Al-Azhar and to continue the reform programme of 'Abduh, see Muḥammad al-Ṣayyādī, *Al-Azhar wa Mashārīḥ Taṭwīrihī 1872-1970*, Dār al-Rashīd, Beirut, 1992, pp.53-62. See also Jacques Waadernberg, "Some Institutional Aspect of Muslim Higher Education and Their Relation to Islam", *International Review for the History of Religion*, NVMEN, Vol. 127, 1965, pp. 96-138.

⁶⁰ For more information on this issue, see Zakariyā Bayūmī, *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn wa al-Jamā'āt al-Islamiyya fī 'l-Ḥayā al-Siyāsiyya al-Miṣriyya*, Maktabat Wahba, Cairo, 1991, pp.262-266.

⁶¹ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.166.

⁶² Maḥmūd Shaltūt was appointed to teach at the Alexandria Religious Institute in 1919, and was transferred from it just one year before al-Ghazali enrolled in 1927. For more information, see Kate Zebiri, *Maḥmūd Shaltūt and the Islamic Modernism*, Clarendon Press, London, 1993, p.11.

Azhar in 1958. Shaltūt, who al-Ghazali describes as a scholar with a deep knowledge and understanding of the sciences of *sharīʿa* as well as a man with an international reputation,⁶³ taught him *tafsīr*.

Apart from the teachers he acknowledges as having a positive influence on him, one senses that there is generally no love lost between him and his teachers when al-Ghazali speaks of his relationship with them.⁶⁴ He laments that the good teachers would leave the university, while those who remained performed their duties devoid of any relationship with their students. He compared this with the cordial relationship that existed between teachers at the Egyptian University (later Cairo University) and their students. He adds that relations between the Al-Azhar "students and their teachers were formal. In truth we hated our teachers".⁶⁵ He could not fathom why such formality existed, but supports his view by describing an incident which occurred during Shaykh al-Zawāhirī's tenure, when students attacked and vandalised the Shaykh's office. Al-Ghazali recounts, "I believe that if they had found the Shaykh present they would have broken his bones."⁶⁶

Al-Marāghī was reappointed upon al-Zawāhirī's departure, and this reappointment was seen as a new era in the history of Al-Azhar.⁶⁷ However, al-Ghazali bemoans the fact that not long afterwards all these hopes and "promises evaporated quickly. He was no better than

⁶³ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt Al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 3, p.165.

⁶⁴ According to 'Abduh, "Unfortunately, Al-Azhar has no system of education. The student was never asked whether or not he had done his work. His teacher never bothered to ask whether he is present or absent at lectures." See *Al-Amāl al-Kamila*, Vol. 3, p.112.

⁶⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.166.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.167. Efforts have been made to verify this story by consulting numerous sources on the modern history of Al-Azhar, but no reference to it could be found.

⁶⁷ Al-Marāghī was welcomed back by Al-Azhar with much jubilation. A party was organised on his honour in 1935 attended by famous scholars and dignitaries. See Khafājī, *Al-Azhar fī Alf 'Am*, Vol. 1, pp. 265-274.

his predecessor".⁶⁸ This lack of estimation may be unfair to al-Marāghī, who is considered as one of the brightest scholars to assume the post of Shaykh Al-Azhar.⁶⁹

The negative attitude of al-Ghazali towards his teachers and the harsh language he employed against them are related to the lack of what he considered to be a fatherly relationship between students and teachers. He and others at the university felt that their teachers lived in a different world. This was exacerbated by the political turmoil that engulfed Egypt at the time, and the conflict between the King and the parties that supported him on the one hand, and the Wafd Party on the other. During those hard times, it was very difficult to talk about what the ideal relationship could be.

Al-Ghazali is not the only one to criticise Al-Azhar. Riḍā and his teacher. ‘Abduh were extremely vociferous in their criticism of Al-Azhar.⁷⁰ What set al-Ghazali apart from others who criticised the university is his harsh criticism which sometimes seems disrespectful and mocking the Azharites. He says that they are people who life itself does not need, and that they do not have the power or any means of resistance. He says, "They do not move and they do not make others move."⁷¹ On other occasions he would describe the "Islam of the Azharite" as one supported by the colonialists.⁷² He goes further to say that he knows "Azharites who live like bilharzia and ancylostoma by sucking the blood of the poor peasant"⁷³. Al-Ghazali sums up his experience at Al-Azhar as follows:

"A friend asked me, 'You are a scholar who graduated from Al-Azhar twenty years ago, and you fear for your religion. Why then did you not send your children to Al-Azhar so they

⁶⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Hayā*, p.168.

⁶⁹ Muḥammad’ Abd al-Mun’im Khafājī, *Al-Azhar fī Alf ‘Am*, Vol. 1, p.265.

⁷⁰ Rashīd Riḍā, "'Ulamā’ Al-Azhar wa al-Maḥākīm al-Shar’iyya", *Al-Manār*, (June, 1904), Vol.7, No. 7, pp. 213-221.

⁷¹ Al-Ghazali, *Fī Mawḳib al-Da’wa*, Nahḍat Miṣr, Cairo, 1997, p.13.

⁷² Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Istibdād al-Siyāsī*, p.12

⁷³ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam al-Mufrā ‘alayh Bayna al-Shuyū’iyyīn wa al-Ra’smāliyyīn*, Dār al-Kitāb al-Arabi, Cairo, 1955, p.28.

can perform the same duty as you?' I answered by saying, 'O my friend, by not sending them there I was trying to protect them from the calamities I endured, and which almost killed me. I spent 15 years in it. During those years I was not a student who was fully devoted to his studies, but I was a fighter in a continuous war with the state and society. The door of the career life was closed to me, both in the public and the official realm. The state used to give preference to those who graduated with a secular education.

"A decision was forced upon the ministries to employ others except Al-Azhar graduates. What was left for us were lowly jobs with meagre salaries...even if we overcame the government's attitude, there was still the public's attitude to contend with. The gap was huge between us (the Azharites) and the public at the time. The masses used to mock us, and make jokes about our costumes and turbans!." ⁷⁴

It is therefore clear that al-Ghazali agonised over the plight of the Azharites. He believed that the official attitude towards them and the restrictions on their employment were part of a plan to undermine Al-Azhar itself, and to turn the public away from religious teaching. ⁷⁵ He went on to blame colonialism, the overt form of it or otherwise, for the plight of the Azharites. ⁷⁶ He contends that the media also engaged in the campaign to marginalise the Azharites by exaggerating any minor mistake committed by any of them as if there was "a personal vendetta between those journalists and those poor and needy graduates". ⁷⁷

Despite everything, al-Ghazali did not have to wait long to obtain his first job. When the Ministry of Religious Affairs announced a competition among Azharite graduates for the

⁷⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Kifāh Dīn, Dār Al-Bayān*, Kuwait, 1969, pp.215. See also *Kayfa Naḥam al-Islam*, p.30 and al-Ṣayyādī, *Al-Azhar wa Mashri' Taṭwīrihī*, pp.60-61. The same attitude is recorded in *Al-Islam wa at-Ṭatawwur* by Muḥammad Faṭḥī 'Uthmān, p.295.

⁷⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.177. This is true in the sense that Al-Azhar itself was caught in middle of the rivalry between the King and the political parties. Many reform programmes were stalled because of this. See Dodge, pp. 146-147.

⁷⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Kifāh Dīn*, p.215.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.227.

position of *Imām, Khaṭīb and Mudaris*, he applied along with hundreds of "unemployed scholars". He excelled during his interview with a committee of scholars, and was employed as *imām, khaṭīb* and a teacher at the 'Azabān Mosque in the popular Al-'Ataba Al-Khaḍrā district in Cairo.⁷⁸ The challenge he faced as a young preacher was that he quickly used up what little knowledge he had acquired at university. When he realised that he had run out of ideas, he embarked on a long journey of self-education. He declares, "In this mosque I started again as a student".⁷⁹

Al-Ghazali and the Muslim Brotherhood

Al-Ghazali joined the Muslim Brotherhood at the age of twenty, a year before he went to at Al-Azhar,⁸⁰ and became very active. He established a branch of the movement at the Faculty of *Uṣūl al-Dīn* where he was the third ranking person. Al-Ghazali used to frequent the Brotherhood's headquarters at Al-'Ataba al-Khaḍrā before it was moved to Al-Ḥilmiyya al-Jadīda in Cairo. Al-Bannā frequently used young talent from the university to promote the cause of the Muslim Brotherhood, and al-Ghazali was active in this effort.⁸¹ He formed a strong bond with al-Bannā, and considered him as the most important Muslim figure in the twentieth century among all the leaders of the Islamic movements. He also believed that al-Bannā was a man who understood the nature of the challenges that the Muslim world faced after the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate.⁸²

⁷⁸ Al-Ghazali speaks of his encounter with members of the committee. He felt that they were against him, and tried to examine him in order to fail him. However, when the results were announced, he came fifth on the list of those who won their first job. See *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, pp.177-178.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.179.

⁸⁰ Al-Ghazali repeated the story of his first encounter with al-Bannā in *Fī Mawḳib al-Da'wa*, pp.206-211, *Mushkilāt fī Ṭarīq Al-Ḥayā Al-Islamiyya*, Kitāb Al-Umma, Doha, 1981, p.147 and *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, Dār Al-Shurūq, 1992, p.154. According to al-Gharib, al-Ghazali mentioned al-Bannā on more than seventy occasions. See also *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazali: Ḥayātuhu wa Atharuhu wa Abraz man Ta'athara Bihim*, pp.190-191.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.169.

⁸² Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh Al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 3, pp.165-166.

Al-Ghazali tells of an incident when he received a letter from al-Bannā urging him to use his pen to defend *al-Da'wa*. During one of his visits to the offices of *Majallat al-Ikhwān* (the Brotherhood's magazine),⁸³ al-Bannā complained about the lack of articles written by members of the movement. He then looked in a file containing many unpublished articles. Among them was one written by al-Ghazali. He read the article, then sent a note to the young al-Ghazali commending him on the piece, and urged him to continue writing for the magazine.⁸⁴ Al-Ghazali was overwhelmed. This encouraged him enormously, and he paid heed to that advice. He continued to write and went on to become one of the first generation of Muslim Brotherhood intellectuals.⁸⁵ According to al-Ghazali, he became a preacher and an activist, using the pulpit of the mosque to promote the cause of the Brotherhood while still a student. He would later credit the Muslim Brotherhood with improving the quality of religious oratory in Egypt and in the rest of the Arab world.⁸⁶

Despite his prominence within the ranks of the movement, al-Ghazali was excluded from those who were chosen to join its newly found military wing, *Al-Nizām al-Khāṣ* (the Special Apparatus).⁸⁷ Interestingly, it was al-Bannā who refused to recommend him for military training because al-Ghazali lacked the discipline required for military life. Al-Bannā believed that al-Ghazali was better suited to writing and public speaking. Al-Ghazali expressed his anger and frustration, and hinted that the decision to exclude him might be influenced by

⁸³ The first issue was published in 1933, and the last appeared in 1938.

⁸⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.170. The title of the article is "Muslim Brotherhood and the Parties".

⁸⁵ Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, p.220.

⁸⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.172.

⁸⁷ The role of this unit became the subject of heated debate within the movement and outside it. The Special Apparatus was established by al-Bannā, and initially given security responsibilities. There are many accounts as to why this secret unit was established. Some believe that it was to support the Palestinian cause while others say that it was to provide security for al-Bannā. It soon got out of hand under the leadership 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sanaḍī, and entered murky waters. It was the primary source of tension which led to the confrontation with Nasser. For more information see Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, p.122; Ṣalāh Shādī, *Ṣafaḥāt min al-Tārīkh: Ḥaṣād al-'Umr*, Sharikat Al-Shu'ā' li'l-Nashr, Kuwait, 1988 and Maḥmūd 'Abd Ḥafīm, *Al-Ikhwān Al-Muslimūn Aḥdāth Ṣana'at al-Tārīkh: Ru'yya min al-Dākhil*, pp.201-203, Dār al-Da'wa, Alexandria, 1994, Vol. 3, pp.197-199. See also 'Abd al-Aẓīm Ramḍān, *Jamā'āt Al-Takfīr fī Miṣr: al-Uṣūl al-Tārīkhīyya, Al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Ama li'l-Kitāb*, Cairo, 1995, pp.71-95.

rumours which questioned his loyalty to the cause. Being outspoken made him a kind of maverick in the eyes of the other members. It is this sense of independence that would eventually lead him to part company with the movement.⁸⁸

Just before al-Bannā's assassination in 1949, al-Ghazali found himself among the many Brotherhood activists rounded up by the government following its decision to outlaw the organisation.⁸⁹ He was imprisoned at the Al-Ṭūr camp in 1948. During his imprisonment, he could not help but notice that the Brotherhood members had not learnt from the experience they had of the regime which cost them the life of their leader. He states, "I was saddened while I was at Al-Ṭūr that the Brothers were, in general, refusing to admit the faults of their policies."⁹⁰

Al-Ghazali was released from prison in late 1949 after the collapse of Ibrāhīm ‘Abd Al-Hādī's⁹¹ (1899-1981) cabinet.⁹² He continued his activities, and became the main spokesman for the movement.⁹³ Al-Ghazali was to use the space given to him in the *Al-Mabāḥith al-Qaḍā'iyya* magazine to defend the cause of the Brotherhood. During that critical transitional period in the Brotherhood's history following al-Bannā's assassination and the appointment

⁸⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.172.

⁸⁹ This was done by Decree 8 of December 1948 where the organisation was described as a terrorist organisation. See Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, pp. 64-67 and Shādī, *Aḥdāth Ṣana't al-Tārīkh*, pp.337-246.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.188.

⁹¹ Many Brotherhood members considered him notorious for his harsh policies toward them.

⁹² He succeeded Maḥmūd al-Nuqrāshī who was assassinated by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood on 28 December 1948. ‘Abd al-Hādī came to power while Egypt was going through a critical period – the spread of political assassinations, the plight of the Egyptian army in Palestine and the irate Muslim Brotherhood whose leader was assassinated, and who were waiting for a chance to avenge his death. In dealing with all these challenges, ‘Abd al-Hādī made many terrible mistakes which violated the constitution. See Aḥmad Zakī ‘Abd al-Qādir, *Miḥnat al-Dustūr*, pp.164-166.

⁹³ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā’ ‘Araḥtuhu*, pp.17-18.

of Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī as his successor, al-Ghazali became the most important writer and polemicist of the movement.⁹⁴

The Indian Muslim writer Abū al-Ḥasan Alī Nadawī met al-Ghazali when he visited Egypt in early May 1951. Al-Ghazali accompanied him on a tour of the whole of Egypt. Al-Nadawī would later describe al-Ghazali as "the most important writer and scholar. He is the most trusted voice of the movement".⁹⁵ When Khālīd Muḥammad Khālīd published his controversial book, *Min Hunā Nabda*, al-Huḍaybī asked al-Ghazali to write a rebuttal of it.⁹⁶ It is worth noting here that al-Ghazali wrote *Min Hunā Na'lam* (1950) to rebut the ideas of Khālīd, but also used it to attack Al-Azhar's 'ulamā'. As one writer observed, both books represent an attack on Al-Azhar by Azharites. However, al-Ghazali was harsher than Khālīd in his criticism.⁹⁷ He understood Khālīd's anger at that institution, and accused the Azharite scholars of paying lip service to Islam.⁹⁸ Bayūmī believes that al-Ghazali's attack was one of the reasons that led to the decline of the Muslim Brotherhood's popularity at Al-Azhar.⁹⁹

Al-Ghazali, al-Huḍaybī and the July Revolution

Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī (1891-1973) was elected *Murshid* (The Guide) of the Muslim Brotherhood in October 1951.¹⁰⁰ He was a high-ranking judge before becoming the movement's supreme leader.¹⁰¹ Al-Huḍaybī was not the favourite choice of the *Al-Niẓām al-*

⁹⁴ Writing at the same time, Muḥib al-Dīn al-Khaḍīb, the scholar and the publisher of Al-Faḥ said that that if he was asked to choose his ten favourite writers, al-Ghazali and Quṭb would be among them. See *Fī Mawḍi' al-Da'wa*, p.116.

⁹⁵ Abū al-Ḥasan Al-Nadawī, *Mudhakarāt Sā'ih fi'l-Sharq al-Arabi*, pp.59, 65 and 101.

⁹⁶ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazali Kamā 'Araftuhu*, p. 24.

⁹⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Min Hunā Na'lam*, p.97.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.98.

⁹⁹ Zakariyā Bayūmī, *Al-Ikhwān wa al-Mujtama' al-Miṣrī*, p.270.

¹⁰⁰ There are many versions of the story of how al-Huḍaybī was elected as the supreme leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, it is clear that it was a move to avoid tension within the movement due to the fact that there were many strong and feasible contenders, among them al-Ghazali himself. See Ghada Osman, *A Journey in Islamic Thought: The Life of Fathi Osman*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2011, pp.93-94.

¹⁰¹ See Barbara Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology*, Routledge Studies in Political Islam, 2009, pp.42-43.

Khās. Some of its members alleged that Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bāqurī (1907-1985), who was very close to the Palace at the time, promoted him to the senior ranks of the Brotherhood as part of a grand plan agreed to by King Farouk and his advisors.¹⁰² The idea was to elect a leader who had close connections with the Palace to enable the King to counter the power of his opponents in the Wafd Party.¹⁰³

Al-Ghazali's relationship with the new leader was good to begin with. Al-Qaraḍāwī, in conciliatory language, maintains that the two men were on good terms upon al-Huḍaybī's election. He adds that it remained cordial until the Revolution of 23 July 1952.¹⁰⁴ Al-Qaraḍāwī's account avoids the mention of the many signs of tension which began to show between the two. This unease may be attributed to the fact that al-Ghazali was a senior figure in the organisation¹⁰⁵ who was close to the assassinated *Murshid*. So close was he to al-Bannā that he used to accompany him on his tours of the movement's many branches.¹⁰⁶ Although al-Ghazali accepted the leadership of al-Huḍaybī, he nevertheless disagreed with him on some of the decisions he took, especially that concerning al-Huḍaybī's rapport with the Palace.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, al-Ghazali disagreed with the movement's decision to reject the 1923 Egyptian Constitution which he considered to be the best the country had

¹⁰² According to al-Dimirdāsh al-'Uqaily, the Palace nominated al-Bāqurī who was the deputy of the late al-Bannā. His nomination was rejected by al-Ghazali and other members of the Executive Committee (see Sulayman al-Ḥakīm, *Asrār al-'Alāqa Bayna 'Abd al-Nasser wa al-Ikhāwan*, Markaz al-Ḥaḍāra al-Arabiyya li'l-Ilām wa al-Nashr, Cairo, 1996, pp.18-19). One should consider that al-'Uqaily's account tends to exaggerate, and tries to absolve the Special Apparatus and Nasser from any responsibility for the events that followed.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhu*, p.40.

¹⁰⁵ He was a member of the Founding Committee, *Al-Hay'a al-Ta'sisiyya*, and was later elected as a member of the Membership Committee, *Lajnat Taḥqīq al-'Uḍwiyya*. See 'Abd al-Ḥalīm, *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, p.191.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁷ According to Aḥmad 'Ādil Kamāl who as a member of the Special Apparatus, al-Ghazali was vocal in his criticism of al-Huḍaybī. See *Al-Niqāṭ Fawqa al-Ḥurūf: Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn wa al-Nizām al-Khās*, Al-Zahrā' li'l-'Ilām al-'Arabī, Cairo, 1987, p.253.

ever had, and it was under this constitution that the organisation was able to be formed and exist.¹⁰⁸

Al-Ghazali's aversion to the cult of personality meant that he could not fully accept al-Huḍaybī's style of leadership.¹⁰⁹ Strained relations between the two increased after the 1952 Revolution when the Muslim Brotherhood clashed openly with the Free Officers. Unlike the Brotherhood, al-Ghazali welcomed the new leaders and the change they brought with them. The Revolution epitomised everything he had fought for during the monarchy.¹¹⁰ He supported the Free Officers because he felt they undertook to dismantle a corrupt feudal regime. He was overjoyed and optimistic when the young and dedicated officers deposed the corrupt and tyrannical king.¹¹¹ His support, however, was not to last.

In the light of the conflict that erupted between the Brotherhood and the Free Officers, al-Ghazali deviated from the official line that was taken by the movement's leadership. Al-Ghazali and a few of the older members advocated a more cautious approach towards the new order. They feared that the Muslim Brotherhood would be forced into an unequal battle. Furthermore, they believed in the goodwill of the new leaders, especially Nasser (1917-1970).¹¹² As they had predicted, the fight first broke within the ranks of the movement itself

¹⁰⁸ Al-Ghazali supported the constitution because it guaranteed political freedom and allowed the creation of political parties. Moreover, the constitution embodied, to a certain extent, the causes he set himself to defend. See *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.189. See also, al-Ghazali, *Al-Fasād al-Siyāsī fī 'l-mujtam'āt al-Islamiyya*, Nahḍat Miṣr, 1998, p.115, and *Kayfa Naḥam al-Islam*, p.176. It should be noted that al-Ghazali's view is in stark contrast to that of al-Bannā who thought that many articles of the constitution were in total contradiction to Islam. See *Majmū'at Rasā'il al-Imām al-Shahīd*, pp.192-193.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Ghazali maintained that his faith in al-Bannā did not mean that he was prepared to compromise his independence. He said, "If the goals of Islam contradicted those of the Muslim Brotherhood, let the Brothers go to hell." This was quoted by 'Abd al-Hafīm 'Auways in *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī: Marāḥil 'Azīma fī Ḥayāt Mujāhid 'Azīm*, and in 'Imād Al-Dīn Khafīl, *Ṣuwar min Ḥayāt Mujāhid 'Azīm*, Dār al-Ṣaḥwa, Cairo, 1993, p.18.

¹¹⁰ The relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and Free Officers progressed through many phases from brief cooperation, to confrontation and prosecution. For an account of this, see Mitchell and Shādī among many others, especially Mitchell in Chapter 5. Shādī's book is written mainly to clarify this critical moment in the history of the organisation.

¹¹¹ In *Fī Mawḳib al-Da'wa*, al-Ghazali conveys a sense of relief at the departure of the King and was full of hope. See, pp.89, 91, 97, 105-106 and 125.

¹¹² Al-Ghazali, *Min Ma'ālim al-Ḥaqq fī Kifāhinā al-Islamī al-Ḥadīth*, Dār Al-Ṣaḥwa, Cairo, 1984, p.235.

when a kind of civil war ensued. Problems started following the killing of Sayyid Fāyiz, a senior figure in the movement. Fingers were pointed at members of Special Apparatus. The *Maktab al-Irshād* (Guidance Council) decided to expel three members of the Special Apparatus for aiding its leader, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sanaḍī.¹¹³ Al-Ghazali, along with other members, was unhappy with the decision and took action against it. Additionally, as will be seen, other events unfolded which almost led to a schism in the movement.

On 27 and 28 November 1953 a group of angry Brotherhood rebels invaded al-Huḍaybī's house intending to force him to resign, but this attempt to unseat the *Murshid* failed.¹¹⁴ A commission set to consider the incident recommended the expulsion of twenty-one out of around seventy mutineers. In addition, the commission advised the *Majlis al-Irshād* (the organisation's high authority) to expel four of the most senior figures, al-Ghazali among them,¹¹⁵ for allegedly taking part in the plot and being advisors to the mutineers.¹¹⁶ Al-Ghazali was enraged at what he felt was an unfair dismissal, and therefore unleashed his attack on the *Murshid* in both his published and unpublished works. He accused al-Huḍaybī of being a Freemason, and that the International Freemasonry movement was successful in planting him at the heart of the *Ikhwān*,¹¹⁷ thus reflecting the general view that the Freemasons as group have a grand plan to control the world and infiltrate Muslim lands.

¹¹³ Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Ḥafīm, *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, Vol. 3, p.205. See also Barbara Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology*, pp.31-33.

¹¹⁴ According to Kamāl this is Shādī's account, which he disputes and rejects. The motivation of Shādī's account is to hold al-Sanaḍī and his faction responsible. Kamāl maintains that al-Ghazali's part in the plot was exaggerated by Shādī. Nevertheless he did not rule out the role played by Nasser to break up the movement. See Kamāl, *Al-Niqāṭ ‘alā al-Hurūf*, pp.287-289.

¹¹⁵ The others were Ṣāliḥ ‘Ashmāwī, Moḥammad Sulaymān and ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz Jalāl. All were members of the Executive Committee. The decision was made on 10 December 1953. Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Ḥafīm gives a full account of the events, although he relies on Shādī's account. He devoted one part to the events in *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, Vol. 3, pp.211-254.

¹¹⁶ Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Ḥafīm, *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, Vol. 3, p.211.

¹¹⁷ Sulaymān al-Ḥakīm, *Asrār al-‘Alāqa Bayna Nasser wa al-Ikhwān*, p.29.

Therefore, by associating al-Huḍaybī with them al-Ghazali tried to tarnish the former's image. However, he later edited and amended some of his writings in this respect.¹¹⁸

Interestingly, al-Ghazali is silent on this matter in *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, but the incident left deep scars, and led him to maintain a keen eye on the conflict that ensued between Nasser and the Brotherhood. When Nasser outlawed the movement in 1954 and executed six of the movement's leaders, the famous jurist 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aūda (1906-1954) among them, al-Ghazali was in a dilemma as to what to do.¹¹⁹ In later years, al-Ghazali and al-Huḍaybī were to reconcile when al-Ghazali took the initiative to visit him after his release from prison in 1971.¹²⁰

The Brotherhood was in no doubt that Nasser was behind the mutiny.¹²¹ According to Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Ḥalīm, Nasser used al-Sanaḍī to undermine al-Huḍaybī's leadership following the latter's rejection of cooperation with the revolutionaries.¹²² Al-Qaraḍāwī holds a similar view. He believes that as Nasser and his colleagues were unable to contain the Brotherhood, they resolved to create a schism within the movement and instigated members of the Special Apparatus to occupy the Brotherhood headquarters, thereby driving a wedge between the movement's leadership and its members.¹²³ No doubt Nasser benefited from this

¹¹⁸ Iṣḥāq Mūsā al-Husaynī quotes al-Ghazali's harsh words against al-Huḍaybī in his book, *The Muslim Brethren*, Khayāt, Beirut, 1956, p.116.

¹¹⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.192.

¹²⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Min Ma'ālim al-Ḥaqq*, p.216.

¹²¹ Muḥammad Farīd 'Abd al-Khālīq, one of the senior figures in the Muslim Brotherhood said in the 2010 Al-Jazeera documentary *Bawaṣlat al-Ḥuriyya* that Nasser convinced some Brotherhood members that the confrontation between the Free Officers and their Movement is unavoidable for as long as Huḍaybī stayed at the helm of the movement.

¹²² Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Ḥalīm, *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, p.213, 258.

¹²³ Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, pp.116-125. See also Iṣḥāq Mūsā Husaynī, *The Muslim Brethren*, p.116.

episode, but his plans has backfired for the mutiny enabled al-Huḍaybī to consolidate his power and marginalise all forces that had relations with Nasser.¹²⁴

Al-Ghazali nevertheless continued to follow the ideals of al-Bannā whom he held in high esteem, but in the interim he had to find his way in the world without the *jamā'a*.

Life after the Muslim Brotherhood

The ending of al-Ghazali's association with Muslim Brotherhood did not prevent him from pursuing his *da'wa* activities. He kept his job at the Ministry of Religious Endowment, and worked with the Free Officers despite his deep suspicion of them, by agreeing to be a member of the Arab Socialist Union (*Al-Itihād al-Arabi al-Ishtirākī*), the only political party in Nasser's Egypt. He justified this decision on the basis of what al-Bannā said, "I am not afraid to work with Satan. Let us see who will be the first to run."¹²⁵ In addition, al-Ghazali participated in a conference to revise the National Charter.¹²⁶ This was a turning point in his life. In one sense it confirmed his views regarding Nasser, but the outcome was to satisfy al-Ghazali as the conference enabled him to disseminate his views to a large and varied audience. He would, during the conference, demand that the president impose a dress code on both men and women in order to protect society from the undesirable influences of imported ideologies.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Fathī 'Uthmān, who witnessed the events, believes that Nasser was involved in the attempt to unseat al-Huḍaybī. He says that some of the leaders of the mutiny saw an alliance with Nasser as an opportunity to topple the General Guide, while some believed that the door was still open to establish an Islamic regime in Egypt. See Ghada Osman, *A Journey in Islamic Thought*, pp. 122-123.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.203.

¹²⁶ The National Charter was presented to the National Conference in May, 1961. It was Nasser's vision about the social democratic principles and how to implement them in Egypt. On this issue, see Derek Hopwood, *Egypt: Politics and Society*, pp.90-91. See also Maḥmūd al-Sharqāwī, *Ta'amulāt fi'l-Mithāq al-Waṭanī*, Kutub Qawmiyya, Cairo, n.d., p.3.

¹²⁷ He later revised his views and acknowledged his shortcomings. See al-Ghazali, *Ma'rakat al-Muṣḥaf fi'l-'Ālam al-Islami*, p.264.

The Conference itself was seen as a step towards the adoption of socialism. The ensuing events and the ridicule from the Left heaped on al-Ghazali would lead to a kind of battle between Islam and the Left.¹²⁸ He opines that the Islamic mood at the conference caused discomfort to the seventy communists who attended.¹²⁹ At the heart of what al-Ghazali called a "battle" between the Islamists and Leftists was the nature of the National Charter (1962).¹³⁰ The Leftists wanted a charter to be on par with that of Eastern European countries, while al-Ghazali and the few who supported him wanted one that preserved the Islamic character of Egypt. He and his colleagues found support from a member of the Revolutionary Command Council, Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn (1921-1999). Al-Ghazali's experience with the Socialist Union was tough, but it exposed a system which he saw was as corrupt as the old one. The event itself confirmed his view about Nasser, whom he saw as a socialist bent on creating a socialist Egypt.¹³¹

Al-Ghazali seems to have considered socialism as synonymous with communism despite the fact that he himself peppered some of his arguments with socialist terminology.¹³² It is worth noting that he titled his second book, published in 1947, *Al-Islam wa al-Ishtirākīyya* (Islam and Socialism), thinking like Qūṭb and the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria,

¹²⁸ According to al-Ghazali, the Leftists at the conference demanded that the famous caricature artist Ṣalāḥ Jāḥīn (1930-1986) draw a cartoon of him, which Jāḥīn felt obliged to do. The cartoon was published in the *Al-Ahram* daily. Al-Ghazali led a protest against what he saw as ridicule not of him, but of the symbols of Islam, (*Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, pp.206-210). See also al-Qaraḏāwī, *Al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araḏuhū*, p.53.

¹²⁹ John Waterbury speaks al-Ghazali as representative of Islamic socialism and Khālīd Muḥammad Khālīd, who was also at the conference, as representing the liberals. See *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes*, Princeton University Press, 1984, p.317.

¹³⁰ According to Joan Wucher King, al-Ghazali came close to leading a popular revolt against Nasser, as Egyptians from widely varying political and religious views rallied behind his Islamic opposition. See *Historical Dictionary of Egypt*, Scarecrow Press, London, 1984, pp.307-308.

¹³¹ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.214.

¹³² According to him, he used terms such as "socialism" out of his hatred of political repression and greedy capitalism. When he wrote about "Islamic Socialism" before the revolution, he was accused of being a communist. See *al-Islam al-Muḥtarā Alayh Bayna al-Shuyu'iyīn wa al-Ra'samālyīn*, pp.8-9. See also *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.201.

Muṣṭafā al-Sibāʿī (1915-1964), that socialism calls for social justice as Islam does.¹³³ This was before the 1952 Revolution where he and others will change their views, because al-Ghazali and the Muslim Brotherhood looked upon Nasser's relationship with the former Soviet Union with suspicion. They believed Nasser was a communist who was planning to establish a communist regime in Egypt.¹³⁴ Al-Ghazali says that "Egypt at the beginning of the 1960s was moving towards communism through the enforcement of very strict laws against the wealthy".¹³⁵

Al-Ghazali opined that the decision to move against the Muslim Brotherhood in the second confrontation with the regime was taken while Nasser was visiting Moscow in 1965. The communist leaders warned him that the presence of a strong Islamic movement in Egypt would threaten the future of "socialism" in the country.¹³⁶ However, al-Ghazali does not explain that the reason behind Nasser's decision to move against the Muslim Brotherhood was mainly to do with the discovery of an alleged plot against his regime which eventually led him to execute Sayyid Quṭb in 1966. Contrary to the Brotherhood's belief, the communists themselves did not believe that Nasser was a Leftist. They believed that he strategically used socialism to undermine the bourgeoisie and capitalist forces, as well as redistribute wealth and put it under the army's control.¹³⁷ Crucially, Nasser himself expressed his dislike for communism because of its contradiction to Islam.¹³⁸

At the conclusion of the conference, al-Ghazali returned to his post as the Director of Mosques at the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. He was to learn of his demotion to the rank of a

¹³³ He was to change his view after discovering that the Arab socialists were not interested in religion. Rather, they were merely interested in socialism as a concept. See *Al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya Tastaqbil Qranaha al-Khāmis 'Ashr*, pp.110-111.

¹³⁴ On the Islamic and Arabic aspects of the Charter, see Yahyā Huwaydī, *Al-Falsafa fi 'l-Mithaq*, Dār al-Qalam, Cairo, 1965, p.114.

¹³⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.215.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.215.

¹³⁷ 'Abd al-Aẓīm Ramaḍān, *Qiṣṣat Nasser wa al-Shuy'yyīn*, Al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āma li'l-Kitāb, Cairo, 1988, p.29.

¹³⁸ 'Abd Allah Imām, *Ḥikayyāt 'Abd al-Nasser*, Maṭba'at al-Sha'b, Cairo, 1987, p.15.

mere inspector. This unsettled him as he had always believed in the system. Apart from the security that the job gave him, he looked at it from the prism of his Islamic activism and his commitment to the cause of Islam. He believed that the further one is promoted, the more one can help the cause. It was this belief, therefore, that motivated him to work with Nasser and his successor, Anwar Sadat.¹³⁹

The aftermath of the conference was that al-Ghazali was banned from giving *Jum'a* (Friday) sermons at Al-Azhar and from participating in any form of broadcast programme.¹⁴⁰ This led him to believe that he was targeted by the regime in order to "besiege" and "liquidate" him financially and morally.¹⁴¹ The financial effect was to hit him hard because of his commitments.¹⁴² What added to his distress was that new editions of two of his books, *Ma'a Allah* and *Al-Ṭa'ṣub wa al-Tasāmuḥ* were confiscated by the police while a third, *Kifāh Dīn* was referred to the Interior Ministry.¹⁴³

In the midst of it all, he received an official invitation from Kuwait to give a series of lectures during Ramaḍān.¹⁴⁴ While in Kuwait, he gave interviews to newspapers, appeared on state radio and television, and signed a contract with publishers to print and distribute ten of his books.¹⁴⁵ He started to give *Jum'a* sermons at the 'Umar Makram Mosque in central Cairo upon his return home, but he was advised to stop in order not to cause embarrassment

¹³⁹ *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.228-229.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Ghazali might be speaking about radio, as television was new in Egypt at the time. Khalafallah says that al-Ghazali was not a familiar face on television in the 1970s and 1980s due to his bluntness, p.56.

¹⁴¹ During this period, he completed three books. As he completed them, he learned that three of his books were banned while still with the publishing house, and one of them was confiscated by the Interior Ministry (*Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p. 213).

¹⁴² At the time of this crisis, he was in the process of building a new house in Gizah, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.213.

¹⁴³ The two books alongside *Kifāh Dīn* were published after the revolution. They were approved at the time by the censorship authorities. However, reprinting them was problematic. *Kifāh Dīn* on its part, was subject to a court case. Al-Ghazali was accused by the prosecution of inciting religious unrest between the Muslims and Copts. Al-Ghazali was able to convince the court that the facts of the book are true, and the judge then ruled in favour the book's distribution. However, Interior Ministry refused to implement this ruling, and continued banning the book. According to al-Ghazali, it was only when Nasser died that the ban was lifted. See *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, pp.199-200.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Ghazali must have visited Kuwait in around 1962, if the fact that he left the *Al-Itihād al-Ishtirākī* in 1961 is taken into consideration.

¹⁴⁵ *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.213.

to Ḥusayn al-Shāfi'ī (1918-2005) who allowed him to work on his return in public mosques.¹⁴⁶ During the ban, he continued to write books and give lectures in private mosques and public clubs.¹⁴⁷

As already mentioned, Nasser confronted the Muslim Brotherhood when he discovered the existence of a group started and led by Sayyid Quṭb, who Nasser accused of plotting to topple his regime. As a result, more than eighteen thousand Brotherhood members were rounded up and imprisoned, some to perish at the hands of torturers. Although al-Ghazali had left the movement a long time previously, he was not spared the persecution. He, like others, was arrested and sent to the infamous Ṭurra prison where he was detained for a short time. According to al-Ghazali the reason for his arrest had nothing to do with the activities of the secret organisation. It was rather because he refused to heed Nasser's order to condemn the Muslim Brotherhood, reveal their terrorist record and warn the nation about them.¹⁴⁸

Al-Ghazali's recollection of the incident indicates that he did not condone Nasser's policies against the Brotherhood despite justifying his early collaboration with the regime on the grounds that he would be better able to serve Islam from within, only to realise later that it was impossible. As is written in most of the Brotherhood's literature (which has come to be known as the "*miḥna*" [inquisition] produced during that period), al-Ghazali believed that Nasser and his regime conspired against Islam and the Brotherhood. He believed that Nasser was working to weaken Islam in Egypt. His aim was to replace Islam with communism.¹⁴⁹ Al-Ghazali scathingly remarked that Nasser never won a battle except the one he launched

¹⁴⁶ Al-Ghazali did not specify al-Shāfi'ī's post, but he was at that time the Minister for Al-Azhar affairs.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.214.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p.216. He also detailed the ordeal of the Muslim Brotherhood in his book *Qadhā'if al-Ḥaqq*.

¹⁴⁹ Raymond Baker, *Sadat and After: Struggles for Egypt's Political Soul*, I. B. Tauris, London, 1990, pp.248-249. Again, the late General Guide of the Brotherhood, 'Umar Telemeany emphasised the same belief in his book, *Qāl al-Nās wa lam Aqul fī Ḥukum 'Abd al-Nasser*, Dār al-'Itiṣām, Cairo, 1985, pp.324-330.

"against his brothers, Islam and the dignity of the people".¹⁵⁰ It seems obvious that al-Ghazali's views reflect his disillusionment with the revolution as well as the attitude of the Muslim Brotherhood who accused Nasser of working to destroy the Islamic movement i.e. Islam.

Nasser would often feature in al-Ghazali's writings. He expressed frustration and disillusionment with the revolution which he had hoped would bring justice and equality to Egyptians. Instead, it brought despotism and corruption, and imposed the cult of the leader on the nation.¹⁵¹ Al-Ghazali would detail, in one of his books, a list of what he saw as Nasser's betrayals of the cause of Islam.¹⁵² Due to the fact that it took three years for the regime to change after Nasser's death, al-Ghazali's metaphor is that Nasser died in 1967 (the Arab defeat), but he was not buried until 1970.¹⁵³

With Sadat

Nasser's departure ended an era which al-Ghazali views negatively. Al-Ghazali felt a sense of relief at the change as he was able to resume his work. He even went to greet the new president with delegates from Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Religious Affairs after Sadat purged his opponents in what is known as "the Correction Movement".¹⁵⁴ Sadat indicated that he was pleased with al-Ghazali, and the Minister of Waqf at the time, 'Abd al-'Azīz Kāmil who was given indirect orders to promote al-Ghazali to the office of deputy. Al-Ghazali recounts in his autobiography that he went on to work hard in order to show his gratitude to the new president.¹⁵⁵ He went on to initiate *da'wa* activities at the Ministry, to

¹⁵⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.221.

¹⁵¹ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Istibdād al-Siyāsī*, p.52-58 and 135-140.

¹⁵² Al-Ghazali, *Qadhā'if al-Ḥaqq*, p.119.

¹⁵³ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.224.

¹⁵⁴ On how Sadat managed to purge his regime of the elements of the old regime, see his book *Al-Baḥṭh 'an al-Dhāt: Qiṣṣat Ḥayā'i*, Maṭābi' al-Ahrām, Cairo, 1979, pp.229-237.

¹⁵⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.225.

help support mosque libraries and organise Qur'ānic competitions. For him, his most important achievement was the restoration of the old 'Amr Ibn al-'Āṣ Mosque in Cairo.¹⁵⁶ Part of his enthusiasm for the new era was the victory of the 1973 Ramaḍān War. Al-Ghazali saw the war as a *jihād*¹⁵⁷ which restored dignity and victory not only to the Egyptians, but also to Arabs and Muslims. Sadat himself encouraged the Islamic features of the state, and liked to be called *Al-Ra'īs al Mu'min* (the Believers' President).¹⁵⁸

While an employee at the Ministry of Waqf, al-Ghazali combined his public role as a preacher with writing for newspapers. His articles appeared in the 1940s, and continued to appear until his death in 1996.¹⁵⁹ Al-Ghazali also worked in the media, and from 1946 until 1947 became editor-in-chief of *Nūr al-Islam*, the official magazine published by Al-Azhar. His career at the ministry continued with his appointment in turn as Supervisor of Islamic affairs, Director of Training, Director for Propagation and Guidance in 1971, and then Deputy for the Minister of Waqf for Islamic Propagation in 1981.

Despite his dedication, things started to change when al-Ghazali refused to soften his criticism of Sadat's regime. The Minister for Religious Affairs advised him not to go too far in his sermons, but he refused, and was therefore blacklisted.¹⁶⁰ His problems worsened when Sadat changed alliances, and started a campaign against the Islamists when the latter rejected the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Al-Ghazali's opposition to the changes in

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp.225-227.

¹⁵⁷ This is partly because the soldiers chanted *Allahu Akbar* (God is Great) while marching to battle. Al-Ghazali and the famous preacher, Hāfiẓ Salāma (b.1925) joined efforts in raising the morale of the soldiers, see *Humūm Dā'iyyah*, Nahḍat Miṣr, Cairo, 2003, pp. 95-100. When the war started, he was in Morocco to give lectures as the king's guest. See also 'Alā' al-Ghazali, *Al'Atā' al-Fikrī li'l-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, pp.189-190.

¹⁵⁸ John Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, Syracuse University Press, 1998, p.236 and *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p.93.

¹⁵⁹ He wrote in many magazines and newspapers in Egypt and the Arab world, among them the Muslim Brotherhood's newspapers such as *Al-Da'wa*, *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, *Minbar al-Islam* and *Al-Mabāḥith al-Qaḍā'iyya* in Egypt, and *Al-Muslimūn*, *Sayida'i* in, *Al-Wa'yy al-Islami*, *Al-Mujtama'* in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. See Khālīd Kamāl al-Ṭāhir, *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 4, pp.264-266.

¹⁶⁰ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhu*, p.54.

Family Law,¹⁶¹ seen as a move to westernise the traditional family in Egypt, also incurred the government's wrath.¹⁶² Al-Ghazali believed that Sadat's changing attitude was because of his visits to America, where he allegedly received orders from the Americans to move against the Islamists in order to consolidate his power.¹⁶³ This is similar to the view al-Ghazali held about Nasser's visit to Russia, and the crackdown on the Brotherhood thereafter. In both cases, al-Ghazali gives the impression that any move against the Islamists in Egypt must have been done with foreign pressure. This is not dissimilar to what he said about al-Hudaybi being in league with the Freemasons as previously discussed. However, we need to appreciate that al-Ghazali was writing in the heat of the moment; and that his writings reflect, to a certain degree, the mood of "the Arab street" who tend to believe that anything that happens in the Middle East would not have happened without the intervention of the great powers be it the former Soviet Union or the United States.

Leaving Egypt

Al-Ghazali sought an escape in the face of isolation. He decided to leave Egypt when the Dean of the Shari'ah Faculty at the King 'Abd al-'Aziz University in Saudi Arabia invited him to teach in Makka in 1974.¹⁶⁴ Al-Ghazali spent seven years at the Umm al-Qurā

¹⁶¹ This law was known as "Jehān's Law", named after Sadat's wife who championed it. See 'Alā' al-Ghazālī, *Al'Atā' al-Fikrī li'l-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, p.191.

¹⁶² Al-Ghazali, *Al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya fi'l-Qarn al-Hālī*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, 2000, p.119.

¹⁶³ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Hayāt*, p.229.

¹⁶⁴ Some said that al-Ghazali left Egypt because his name came under the investigation in the attempt by the Military Academy Group to assassinate Sadat and bring about a coup d'état in 1974. The group was led by the Palestinian Ṣālih Siriyā (1933-1974), the latter did meet with al-Ghazali and other Islamist leaders before deciding to go his own way and form his group. Al-Ghazali in his letter to *Al-'Itisām* magazine in 1975 made it clear that he had no relation with the group whatsoever and maintained that his problem with Sadat was because of his opposition to the aforementioned family law. See Muḥammad 'Amāra, *Al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī: Al-Mawq'ī al-Fikrī*, p.34 and Naṣr al-Dīn La'raba, *Al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, pp.191-193.

University in Saudi Arabia before moving to Qatar in 1981 where he taught at the University of Qatar until his move to Algeria in 1984.¹⁶⁵

During al-Ghazali's time in Makka, many in Egypt protested against his self-imposed exile. This enraged Sadat who accused al-Ghazali of inciting unrest between the Muslims and the Copts¹⁶⁶ This despite the fact that al-Ghazali was a member of the High Council of the Permanent Islamic Propagation which was formed to calm down emotions after the 1981 violent sectarian clashes in the Al-Zāwiya al-Hamrā' area in Cairo.¹⁶⁷ Sadat went on to remark that al-Ghazali had left Egypt because he was being paid a much higher salary in Saudi Arabia. Al-Ghazali responded with an open letter published in the *Al-Ahram* daily newspaper and another to Sadat himself where he made clear that he was prepared to leave Makka and return to Egypt if his job at the 'Amr Ibn al-'Āṣ Mosque was given back to him.¹⁶⁸ He went further to say that he had informed the Ministers of Waqf, Shaykh al-Dhahabī (1915-1977)¹⁶⁹ and Shaykh Muḥammad Mutawafī al-Sha'rāwī¹⁷⁰ of his preparedness to return to Egypt on the condition that his freedom of expression was guaranteed.¹⁷¹

In Algeria (1984-1989)

Al-Ghazali became engaged in Algerian affairs while still in Qatar. Algeria had witnessed an Islamic revival during the 1980s with the Islamic movement gaining ground after the death of President Houari Boumediene (1932-1978). He was a staunch socialist, a post-

¹⁶⁵ Although al-Ghazali felt the shock of change, his time in Saudi Arabia led him to alter his earlier views with regard to its founder, King 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Saud whom he found to be religious and pious. See al-Ghazali, *Al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya*, pp.119-120.

¹⁶⁶ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Ghazālī kamā 'Araḥūhu*, p. 54.

¹⁶⁷ Hamied Ansari, *Egypt: The Stalled Society*, State University Press, New York, 1986, p.228.

¹⁶⁸ 'Alā' al-Ghazali, *Al-'Aṭā' al-Fikrī li'l-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, p.192.

¹⁶⁹ He was a scholar in Islamic studies and the author of an important book on the development of Qur'anic commentaries. He was kidnapped and killed at the hands of the al-Takfīr wa al-Hijra (Excommunication and Migration).

¹⁷⁰ He was a famous preacher and Qur'anic commentator known for his refined style and his popular television programme. He was born in 1911 and died in 1998.

¹⁷¹ 'Alā' al-Ghazali, *Al-'Aṭā' al-Fikrī li'l-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, p.192.

colonial leader who was one of the founding fathers of the modern Algerian republic. His successor, Chadli Benjedid allowed the Islamists a voice.¹⁷² Many leading Muslim intellectuals were invited to participate in an annual state organised conference on Islamic thought.¹⁷³ During one of his visits, al-Ghazali met Benjedid who invited him to live in Algeria, hoping that al-Ghazali would play a role in moderating the rising Islamic movement.¹⁷⁴ There al-Ghazali found a very Westernised country where Arabic was marginalised, and the country rife with both religious and political divisions.¹⁷⁵ He was given the freedom to initiate whatever *da'wa* work he felt suitable. When the Amīr ‘Abd al-Qādir University was officially opened in 1984, al-Ghazali was appointed president of the university's Academic Council. In addition to his academic commitments, Benjedid also ensured that al-Ghazali was given air time on state television.¹⁷⁶

Unfortunately, al-Ghazali continued to face difficulties. This was partly the result of extreme elements among the Algerian Islamists.¹⁷⁷ The severe circumstances under which al-Ghazali had to work took a toll on his health. He continued to work despite suffering his first heart attack and his family's concerns. He only resigned from his post when the situation became unbearable.¹⁷⁸ Al-Ghazali had spent five years between 1984 and 1989 in Algeria, and the question arose as to where he could go next. His disciples felt that if he were to

¹⁷² See, John Esposito, *Islam and Politics and Islamic Threat*, pp.302-306 and pp.171-191 respectively.

¹⁷³ The initiative was called "The Convention of Islamic Thought". This idea is the brainchild of the famous Algerian intellectual Mālik Bennabi.

¹⁷⁴ Al-Ghazali gives an account of his invitation to Algeria in *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, Vol.4, pp. 207-209. According to Gilles Kepel, al-Ghazali's invitation and that of his fellow scholar, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī was an attempt by the regime to strengthen the Islamic credentials of the National Liberation Front (FLN) and its nationalist ideology which was losing support. See *Jihad: The Trial of Political Islam*, I. B. Tauris, 2006, p.165. See also Ray Takey and Nikolas Gvosdev, *The Receding Shadow of the Prophet*, Praeger Publishers, 2004, pp.41-42.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Alā’ al-Ghazali, *Al-‘Aḥādīth al-Fikrī li’l-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, p.193.

¹⁷⁶ He gave more than 600 lectures. See *Manhaj al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī fi’l-Tajdīd wa al-Iṣlāḥ*, Dār al-Yumn, Quşantīna, 2003, p.204.

¹⁷⁷ Not only in Algeria but from Egypt where the interior minister accused al-Ghazali of taking a huge amount of money from an Arab country. Al-Ghazali refuted this claim in *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, Vol.3. pp.34-36.

¹⁷⁸ On the Algerian experience, see Amār al-Ṭālibī, "Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā ‘Araḥūhu fi’l-Jazā’ir," in *Islāmīyat alMa’rifāh*, pp. 49-70. Also, Kamāl Abū Sinna compiled some of the speeches al-Ghazali gave during his stint in Algeria, in *Al-‘Aḥādīth al-jazā’iryya li’l-Imām Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, Dār al-Kalima, Cairo, 2004.

return to Egypt, any post he held should match his reputation abroad. They believed that his status as the leading thinker in the Muslim world made him a good candidate for the rectorship of Al-Azhar, or the job of the *Murshid* of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁷⁹

Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī the director of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) speaks of a futile campaign in support of al-Ghazali to attain one of these two posts, which came to nothing partly because both these establishments were not supportive of his appointment. His history of criticising state policies weighed heavily against him with regard to the post of Shaykh Al-Azhar as the appointment was by presidential decree alone.¹⁸⁰ This was no different in terms of the Brotherhood leadership. Although he was one of the living members of its founding committee, he was not the most senior. Others in the organisation also raised the issue of his 1953 dismissal from the organisation as a hindrance, while some based their objection on the grounds that he had not spent a long enough time in prison as others had.¹⁸¹ Given these obstacles, his supporters found a viable alternative for him in the form of the IIIT.

Al-Ghazali was aware of the IIIT's work which focused on the Islamisation of knowledge. He knew many of its members, especially its principal founder, Ismail al-Faruqi (1921-1986).¹⁸² The IIIT devised an ideal way to reward and accord him the place he deserved, and help him re-settle in his homeland. They thus appointed him as president of the Academic Council of their bureau in Cairo.¹⁸³ Al-Ghazali welcomed the idea and expressed his appreciation, especially as he was to work with many prominent scholars. His collaboration

¹⁷⁹ Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, "Shaykhnā Muḥammad al-Ghazālī," *Islāmīyat alMa'rifah*, Vol.11, No. 7, (January, 1997), p.9.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Abd al-Mun’im Khafājī, *Al-Azhar fi Alf ‘Am*, Vol. 1, p.234.

¹⁸¹ Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, *Islāmīyat alMa'rifa*, pp.6-9. Al-‘Alwānī says most of these objections were trivial, especially those about him not being the most senior among the living founding fathers.

¹⁸² Al-Ghazali came to know him early on when al-Faruqi sought to translate his book *Min Hunā Na'lam* into English. Al-Faruqi translated it as *Our Beginning in Wisdom* (1975). Al-Ghazali wrote about their friendship after al-Faruqi's assassination in 1986. See *Al-Ḥaq al-Murr*, Vol. 1, pp.91-93 and also Esposito and Voll, *Makers of The Islamic Movement*, pp.23-39.

¹⁸³ Al-‘Alwānī, *Islāmīyat alMa'rifah*, p.10.

with the IIIT was to be the most fruitful period of his academic life. It was then that he wrote the majority of his later and most mature works, and he would go on to publish more than a thousand articles.¹⁸⁴ Working with eminent Islamists he also agreed to have a video recording of his life made. According to al-‘Alwānī, al-Ghazali provided more than 15 hours of recording which charting his early life and education. Most importantly, it is a record of the times in which he lived from a critical point of view.¹⁸⁵

Al-Ghazali became involved with many causes during the last years of his life. He supported the Muslims of Bosnia in the civil war, and despite his illness travelled there to present their politicians with a proposed constitution based on Islamic principles.¹⁸⁶ Of note is his close relationship with Iran. He made frequent visits to the Islamic Republic, which his son ‘Alā’ explained as his father's efforts to mediate and secure the release of Egyptian prisoners captured during the Iran-Iraq war given that the Iranians had refused to heed calls from the UN and Egyptian officials to release them. The Iranians considered al-Ghazali to be an acceptable mediator by virtue of his delicate approach and his efforts in calling for dialogue between the Sunnīs and the Shi‘īs.¹⁸⁷ The long and arduous process of negotiations ended with the release of the captives.

The Foda affair

The one thing that stands out in al-Ghazali's career that caused much debate and controversy is his testimony during the trial of the killers of Faraj Foda (1945-1992), writer, human rights activist and critic of the Islamists. Al-Ghazali knew Foda as they used to participate in debates about the nature of the Egyptian state, whether it should be Islamic or

¹⁸⁴ Some of his articles were published in a series of books in three volumes, *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, each compiled by a different researcher. All are published by Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, Cairo.

¹⁸⁵ Ṭāhā Jābir ‘Alwānī, p.12. Haifa Khalafallah, p.74.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Alā’ al-Ghazālī in *Al-‘Aṭā’ al-Fikrī*, p.195.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.195.

secular. They participated in a major debate in 1992 on the matter.¹⁸⁸ Foda was assassinated that same year by two extremists who considered him to be an apostate. Al-Ghazali's expert opinion was sought by the defence to define the concept of apostasy. He appeared in Court on 22 June 1993. When asked by the presiding judge of the Egyptian High Court of State Security to comment on Foda's murder, al-Ghazali offered the view that the killing was in fact the implementation of the punishment against an apostate, which the state had failed to implement.

This shocked both the liberals and the establishment alike, and drew the attention of the local and international media.¹⁸⁹ It became a political issue which would eventually affect the relationship between al-Ghazali and the government, as well as his relationship with secularists with whom he had established a good rapport, and who had until then considered him to be the voice of moderation among the Islamists, thus earning their respect.¹⁹⁰ However, al-Ghazali would defend himself by saying that he was merely citing the *sharī'a* ruling, not giving his own view, and that he was testifying in court, not in the streets. He expressed shock to the media reaction, and sought to defend himself during many interviews where he said that the media inflated the matter and took his answer to a legal question as condoning the killing.¹⁹¹ It is true that al-Ghazali testified in the court as an expert but other than sanctioning the individual to punish someone accused of *ridda* (apostasy) he was

¹⁸⁸ The debate was organised by the syndicate of writers as part of the Cairo International Book Fair. It was moderated by Samīr Sarḥān, the head of the syndicate. Other participants included representatives from the Islamist and secular camps. It was attended and watched by thousands. For the proceedings and the reaction to the debate, see *Miṣr Bayna al-Dawla al-Islamiyya wa al-'Almaniyya* compiled by Khālīd Muḥsen, Al-Markaz al-Arabi li'l-'Ilām, Cairo, 1992.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Gharīb gives an inventory of 70 articles written on the case, mainly in the Egyptian and Arabic press. See al-Gharīb, pp.119-125. For the Western media reaction, one may consult Caryle Murphy, *Passion for Islam: Shaping the Modern Middle East, the Egyptian Experience*, Lisa Drew Books, New York, 2002, p.322.

¹⁹⁰ Al-Ghazali pursued his debate with secularists in Egypt by giving lectures and attending the debates at the Cairo International Book Fair where he became known for his encounters with the secular forces in Egypt. As part of his interest in this issue, he delivered his famous lecture "Islam and Secularism" at the Medical Association in Cairo on 11 July 1986. The text of this lecture may be found in *Muḥāḍarāt al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī fī Iṣlāḥ al-Fard wa al-Mujtama'* compiled by Quṭb 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Quṭb, Al-Bashīr, Cairo, 1989, pp.77-89.

¹⁹¹ Al-Ghazali gave many interviews, one of which was to the *Al-Majalla*, a Saudi magazine. This interview was included in Naṣr al-Dīn La'raba's *Al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, pp.77-82.

repeating what he wrote in the 1960s with regard to those who distort Islam and its heritage in the name of freedom of thought as being apostates and should be put to death, he says "How can we demand of Islam to permit the apostates the right to life so that they may take part in killing it?"¹⁹² The establishment, the liberals, the media and human right groups were all critical of al-Ghazali. Al-Azhar in turn, issued a manifesto banning individuals from punishing anyone regardless of the seriousness of his crime against Islam. However, al-Ghazali was defended by al-Qaraḍāwī and Huwaydī who tried to justify al-Ghazali's testimony. Al-Qaraḍāwī, published a detailed legal analysis of the testimony repeating what al-Ghazali himself had said.¹⁹³

According to Hatina the Foda affair illustrates the difficulty of labelling any stream of thought with modern terms, such as "Conservative", "Moderate" or "Extremist". The idea that they all rely on the *naṣṣ* to defend Islam against those who transgress against its tenets shows a camp united by one ideology.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, the testimony of a moderate scholar in a case which involves extremist offenders shows a kind of affinity between the two currents of thought. In fact, the moderate pronouncement against Foda somehow contributed indirectly to the murder because the killers used it to justify the killing.¹⁹⁵

Consequently, the government would no longer seek his advice on how to counter the challenges of the 1990s *jihād* campaign against the state.¹⁹⁶ However, al-Ghazali was to remain active and in touch with political and cultural debate until his death. He participated in many conferences from Amman to Riyadh, and from Algeria to Kuala Lumpur. He was

¹⁹² Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Istibḍāḍ al-Siyāsī*, pp.121-122, and *Huqūq al-'Insān*, pp.79-84.

¹⁹³ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Ghazali Kama 'Araftuhu*, pp. 280-291.

¹⁹⁴ Meir Hatina, *Identity Politics in the Middle East: Liberal Thought and Islamic Challenge in Egypt*, Tauris Academic Studies, 2007, p.70.

¹⁹⁵ Meir Hatina, *Identity Politics in the Middle East: Liberal Thought and Islamic Challenge in Egypt*, pp.68-69. See also Geneive Abdo, *No God But God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p.68.

¹⁹⁶ See Ray Takey and Gvosdev Nikolas, *The Receding Shadow of the Prophet*, p.75.

rewarded for his services to Islam by Saudi Arabia with the King Faisal Prize in 1989. In 1991 he won the state award in recognition of his services, and in 1995 Anwar Ibrahim, the president of the International Islamic University in Malaysia, presented him with an award from that university.¹⁹⁷

Al-Ghazali's legacy

Al-Ghazali died on 9 March 1996 in Saudi Arabia while participating in *Al-Janādriyya*, a cultural festival organised yearly in Riyadh. He received eulogies from scholars from all over the Muslim and Arab world, and was buried in the most revered cemetery in Islam, the Al-Baqī' cemetery in Madina. His death was reported both in the Arab and the international press.¹⁹⁸ His supporters and critics alike praised his services to Islam.¹⁹⁹ Throughout this chapter the attempt was to show that al-Ghazali combined the role of *'ālim* (scholar) and *dā'iyyah* (preacher). He writes in *Ta'mulāt fi'l-Dīn wa al-Ḥayā*, "I never imagined in my childhood, nor in my youth, that one day I would be a *dā'iyyah*."²⁰⁰ Nonetheless, al-Ghazali was not a popular provocateur. Rather, he was a man with a mission who tried to chart his career through difficult terrain. Although many liked to describe him as a thinker or scholar, he himself felt most comfortable with the title "*Shaykh*" which stayed with him all his life.

¹⁹⁷ It is worth noting that Al-Azhar recently recognized al-Ghazali's contribution to the Islam. Under the auspices of its current rector, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib, the International Alumni of Al-Azhar graduates organized a meeting to celebrate his life and work. This meeting was made possible due to the Egyptian Revolution, which ended 30 years of Hosni Mubarak's rule (reported in *Al-Ahram al-Yawmi* newspaper on 21 September 2011).

¹⁹⁸ The *New York Times* correspondent in Cairo, Douglas Jehl described him as an "Islamic cleric and scholar whose writings have influenced generations of Egyptians". He went on to say that he was the "author of 94 books... Shaikh al-Ghazali attracted a broad following with works that sought to interpret Islam and its holy book, the Koran, in modern light". Jehl also mentioned the Foda case of 1993. See *New York Times* (March 14, 1996).

¹⁹⁹ Articles published in Egypt in official, semi-official and opposition newspapers such as *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Sh'ab*, *Al-Wafd* and *Al-Ahālī*. In *Al-Ahram* for example, more than 15 articles were published about him. See Al-Gharīb, *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī, Ḥayātuhu wa 'Aṣruhu*, pp.112-118.

²⁰⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Ta'mulāt fi'l-Dīn wa al-Ḥayā*, p.3

Another aspect worthy of mention is the way he used to preach and establish lines of communication with the establishment and masses alike. He reminds us on many occasions that he was not a follower of any school of thought, and never looked at himself as being confined to one wave of Islamic thinking. He also made clear that he was not in any way a rigid follower of the Brotherhood.²⁰¹ He spoke of his own line of thinking based on extracting the best from all trends in the different fields of thought, *fiqh* and Islamic history. He combined this with openness in the face of modernity in the fields of knowledge and discovery. He saw himself as a pioneer, or the one who paved the way, in this direction.²⁰² Al-Ghazali considered independence and freedom from the confines of a specific school as being important to his own intellectual development, whether it concerned Islam or politics. He explained, "I am one of the Al-Azhar scholars who worked from within the ranks of the Brotherhood for nearly twenty years. I did not take pride in being a member of this group or that. My loyalty to Islam is more important than my loyalty to the university I graduated from or a group that I joined".²⁰³

In summary, this exposition of al-Ghazali's life from a historical and social perspective is an attempt to understand the main events that shaped and influenced his life. The main themes explored relate to his Azharite education, his Islamic activism and his relationship with the establishment. These findings are consistent, to a certain point, with his profile as an independent and moderate voice among the Islamists. However, this study does not claim to present a comprehensive profile of the man. Hence, what has been presented of his personal life is intertwined with his career and influenced by his intellectual progress.

²⁰¹ Al-Ghazali, *Fī Mawkiḥ al-Da'wa*, p.11

²⁰² Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazālī*, Vol.3, p.166.

²⁰³ Al-Ghazali, *Fī Mawkiḥ al-Da'wa*, p.12.

One may be tempted to describe al-Ghazali as a maverick, but this would not do him justice. He was neither a lone voice nor a band of his own. His life story shows that he worked with others, maintained good relations with the ‘*ulamā*’, the politicians and royal personages. One could argue that the contour of al-Ghazali's life reveals a set of contradictions, for al-Ghazali's apparent lack of judgment led him to serve Islam by working with people who he would later denounce. His mantra to work with the Egyptian establishment led him to sometimes act as intermediary between two extremes – the state on one side and its opponent, the extremists, on the other. In most cases he would lose favour with both sides. This was tested in Egypt when he worked briefly with Nasser and Sadat.

He was among the moderates Mubarak relied on to reason with the extremists who waged war against the government, and al-Ghazali reprised the role in Algeria, which took a toll on his health. Al-Ghazali's boldness stands out, as does his sense of responsibility towards his cause. It is through this that we will come to understand his legacy and place in modern Islamic thought. When we speak of his legacy, we speak of his influence on a generation of Muslim activists, intellectuals and writers who continue to hold to his vision and ideas. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī stands as a living example. He, to a certain extent, is loyal to al-Ghazali's vision, albeit in a different way. Al-Qaraḍāwī has written about each and every issue, such as women, democracy, the problems of *ṣaḥwa*, *ḥadīth*, how to approach the Qurʾān and so on, that al-Ghazali tackled during his life. However, needless to say, the manner in which al-Qaraḍāwī deals with these issues is different. While al-Ghazali avoided an academic and scholastic style, the works of al-Qaraḍāwī bear the hallmark of a writer who is interested in details.

Al-Ghazali is considered by many as the most distinguished scholar in "modern Islam".²⁰⁴ His influence extends beyond his homeland and is apparent in countries as far afield as Iran and Malaysia. His books have been translated into many languages, among them English, Malay, Albanian and Persian. His writings were popular in Iran before the Iranian revolution and these, together with the books of Sayyid Quṭb are considered a major influence on the political thought of the Iranian revolution.²⁰⁵

The former deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim, summed up al-Ghazali's contribution to modern Islamic thought when he spoke about himself and the youth of his generation in Malaysia who came to know al-Ghazali through his books:

"At a time when the *umma* is all too prone to be swayed by the impulses of passion, the ideas of Shaikh al-Ghazali provide a powerful counterpoise. His is the celebration of reason over passion, balanced view over blinkered perspective, knowledge over ignorance, intellectual rigour over indolence and sloppiness, tolerance over bigotry. These, to my mind, are his enduring legacy, the legacy of the central motives of Islam, of the great scholars of the past, which he has faithfully transmitted to us."²⁰⁶

Having discussed the life of al-Ghazali, his milieu and the forces that shaped his thought, we now turn our attention to charting his intellectual development. This will be done by examining his work in the field of Qur'ānic studies that form the bases of his vision of the

²⁰⁴This may be an exaggeration, but it indicates his importance in modern Islamic scholarship. Nevertheless, the description of al-Ghazali varies from thinker to scholar, but he is simply known as the "Shaykh" to indicate his authority. See Abu Rabi', *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in post-1967 Arab Intellectual History*, p.224. See also Muṣṭafā Alzarqā in *Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī: Kalimāt fī Takrīmihī wa Buḥūth fī Fikrihī wa Fiqhī*, Dār al-Salām, Cairo, 2004, p.43. Al-Zarqā considers him as one of the most important Muslim scholars in modern times. In addition to Al-Qaraḍāwī (born 1926), others include Abū al-Ḥasan Nadawī (1914-1999) and Aḥī al-Ṭanṭāwī (1909-1999). The same description may also be found in Raymond Baker, *Islam Without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamist*. p.7.

²⁰⁵ 'Abbās Khāma Yār, *Iran Wa al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn: Dirāsa fī 'Awāmil al-Iltiqā' wa al-Iftirāq*, Markaz al-Dirasāt al-Istrāṭijīyya wa al-Buḥūth, Beirut, 1998, p.227 and Anthony Shadid, *The Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam*, Westview, 2002, pp.68-71.

²⁰⁶ Excerpt from his speech during the ceremony held at the International Islamic University on 22 August 1995.

reformation of Islamic thought. In view of this, it is perhaps fitting to discuss the analysis of his views on the thematic interpretation of the Qurʾān in the next chapter, and point out that although he was a follower of the trend started by ‘Abduh, al-Ghazali used *al-tafsīr al-mawḍūʿī* (thematic interpretation) to criticise the old commentaries in order to highlight controversial issues pertaining to *sunna*, women and theology which would require Muslims to re-think and re-read the main Islamic sources.

CHAPTER TWO

Al-Ghazali and the thematic interpretation of the Qur'ān:

An assessment

Introduction

According to al-Qaraḍāwī, al-Ghazali stated that the Qur'ān was his constant companion, having memorised it at a young age. He continued to revisit it and delved into its meaning throughout his life.¹ It was the driving force behind his life and work, and he would often quote from it, reminding his readers of his devotion to it which sprang from the way he understood its role in the lives of Muslims and their beliefs. He considered it as the only source of Islamic beliefs.² Once he likened it to a tree where no branch could live without it.³

Reading the Qur'ān

In addition to his devotion, al-Ghazali put great emphasis on the best way or ways to approach the Qur'ān. This apparent need for new approaches was, to a great extent, a reaction to the way the Qur'ān has been taught in religious schools, or treated by commentators in the field of exegesis. Although he was exposed to the Qur'ān early in life, towards the end of his life al-Ghazali opposed the way it was taught or memorised in Qur'ānic schools.

Al-Ghazali felt that Muslims living with advanced technology in the modern world do not need many "moving *muṣḥaf*" or "tape recorders", his synonyms for *ḥuffāz* (memorisers) of

¹ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nata'āmal Ma' al-Qur'ān*, IIIT, Dar al-Wafā', Cairo, 1992, p.32. See also *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 3, p.164, *Muḥāḍarāt al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, p.18 and *Turāthunā al-Fikrī fī Mizān al-'Aql wa al-Shar'*, p.156.

² Al-Ghazali, *Ma'rakat al-Muṣḥaf fi'l-'Ālam al-Islami*, p.30.

³ Al-Ghazali, *Laysa Mina al-Islam*, p.28 and 37.

the sacred text,⁴ as much as people who are capable of understanding the text.⁵ He thought that the best way to approach the Qur'ān was through understanding its message.⁶ He felt that Muslims would sometimes shift their attention from understanding the text to merely reciting it,⁷ and observed that in most parts of the Muslim world, Muslims would lose sight of the purpose of the Qur'ān when they look at it as a source of *baraka* (blessing) rather than as a way of life.⁸ He once lamented, "How long will the Qur'ān be treated as the book of the dead where people listen to it at funerals rather than at study circles?"⁹

Al-Ghazali devoted three books to the study of the Qur'ān, in addition to his own contribution to Qur'ānic exegesis, *Naḥwa Tafṣīr al-Mawḍū'ī li'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (hereinafter *Naḥwa*). The first of these books was published when he was forty years old, and the last just one year before his death. These four books, when taken in chronological order, give the reader an understanding of the major themes that al-Ghazali tried to pursue throughout his life. A close analysis of the contents of these books shows that the first, *Nazarāt fī'l-Qur'ān* (1958) formed the basis of the majority of Qur'ānic issues found in later books. After *Nazarāt*, he published *Al-Maḥāwir al-Khamsa fī'l-Qur'ān* (1989) and *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Qur'ān* (1991) respectively. This latter was the fruit of the dialogue between him and the Syrian writer, 'Umar 'Ubayd Ḥasana. The first volume of *Naḥwa*, al-Ghazali's commentary on the first ten *suwar* of the Qur'ān, was published in 1992. The

⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Ma'a Allah*, p.430.

⁵ Abdallah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, Routledge, London, 2005, p.116.

⁶ On al-Ghazali's views on the way the Qur'ān was taught, see *Kayfa Nata'āmal Ma' al-Qur'ān*, pp.32-34, *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, Vol. 3, p.218 and *Nazarāt fī'l-Qur'ān*, Bayt al-Qur'ān, Bahrain, 1993, pp.5-6.

⁷ To him, "listening without understanding and reading the Qur'ān hurriedly are illnesses that kill the human faculties and transform him (the human) into a mere ghost with no soul". See *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, Vol. 1, p.87. See also Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, pp.250-251.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.87.

⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Rakā'iz al-Imān bayna al-'Aql wa al-Qalb*, p.142.

second volume, containing his complete commentary of the whole of the Qur'ān, was published in 1995.¹⁰ This last book will be examined in the next chapter.

Thematic commentary was not something new that al-Ghazali had introduced, or changed the perceptions of. However, it is necessary to examine his contribution in light of what has already been written. Al-Ghazali himself spoke of his debt to his predecessors, but nevertheless emphasised the importance of this type of *tafsīr* as the best method of interpretation suitable to modern life.

This chapter will attempt to give an introduction to the state of thematic interpretation and present, as well as follow, the various meanings of thematic commentary to see if they relate to the unity of *sūra* or theme that can be chosen and followed throughout the Qur'ān.¹¹ Thereafter al-Ghazali's views on the nature and importance of thematic interpretation throughout his books will be presented. Prior to this, it is necessary to give a brief history of modern trends in *tafsīr* and the impact of Muḥammad 'Abduh and his school on thematic commentary.

'Abduh and his school

Al-Ghazali's contribution cannot be understood without referring to the works of the Egyptian scholar, theologian, commentator and reformer, Muḥammad 'Abduh. It was 'Abduh who changed the modern Muslim's approach to the Qur'ān. It would perhaps be natural to discuss the "Abduh factor" in the field of Islamic studies, and attribute the development of modern scholarship in Islam to him. Although no one doubts his influence in the field of theology and *tafsīr* and that he laid the foundations of modern *tafsīr*, some may

¹⁰ The third edition of a fifth book, *Ma'rakat al-Muḥaf fi'l-'Ālam al-Islamī* was published in 1971. Despite "*Muḥaf*" in its title, the book deals mainly with Muslim current affairs.

¹¹ Due to the huge interest in this type of commentary and the many books on the market, an attempt has been made to be as selective as possible where this thesis is concerned.

consider this accolade undeserved. Despite not having written many books in these fields, what few he wrote still exert a huge influence on Qur'ānic exegesis and theology. Jansen rightly observes that "before 'Abduh, the interpretation of the Qur'ān was an academic affair. Commentaries were written by scholars for other scholars".¹²

One of the main characteristics of 'Abduh's school is the preference to appeal to the hearts and minds of ordinary Muslims through the Qur'ān – the preference for the spoken word, or what 'Abduh calls *mukhāṭabāt* (discourses) over the written form.¹³ 'Abduh himself remarked, "I want the Qur'ān to be the source through which all opinions and ideas are interpreted; not the other way round."¹⁴ This statement is reaffirmed by his disciple, Riḍā who stated that 'Abduh wanted on the one hand to make "the Qur'ān the scale by which the true creed is value", and on the other he wanted "the Qur'ān to be the source of the creed".¹⁵

Al-Dhahabī sums up the main aspect of 'Abduh's school by saying that it avoids the influence of *madhhabīyya* and sectarianism in approaching the Qur'ān. It also stays away from ambiguous verses (*mutashābihāt*) and accepts them as they are, without engaging in polemic details.¹⁶ By doing so, 'Abduh and his followers have limited the scope for division within the Muslim community. This is not to imply in any way that they have narrowed the scope for discussion. Rather, what 'Abduh and his disciples suggest is that the above issues are a source of dispute (*khilāf*) among Muslims, and the more they discuss them, the more disunited they will become.

¹² Johannes J. G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1974, p.8.

¹³ 'Abduh started a circle to comment on the Qur'ān at Al-Azhar in 1899 which continued until 1905. The lectures he gave formed the basis of *Tafsīr al-Manār*. See Moḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Vol. 1, p.13.

¹⁴ Ibid., Vol. 1, p.17.

¹⁵ Ibid., Vol. 1, p.25.

¹⁶ Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasirūn*, Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-Arabi, Beirut, Vol. 2, pp.548-549

Al-Dhahabī criticised ‘Abduh's approach to the role he accorded to reason, and the way he commented on certain verses. He also reproached ‘Abduh for what he saw as his excessive leaning towards the principles of the Mu’tazilites.¹⁷ By thus accusing ‘Abduh, Al-Dhahabī ignores a very important strand in ‘Abduh's school, which is its reliance on *tafsīr* to defend Islam against Western accusation that Islam is incompatible with science.¹⁸

Despite the controversy, over the years the method of commentary ‘Abduh and his students generated has been universally accepted by modern Muslim scholars. It paved the way for the emergence of new genres in *tafsīr*, be it scientific, literary, ethico-social, thematic or even secular.¹⁹ The constant advances in science and technology as well as the scope of discoveries humanity has achieved in the twentieth century have given rise to scientific commentaries in the field of *tafsīr*.²⁰ In addition, rapid changes in the Arab and Muslim world have led many Islamic scholars to lay emphasis on the social, ethical and practical message of the Qur’ān. Scholars, al-Ghazali among them, have tried to look at ways of relating the Qur’ān to the daily life of Muslims.²¹

Due to the emphasis on the message and relevance of Islam to modern life, modern scholars seek to present their argument from within a framework that is simple and accessible without applying the detailed methodology of the past. In this way, the traditional way of looking at Qur’ānic verses as units isolated from the main theme of the *sūra* has given

¹⁷ Ibid., p.549.

¹⁸ Kate Zebiri, *Maḥmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism*, p.134.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.474-494.

²⁰ Most authors agree on the nature of modern trends, but sometimes differ slightly on their number – some speak of about five main types of *tafsīr* while others put the number at nine. See Bakrī Shaykh Amīn, *Al-Ta’bīr al-Fanī fi’l-Qur’ān*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, 1976, p.134. Also Faḍl Ḥasan ‘Abbās *Tayārāt al-Tafsīr fi Miṣr wa al-Shām fi’l-‘Aṣr al-Ḥadīth* and ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Muḥatasib, *Itijāhāt al-Tafsīr fi’l-‘Aṣr al-Ḥadīth*, Dār al-Fikr, Beirut, 1973. It should be mentioned that John Wansborough attempted to suggest a different typology in his book, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods and Scriptural Interpretation*, where he talked about textual, narrative, legal, allegorical and rhetorical types of *tafsīr*. For an assessment and criticism of this typology, see Farid Esack, *The Qur’an: A Short Introduction*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2002, pp.137-142.

²¹ ‘Abdallah Saced, *Interpreting the Qur’an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, pp.116-117 and Stefan Wild, *Political Interpretation of the Qur’an*, in Jane Dammen MacAuliffe, *The Cambridge Companion of The Qur’an*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, pp.276-293.

way to emphasising the importance of the main theme in that *sūra*. It is common now to find scholars writing about one topic in the Qurʾān such as money, women, ʿĪsā (Jesus), Mūsā (Moses), *tawḥīd*, the angels and so on. This method gives the reader a chance to follow and understand a specific theme in the Qurʾān.²² As will become clear later, thematic commentaries are of different types and their proponents are far from agreed on the methodology or terminology.²³

At this stage, it is important to point out that Qurʾānic studies in general, and commentaries in particular, developed in the last century as a response to social and political problems of Muslims at the local, national and international levels.²⁴ Most among those responsible for the huge output written in Arabic and in other languages in this area, who never questioned the validity of the Qurʾān as the main source of Islam, were Islamic activists engaged in social and political activism. Their efforts concentrated on bringing the realities of Muslim communities in line with Qurʾānic teachings, and affirming its centrality to Muslim life.²⁵ Therefore any attempt to study *tafsīr* in modern times should not ignore the role of ʿAbduh's school in shaping the way modern *mufasssīrūn* engage with the Qurʾān. Also, it is necessary to read modern discourse on the Qurʾān as a reflection of the Muslim dilemma and as part of the attempts by Muslims to find answers to the big question: What should be done to encourage Muslims to emerge from a state of inertia? In this case the history of modern *tafsīr* is part and parcel of Muslim modernism or *iṣlāḥ*.²⁶ Before looking at al-Ghazali's contribution, it is worth looking briefly at definitions of thematic interpretation and the main representatives of this method in modern times.

²² R. Weildant, *Exegesis of the Qurʾan: Early and Modern and Contemporary*, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾan* (EQ), Brill, Leiden, 2002, Vol. 2, pp.128-142.

²³ A quick look at the papers presented at the *Sharjah* conference, 24-26 April 2010 show different views on the origins. All papers are available on the web, and can be accessed from different sites (for example www.attaweeel.com).

²⁴ Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Fatāḥ al-Khālīdī, *Madkhal ilā Zilāl al-Qurʾān*, Dār ʿAmmār, Amman, 2000, Vol. 1, pp.59-62.

²⁵ Suha Taji-Farouki (ed.), *Modern Intellectuals and the Qurʾan*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, p.18.

²⁶ Stefan Wild, *Political Interpretation of the Qurʾan*, p.280.

Al-tafsīr al-mawḍūʿī

Tafsīr mawḍūʿī, generally translated as "thematic interpretation", is understood by modern Muslim scholars as a way to look at the Qurʾān from the perspective of the unity of the theme either in the Qurʾān as a whole, or the unity of the theme in its individual *sūra*. However, the exact definition of "thematic interpretation" is still contested among Qurʾān exegetes. Some understand unity in general terms, i.e. that the Qurʾān as a whole is united around one theme or more.²⁷ Others look at it as the unity of themes, while others still understand the unity in terms of the *sūra*. What is meant by the latter is that each *sūra* in the Qurʾān has a central theme (axis) around which other issues revolve. This is how the idea of thematic interpretation is presented by the majority of modern Muslim scholars, most of whom trained in traditional Islamic schools and learned the classical way of looking at Qurʾānic text.

The theme related hermeneutics places the interpreter at the heart of the text where he or she performs an internal analysis of the text. This is different from other modern approaches to the Qurʾān such as the ones applied by Mohammad Arkoun (1928-2010) and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (1943-2010) where the exegete tries to somehow distance himself or herself from the text.²⁸ However, proponents of this method of interpretation say that the idea of the unity or unities in Qurʾānic exegesis is not new. They point out that classical Muslim scholars were aware of this idea. Some, such as al-Zarkashī (1344-1391) spoke about it in

²⁷ See for example Muḥammad al-Bahī, *Naḥwa al-Qurʾān*, Maktabat Wahba, Cairo, 1981, p.81.

²⁸ For more elaboration, see Massimo Campanini, *The Qurʾan: Modern Muslim Interpretations*, Routledge, London, 2011, p.73.

detail. He devoted a whole chapter to it in his book, *Al-Burhān*,²⁹ and so too al-Suyūṭī in *Al-Itqān*.³⁰

Al-Zarkashī wrote on the agreement and disagreement among the scholars on this issue. He indicates the unity of theme in the Qurʾān through what he calls "*munāsaba* (coherence)-*irtibāt* (co-relation)",³¹ and points out that the scholar ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām (1181-1262) rejected this idea. Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām accepted the concept in a general sense, but not on a practical level. His reasoning is based on the idea that the Qurʾān was revealed over a period of approximately 23 years and in different circumstances, which makes the issue of unity impractical.³² Al-Zarkashī himself spoke favourably of the issue, but admits that only a few scholars accepted *‘ilm al-Munāsaba* or paid any attention to it.³³

In addition to the above references, some modern scholars attempting to formulate a history of *tafsīr al-mawḍūʿī* have looked for other references that belong to the classical period. Some have tried to trace this method to the second century of the Hijra.³⁴ Among the classical writers who showed great awareness of the unity in the Qurʾān was Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī in his *tafsīr, Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsib al-Asmāʾ wa al-Suwar*.³⁵ Al-Biqāʿī believed in the interrelation between the *suwar* of the Qurʾān. Al-Biqāʿī states that he discovered the relation between the name of the *sūra* and its theme in the tenth year that he was working on his *tafsīr*. According to him, each indicates its main theme, and this in turn points to the goal of the *sūra*. Al-Biqāʿī applied this idea on each *sūra* (for example on *Yūsuf, Ibrahim, Al-*

²⁹ Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qurʾān*, edited by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Dār al-Turāth, Cairo, 1980, Vol. 1, pp.39-55.

³⁰ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī also gives the names of the scholars who dealt with the issue. See *Al-Itqān*, Bulāq, 1951 Vol. 2, p.110.

³¹ It is understood that this type of coherence or cohesion is part of the study of linguistics. See Salwa M. S. El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qurʾān: Relevance, Coherence and Structure*, Routledge, London, 2006, p.9.

³² Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qurʾān*, Vol. 1, p.37.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.36.

³⁴ Aḥmad al-Kūmī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍūʿī li’l-Qurʾān al-Karīm*, (n. p.), 1982, Egypt, pp.20-21.

³⁵ His *tafsīr* was first published in Hyderabad Deccan, India.

Baqara and *Al-Taghābun*).³⁶ According to al-Khālīdī, the books written by al-Biqā'ī were innovative in approach at the time, but fall short when compared with the works of modern writers.³⁷ These earlier works do not conform to what is today known as thematic interpretation as it was understood by al-Zarkashī.³⁸

Despite the varied nature of each title, it is obvious that what some scholars meant was not a single theme that unites the *sūra* or the *suwar* of the Qur'ān. Rather, they attempted to look at the interrelation aspect in the Qur'ān, or what is referred to by al-Zarkashī and others as *naẓm* or *munāsaba*. Al-Shāṭibī, for example, refers to the unity of theme in the *sūra* in his *Muwafaqāt*. He attributes this idea to leading scholars (*al-A'imma*). According to him, they understood the *sūra* as one unit despite the fact that it refers to many issues, "and in the end it remains (the *sūra*) a single whole linking its beginning to its end".³⁹ Furthermore, *naẓm* in traditional exegesis was considered in relation to the *i'jāz* (inimitability) of the Qur'ān, while unity of theme in modern exegesis is mainly concerned with meanings.⁴⁰ Mir believes that the idea of the unity of the theme or topic has replaced *naẓm* in modern writings. He makes an attempt to study the idea in modern writings by highlighting the works of writers such as Maulana Abu al-Ala Mawdudi, Fazlur Rahman and Muḥammad Hijāzī.⁴¹

³⁶ Al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsib al-Asmā' wa al-Suwar*, Dar al-Kitāb al-Islami, Cairo, Vol.1, p.18. See also Vol.10, p.2, 396 and Vol.20.94.

³⁷ Ṣalāḥ 'Abd al-Fatāḥ al-Khālīdī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī Bayna al-Nazariya wa al-Taḥbīq*, Dār al-Nafā'is, Amman, 2008, p.65 and Muḥammad Tawfīq Sa'īd, *Al-Imām al-Biqā'ī wa Minhā Juhn fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, Dār Wahba, Cairo, 2003.

³⁸ Ziad Daghāmīn, *Manhajiyat al-Baḥth fī 'l-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī*, Dār al-Bashīr, Amman, 1995, p.19 and 'Abd al-Hay al-Farmāwī, *Al-Bidayya fī 'l-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī*, (n. p.), Egypt, 1984, p.57.

³⁹ Muḥammad 'Abd Allah Dirāz, *Al-Naba' al-'Azīm: Nazarāt Jadida fī 'l-Qur'ān*, Dār al-Qalam, Kuwait, p.159. The English version of the book is translated and edited by Adil Salahi under the title: *The Qur'ān: An Eternal Challenge: Al-Naba' al-'Azīm*, Islamic Foundation, Leicester, 2001, p.133.

⁴⁰ Ziad al-Daghāmīn, *Manhajiyat al-Baḥth fī 'l-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī*, p.96.

⁴¹ Hijāzī claims that he was the first modern exegete to present the notion of unity of topic in the Qur'ān in his work *Al-waḥda al-Mawḍū'iyya fī 'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, Maṭba'at al-Madanī, Cairo, 1970. On Islahi, see Musatansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān: A Study of Islahi Concept of Naẓm in Tadabu-i-Qur'ān*, American Trust Publication, Indianapolis, 1986, pp.19-21.

The idea of studying the Qur'ān from a thematic point of view became so popular in the twentieth century that there have been widespread calls for this method to be adopted. In tracing the beginning of thematic interpretation in modern times we should revisit 'Abduh.⁴² It was 'Abduh and the Al-Manār school who first emphasised the organic unity of the Qur'ān, and looked at unity in the *suwar* of the Qur'ān. Not only did 'Abduh and Riḍā speak about unity in the *sūra* itself, but they also tried to find links between the *suwar* themselves.⁴³ However, 'Abduh's work was not consistently thematic, nor was Riḍā's. The same may be said of those who adopted 'Abduh's method as most, if not all, considered part or a selection of *suwar* from the Qur'ān in order to apply this method of interpretation.

At this stage it is worth noting that early works on thematic interpretation came from Egypt in addition to India, Pakistan, Iran, Palestine and Syria. Indo-Pakistani exegetes were the first to attempt to produce a theoretical background for this type of *tafsīr*. Furthermore, they tried with little success to produce complete works based on thematic interpretation. Personalities such as Ashraf Ali Thanavi, Amīn Iṣḥāqī and Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī⁴⁴ were famous in this field. In the Arab world many exegetes such as Sayyid Quṭb (Egypt) and Muḥammad 'Izza Darwaza (Palestine) used this method of *tafsīr* while at the same time continuing to use the traditional methods of exegesis.

In Egypt in particular, the works of Muḥammad 'Abd Allah Dirāz, Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī and Maḥmūd Shaltūt formed the model for those who adopted this form of exegesis. Although they did not comment on the Qur'ān completely, their works along with those of

⁴² For more information on 'Abduh's role see Kate Zebiri, *Maḥmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism*, pp.132-137.

⁴³ For example Riḍā tried to link *Al-Imran* with *Al-Baqra* on the merit of the theme. See *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Vol.3, p.153

⁴⁴ Musatansir Mir, *The Sūra as a Unity: Twentieth Century Development in Qur'anic Exegesis*, pp. 212-217.

Albahī al-Khulī gave guidelines on how to approach the Qur'ān thematically.⁴⁵ In Iran the work of Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī is notable.

The number of Egyptian scholars who adopted this style of exegesis points to the role Egypt has played in the last century in developing new and innovative ways of interpretation.⁴⁶ Thematic interpretation is now a dominant topic in the field of Qur'ānic studies, where it has been taught in many universities.⁴⁷ As will be shown later, this trend is not unique to Arab and Muslim universities. There is clear evidence that the method has also been embraced by Western universities. In short, the thematic style has become a trend with many commentaries bearing "thematic" in their title.⁴⁸

Writers who have tried to give a theoretical background to this style of interpretation, while putting emphasis on *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*, are not breaking away from traditional commentaries i.e. *musalsal* or the atomistic method (i.e. verse by verse).⁴⁹ However, they advance many arguments in favour of it; one being that it allows the exegetes to have a comprehensive idea of what the Qur'ān says about an issue as to whether or not it is related to belief or modern challenges. Another argument is to do with the role of the exegetes in the

⁴⁵ Muḥammad al-Bahī, *Naḥwa al-Qur'ān*, p.82 and p.97.

⁴⁶ Roturad Weildant, *Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early and Modern and Contemporary*, p.124. Johanna Pink made the same observation in his survey on modern commentaries, "Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur'anic Exegesis: Qur'anic Commentaries from the Arab World, Turkey and Indonesia and their Interpretation of Q5:51", *Die Welt Des Islams, International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam*, Vol. 50, No.1., (2010), p.8.

⁴⁷ One of the most vibrant and active regions where thematic interpretation has become dominant is Indonesia. This is due to the active work of Quraish Shihab (b. 1944). Muḥammadiyah Amin and Kusmana counted more than 74 theses at Masters and Doctoral levels which were submitted up until 2001 under the supervision of Shihab during a period of thirty years. See Muḥammadiyah Amin and Kusman, "Purposive Exegesis: A Study of Quraish Shahab's Thematic Interpretation of the Qur'an" in *Approaches to the Qur'an in Contemporary Indonesia*, edited by 'Abdullah Saeed, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, pp.67-85.

⁴⁸ In addition to the above titles one may perhaps also mention Aḥmad Jamāl al-'Umarī, *Dirāsāt fi'l-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī li'l-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī*, Maktabat al-Khānjī, Cairo, 1986 and Muṣṭafā Musalam, *Mabāḥith fi'l-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī*, Dār al-Qalam, Damascus, 1989.

⁴⁹ Ṣalāḥ 'Abd al-Fatāḥ al-Khālidi believes that traditional commentary precedes thematic interpretation. See *Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī bayna al-Nazariyya wa al-Tatbiq*, pp.50-51.

interpretation. Rather than reporting what is said about the verse, the commentator may apply his own questions to the text.⁵⁰

While thematic interpretation is accepted in its general sense, some writers nonetheless refuse to accept the unity of the theme in the *sūra*.⁵¹ While Amīn al-Khūfī's *Al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī* (Rhetorical Exegesis) speaks about the importance of the theme in determining the literary meaning of the Qur'ānic words, it does not support the unity of theme in the *sūra*. He believes that the arrangement of the *suwar* in the *muṣḥaf* does not adhere to the concept of unity. This requires commentators to gather all verses on the same theme together. This process must take into consideration the chronological order as well as the time of and the reason for their revelation (that is *asbāb al-nuzūl*) as all are necessary to the understanding of thematic meanings.⁵²

In their search for a theory or *manhaj*, writers on *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī* emphasised that the modern interpreter must be well-versed in traditional methods as well as have a deep understanding of the condition or situation of the time of revelation in order to connect the time of the Prophet to the time of the exegete. One of the most important points that any exegete must remember is that when this method of *tafsīr* is applied, the Qur'ān should not be approached with preconceived ideas, but that it should be taken as the starting point for the endeavour as the experience of 'Abduh indicates. He achieves this aim by presenting the overall meaning of the verse.⁵³

⁵⁰ R. Weildant, "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early and Modern and Contemporary" in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, pp.125–126.

⁵¹ Among those who criticised Dirāz's view on the unity of theme in the *sūra* were Muḥammad Rajab al-Bayūmī, and Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Sharīf in his book *Itijāhāt al-Tajdīd fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān fī Miṣr*, Dār al-Turāth, Cairo, 1982.

⁵² Amīn Al-Khūfī, *Al-Tafsīr: Nash'atuhu, Tadarujuhu, Taḥawuruhu*, Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, Beirut, 1982, pp.82-83.

⁵³ Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Vol. 1, p.11.

It is clear thus far, from the bulk of writings on thematic interpretation, that this approach to the Qurʾān has taken root, but the question that needs to be answered still remains – can this approach be termed ‘*tafsīr*’ in the strict sense of the word, or can we not do without traditional commentaries?⁵⁴ The answer to this question is linked to the ability of those who adopted this method to develop techniques that will help establish links between *suwar* in a way that is different from traditional commentaries. As the discussion above shows, most writers tend to view the *sūra* differently from al-Rāzī for example, or other traditional commentators. However, as the approach is evolving, the lines between what is *mawḍūʿī* (thematic) and what is *mawḍīʿī* (verse by verse) are not clear. While commentators approach the *sūra* by highlighting its main theme or themes, some prefer to follow the old method of interpreting verse by verse. Those who have managed to apply the latter method have only been successful in applying it to the short *suwar*. As for the long *suwar*, the only give a general impression of what the *suwar* intended to say.

Dirāz in his important reading of *sūra Al-Baqara* has divided it into sections.⁵⁵ Quṭb⁵⁶ and Mawḍūdī⁵⁷ have done the same, and at times each followed his own logic. In this case thematic interpretation is a useful method to relate the Qurʾān to the life of the Muslim. It is

⁵⁴ Kate Zebiri thinks that the above works may be considered *tafsīr* when the definition of the science is applied to them. See *Maḥmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism*, p.138.

⁵⁵ He divided the verses of the *sūra* according to their aims and subject matter: introduction (1-20), the second aim (40-162), the third (178-283), but he considered Verse 294 to constitute one aim, and as the *sūra* has a beginning it also has an end (285-286) within each section. Dirāz also highlighted many themes. See *Al-Nabaʿ al-ʿAzīm*, pp.164-211.

⁵⁶ Al-Khālīdī argues that Quṭb not only tackled the unity in the *sūra*, but also did so between each *sūra* with another. He goes further to suggest that Quṭb paid attention to the overall unity in the Qurʾān. See Ṣalāḥ al-Khālīdī, *Al-Manhaj al-Ḥarakī fī Zilāl al-Qurʾān*, Dār al-Manāra, Jeddah, 1986, pp.152-166. However, Zarzūr claims that Quṭb was the first commentator in the history of Qurʾānic studies to discover the unity in the *sūra* of the Qurʾān, whether it be in long or short *suwar*. See ʿAdnān Zarzūr, *ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān: Madkhal ilā Tafsīr al-Qurʾān wa Bayān Iʿjāzihī*, Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut, 1981, pp.431-433.

⁵⁷ Quṭb in *Zilāl al-Qurʾān* gives, at the beginning, an overview of the themes of the *sūra*. Mawḍūdī did the same. Quṭb provides an introduction to every *sūra* in which he explains its name, its period of revelation and its content. *Suwar* dealing with historical events are provided with a background of those events. See Zafar Zakria Ansari, *Towards Understanding the Qurʾān* (this is an English translation of *Tafhim al-Qurʾān*), the Islamic Foundation, Leicester 1995, Vol.1, pp.33-34 and Charles Adams, "Abu Ala Mawḍūdī's Tafhim al-Qurʾān" in *Approaches to the history of interpretation of the Qurʾān*, edited by Andrew Rippin, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988, pp.306-322.

a method that gives the modern commentator the freedom to appreciate the Qur'ān from a literary point of view.⁵⁸ It is a useful way to deduce lessons from the Holy Book for the purpose of teaching young Muslims. In the age of advanced media and information technology, thematic interpretation serves as a good tool to highlight the major themes of the Qur'ān to wider audiences.

According to Faḍl Abbās, this type of *tafsīr* was known to the early generation of Muslims. However, they felt no need to apply it as they had memorised the Qur'ān, and possessed the ability to relate the particular verse to the specific theme. He goes on to say that the reason Muslims in modern times feel a need to follow this method is due to the motivation to defend Islam against attacks from external forces.⁵⁹

The last issue that needs to be addressed is related to whether this method has emerged as a reaction to Western criticism of the Qur'ān. While some emphasise the indigenous origin of this approach, others believe that it was really the case.⁶⁰ In the case of Ḥamīd al-Farāhī there is evidence that his interest in *nāẓm* was a reaction to claims made by the Orientalists that the Qur'ān lacks cohesion and that its verses and its *suwar* were put together without any systematic arrangement.⁶¹ Thus, al-Farāhī embarked on the study of the Qur'ān with the aim of exploring the connection between the verses and the *suwar*. He devoted his life to this cause, and included his findings in his small book *Dalā'il al-Niẓām (The Evidence of Cohesion)*.⁶² Dirāz, who was the first to apply this method, has mounted criticism on the

⁵⁸ See for example, Issa Boulatta, "Sayyid Quṭb's Literary Appreciation of the Qur'ān" in *Literary Structures of Religious Meanings of the Qur'an*, edited by Issa Boulatta, Curzon, Richmond, Surrey, 2000, pp.361-362.

⁵⁹ Faḍl Ḥasan 'Abbās, *Al-Tafsīr: Asāsīyātuhu wa Itijāhatuhu*, Maktabat Dandīs, Amman, 2005, p.649.

⁶⁰ Mir argues against the idea of Western influences. See *The Sura as a Unity*, p.218.

⁶¹ W. Montgomery Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, Edinburgh University Press, 1997 p.73.

⁶² A collection of his works was published in India and in Arabic under the title, *Rasā'il al-Imām al-Farāhī fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Al-Dairah al-Hamidiyya, Aẓam Kara, 1991, pp.45-46 and pp.53-55.

Orientalists whom he accused of failing to understand the Qur'ānic style of tackling more than one topic in the same *sūra*.⁶³

The idea of disjointedness or incoherence of the Qur'ān is no longer an issue with many in Western academia. Now, while accepting the text as it stands, scholars are paying more attention to the content of the Qur'ān.⁶⁴ The tendency to approach the Qur'ān from a textual perspective or contents-based approach rather than historically (i.e. arrangement and collection) can be found in a number of publications such as the work of Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'ān: A Contemporary Approach* (1996);⁶⁵ Jacques Jomier, *The Great Themes of The Qur'ān* (1978);⁶⁶ and Anton Wessels, *Understanding the Qur'ān* (2000).⁶⁷

It becomes clear from the above presentation that *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī* gained an acceptance among modern Muslim scholars even though the field itself is still developing its own terminology and methodology. Many works written in Arabic in the past few decades have been examined, and it has been found that some considered certain *suwar* while others looked at the Qur'ān as the manifestation of one theme. Others still looked at only one word. The general view about these works is that they are full of repetitions, and tend to generalise when it comes to the question of themes. One of the latest contributions is published publication by Sharjah University, in the United Arab Emirates.⁶⁸ It is the result of team work, and consists of ten volumes.

⁶³ Muḥammad 'Abd Allah Dirāz, *Madkhal Ilā al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: 'Arḍ Tarīkhī wa Taḥfīl Muqāran*, 1971, pp.118-119.

⁶⁴ Muḥammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding The Qur'an: Themes and Styles*, I. B. Tauris, London, 1999, p.vii. Kate Zebiri gives a good account of these developments in her two essays, "Towards A Rhetorical Criticism of the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* (Vol. V, Issue 5, 2003), pp.95-120 and "Argumentation" in *Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, edited by Andrew Rippin, Wiley Blackwell, UK, 2009, pp.266-281.

⁶⁵ For an assessment of his work see El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an*, pp.23-24.

⁶⁶ Translated from French by Zoe Hesov, SCM Press Limited, London, 1997.

⁶⁷ Translated by John Bowden, SCM Press Limited, London, 2000.

⁶⁸ The same university organised a conference on 24-26 April 2010 where around 52 papers were discussed covering many aspects of thematic interpretation. Some of the papers were accessed from the website: <http://uqu.edu.sa>

The Taf̄s̄ir Centre at that university oversaw the preparation of this project. Each scholar who contributed was given chapters of the Qur'ān with a list of rules to follow in order to maintain the consistency of the work. However, the editor of the volumes acknowledges in his introduction that this was not always followed due to various reasons including the fact that although the project was set in motion in 2004, it was only recently published.⁶⁹ The work attempted to apply a very strict methodology, but it was usually lost in the vastness of the information the contributor wanted to convey to the readers. It was an all-male team with no female presence, and only represents the Sunni perspective.⁷⁰ At this stage, it is necessary to present al-Ghazali's views on the thematic interpretation as discussed in his books. In presenting his views the endeavour would be to avoid repetition and superfluous information.

Al-Ghazali and thematic interpretation

Al-Ghazali made many statements on the importance of thematic interpretation of the Qur'ān, and sometimes pointed to its organic unity. However, in most cases what he meant was the organic unity of the *sūra*. Hence, al-Ghazali emphasised the importance of both *mawḍū'ī* and *mawḍi'ī* (verse by verse) where he believed that they both may be used to serve Islamic *da'wa*, and that they are both capable of serving Islam and expressing their goals.⁷¹ Elsewhere he spoke further about the importance of thematic commentaries to the

⁶⁹ *Al-Taf̄s̄ir al-Mawḍū'ī li Suwar al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, with Muṣṭafā Musalam as chairperson of the team, Taf̄s̄ir Centre for Qur'ānic Studies, Sharjah University, Sharjah, 2010.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. j.

⁷¹ Al-Qaraḍāwī took the same view on thematic interpretation, but refrained from describing this way of commenting on the Qur'ān as *taf̄s̄ir* in the traditional sense. Nevertheless, he wrote some books following the general type, such as his analysis of the concept of patience in the Qur'ān. See *Al-Ṣabr fī'l-Qur'ān*, Maktabat Wahba, Cairo, 1989, pp.4-6.

field of Qur'ānic studies,⁷² and predicted that the future is for these two types of commentary.⁷³

Al-Ghazali's statements on the nature of thematic interpretation imply that modern scholarship on the Qur'ān has no choice but to embrace it. When it comes to his definition of thematic interpretation, we see the same definition given by others, sometimes with a different twist. However, in most cases al-Ghazali maintains that each *sūra* is linked thematically from the beginning to its end, and that its opening always leads and confirms its ending. He speaks of unseen threads that link the meanings of the *sūra* together.⁷⁴ Al-Ghazali found thematic interpretation attractive as it is easy to understand and suits the spirit of this age,⁷⁵ leading him to express a desire to present a complete and full commentary of the Qur'ān.⁷⁶

Another reason why al-Ghazali supported thematic interpretation is because it relieved him from the pedantic nature of the traditional *tafsīr* where the commentator is forced to study the verse in relation to the one that precedes or follows it. Furthermore, thematic interpretation freed him from reading unnecessary details in the old commentaries. Despite his appreciation of classical exegetes, he was critical of many aspects of their *tafsīr*, mainly their reliance on some weak and fabricated *aḥādīth* as well as on many baseless reports.⁷⁷ While assessing the major schools of commentary, he criticised the technical nature of the major commentaries of these schools.⁷⁸

⁷² Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa Tafsīr Mawḍū'ī li'l-Qur'ān*, p.6.

⁷³ Al-Ghazali, *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, p.129. See also *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.129.

⁷⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Khūṭab al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 5, p.189.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p.147.

⁷⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Khūṭab al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 1, p.18.

⁷⁷ Along the way al-Ghazali criticised the classical *mufasirūn*. See his scathing attack on the famous commentator, al-Khāzin. See also *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, pp. 126-128 and *Kayfā Nata'āmal ma' al-Qur'ān*, pp.39-45.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.195-196.

Al-Ghazali's attitude reflects his own feelings towards the way exegesis was taught at Al-Azhar. He called upon the latter to form a committee with the aim of expunging what he describes as "rubbish" from classical commentaries.⁷⁹ Unlike classical *tafāsīr* which are full of details, whether linguistic, theological or *fiqh*, one of the main features of thematic interpretation is to eschew detailed analysis and its concentration on the overall message of the *sūra*.⁸⁰ Al-Ghazali believes that thematic interpretation is capable of providing a comprehensive understanding of reality. He believes that by identifying the themes of the *sūra* and understanding its aims, we will be able to form an intellectual foundation for that comprehensive view of reality.⁸¹ According to al-Ghazali, a comprehensive approach is needed in modern times to replace the atomistic understanding of the *sūra*; an understanding which blinds the commentator from diagnosing the problems of modern societies. He criticises exegetes who believe that each *sūra* in the Qur'ān is an amalgam of verses with no cohesion between them.⁸²

When al-Ghazali speaks of an all-encompassing approach to the Qur'ān, he is driven by the belief that the unity of the *sūra*, short or long, usually conforms to the overall meanings of the Qur'ān which, according to him, revolve around four themes: description of the universe, evoking the past by bringing to life ancient history to remind the reader of bygone nations, the present where the Qur'ān speaks of the obligations of human beings towards their creator, and finally, the hereafter where the Qur'ān reminds the reader of things to come in the afterlife – signs of the Day of Judgment, the collapse of the natural world and the road to heaven or hell.⁸³

⁷⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Khutab al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 1, pp.123-124.

⁸⁰ Ibid., Vol. 5, p.63.

⁸¹ Al-Ghazali, *Qiṣṣat Ḥayā*, p.74.

⁸² Al-Ghazali, *Khutab al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 4, pp.149-150.

⁸³ Ibid., Vol. 2, p.10.

Moreover, reading the *suwar* of the Qur'ān from a thematic point of view helps the reader to have, as al-Ghazali believes, an overview of a *sūra* and its themes. In this regard, thematic reading is a roadmap which helps the reader to understand that what is being read as the *sūra* is followed verse after verse. In the introduction to his *tafsīr*, he gives another view on thematic interpretation where he says that this type of commentary will assist the reader of the Qur'ān to look at the *sūra* as a "photograph" from top to bottom, so that the threads that go through it would be found to tie it all together.⁸⁴ He also speaks of an axis that connects each *sūra* from beginning to end and vice versa.⁸⁵

It is clear that al-Ghazali understands thematic interpretation as a way to throw some light on the major themes of the *sūra*. He says, "Thematic interpretation was something I became interested in as a way of helping people to glance at the Qur'ān very quickly, a form which is suitable to this age and fulfils the needs of the people. Added to that, the awareness of the people will be enhanced later when they consult their *muṣḥaf* combined with another *tafsīr*."⁸⁶ This statement indicates al-Ghazali's belief that thematic interpretation does not replace *al-tafsīr al-al-mawḍi'ī* (the traditional method), i.e. that they both complement each other.⁸⁷

This is true if one looks at the major commentaries which have been published during the last decades of the twentieth century in many parts of the Muslim world such as Nigeria, the Sudan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Turkey and Egypt. The majority belong to the *musalsal* (traditional) type of *tafsīr*.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Ibid., Vol. 4, p.5.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Vol. 4, p.165.

⁸⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Khuṭab al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 5, p.146. See also Ṣalāh 'Abd al-Fatāḥ al-Khālīdī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍi'ī*, p.50.

⁸⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa Tafsīr Mawḍi'ī*, p.6. Ṣalāh al-Khālīdī believes that both types complement each other, but that *al-mawḍi'ī* comes first before *al-tafsīr al-mawḍi'ī*. See *Al-Tafsīr Al-Mawḍi'ī Bayana al-Naẓariyya wa al-Taṭbīq*, Dār al-Nafā'is, Amman, 2008, pp.50-52.

⁸⁸ Johanna Pink, *Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur'anic Exegesis*, p.8.

The number of books, lectures, talks, articles and *khutab* show that al-Ghazali was engaged in Qur'anic commentary from the beginning as student, activist and writer. However, his contribution may be looked at in the context of Egypt which emerged as a centre of thematic interpretation in particular, and traditional *tafsīr* in general. In this case he was following a rich tradition which spans from 'Abduh to Shaltūt. Al-Ghazali pointed to the importance and continuity of 'Abduh's school when he said that the works of Al-Manār, al-Bannā, Shaltūt, Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, Abbās al-'Aqqād were not possible without the efforts of al-'Afghāni and 'Abduh.⁸⁹ Al-Ghazali expressed his debt to them and others. Unlike most of them, he had the time to complete his commentary as a few of them managed only a few *juz'* of the Qur'ān.

However, while al-Ghazali agrees with them on the method and the goals of this type of *tafsīr*, he differs in the emphasis. For example, al-Ghazali eschews the details and concentrates on the "lessons" that may be deducted from the *suwar*. This is compared with Shaltūt who as will be shown in the next chapter, also paid much attention to the details, so that he clearly sets the aims and the goals of the *sūra*. Shaltūt's interest in the *maqāṣid* of the Qur'ān is seen in his short book, *Ilā al-Qur'ān*, in which he discusses the characters and the aims of twenty-six *suwar*. Accordingly, the general aims of the Qur'ān may be summed by three words: creed, ethics and laws.⁹⁰

Conclusion

To sum up the discussion thus far, an attempt has been made to show how the idea of thematic interpretation of the Qur'ān evolved in modern times and became popular in the field of Islamic studies. The role of 'Abduh and his school in changing the way Muslim

⁸⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Ilal wa Adwiya*, p.92.

⁹⁰ Shaltūt, *Ilā al-Qur'ān*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, 1983, pp.5-6.

scholars approached the Qur'ān has been highlighted, and an attempt made to give a comprehensive, albeit brief, presentation of the notion of theme in the Qur'ān. This chapter provides a discussion on its historical origins and modern attempts to formulate theoretical bases for it, and highlights the reason why this approach to the Qur'ān has become the method many scholars working in the field of Qur'ānic studies prefer. Al-Ghazali's views on the theme in Qur'ānic studies are described, indicating that he showed an interest in this method from the start of his career. He believed that it was suitable to serve his aims as a public speaker, and enabled him to speak to a wider audience. If we are to speak of al-Ghazali's early engagement with *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*, it may be said that his interest was motivated by a desire to present a complete commentary on the Qur'ān, a dream which he later fulfilled. In light of this, his *tafsīr*, *Nahwa Tafsīr Mawḍū'ī li'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm* will be analysed and discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Al-Ghazali's contribution to thematic interpretation:

Analysis and discussion of *Naḥwa Tafsīr Mawḍūʿī*

li'l-Qurʾān al-Karīm

In his works, al-Ghazali adopted both methods of thematic commentary – one that follows a theme throughout the Qurʾān, and one that looks at the organic unity throughout the *sūra*. It is this latter method that he adopted for his own book on *tafsīr*, which represents three decades of experimentation in the field of Qurʾānic commentary. *Naḥwa Tafsīr Mawḍūʿī li'l-Qurʾān al-Karīm*¹ (hereinafter, "*Naḥwa*") is also a fulfilment of what he expressed in the conclusion of his book, *Nazarāt fi'l-Qurʾān* (1957). In it he wrote, "When I wrote these thoughts, I hoped that it would be part [i.e. the introduction] of a better commentary, one that is suited to the understanding of our time and its ways of deduction, which reflects the spirit of the Qurʾān. Most importantly free, as much as possible, from syntactic argument, rhetorical methods and the bickering of the dogmatic theologians and their counterparts – the philosophers. I am not sure if I will be able to do so in the coming days."²

As *Naḥwa* has never before been subject to an analysis in English, this chapter will attempt to an assessment in the light of al-Ghazali's early works and of the modern *tafsīr* tradition of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The structure, method, themes and aims of this *tafsīr* to identify any merits or weaknesses will be examined. However, a

¹ There are two English translation of al-Ghazali's *tafsīr*, the first by Ashour al-Shamis, *Thematic Interpretation on the Qurʾān* published by IIIT, Washington, 2000. The second is published by Dār al-Taqwā under *Journey Through the Qurʾān: Content and Context of the Suras*, London, 1998.

² Al-Ghazali, *Nazarāt fi'l-Qurʾān*, p.230.

historical insight would be useful to show that *Naḥwa* is the product of al-Ghazali's continuous engagement in Qur'anic commentary.

Background

Naḥwa may be taken as the culmination of the effort that al-Ghazali started when he was an *imām* at Cairo's 'Amr Ibn al-'Āṣ Mosque in the early 1970s, where he started to focus on the unity of *suwar* of the al-Qur'ān.³ He would focus on one *sūra* during each Friday *khuṭba*. Al-Ghazali's efforts ceased when he was banned from giving the *khuṭba* in 1974.⁴ Nevertheless, his interest in commentary remained intact, and he continued to comment on the Qur'ān either privately or through his public speeches,⁵ especially on Algerian state television.⁶ He also tried his hand at writing articles on the subject, an attempt which may be looked upon as part of his *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*.⁷

It may be useful at this stage to draw a parallel between his complete *tafsīr* and his weekly sermons which focused on a particular *sūra*. He used to present his thoughts on the *sūra* under different titles – *naẓarāt* (insights), *ta'ālīm* (instructions)⁸ or *ta'mulāt* (contemplations)⁹ in these sermons. Some of his sermons have been collected and published

³ 'Amr Ibn al-'Āṣ Mosque was the main venue where he delivered the majority of his *khuṭab*. However, he delivered others elsewhere in Cairo such as at the Al-Nūr Mosque in Al-'Abāsiyya, Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd Mosque in Al-Muhandisīn, Al-Faṭḥ Mosque in Al-Ma'ādī and the famous Al-Sayyida Zainab Mosque.

⁴ The first *sūra* al-Ghazali commented on was *Al-Baqara* in 1973. See *Khuṭab al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 4, p.79.

⁵ In some of his public lectures in Egypt, al-Ghazali drew lessons from some of *suwar* of the Qur'ān such as *Al-Anfāl* and *Al-Tawba*. See *Muḥāḍarāt fī Iṣlāḥ al-Fard wal al-Mujtama'*, pp. 213-229.

⁶ See 'Ammār al-Ṭālibī, *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araṭuhū, Islāmīyat alMa'rifa*, p.50.

⁷ An earlier version of his comments on *sūra Al-Ṭalāq* appeared in his book, *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, pp.132-134. The same with a slight change is included in *Naḥwa*, pp.465-468.

⁸ See *Al-Aḥādīth al-Jazā'iriyya* where he commented on selected verses from *Al-Nisā'*, pp.61-66.

⁹ The *suwar* al-Ghazal commented on during these sermons include *Al-Wāqī'a*, Muḥammad, *Al-Faṭḥ*, *Al-Mumtaḥana*, *Al-'Imrān*, *Al-Baqara*, *Al-Nisā'*, *Al-Shu'arā'*, *Al-Rūm*, *Al-Aḥzāb*, *Al-Zumar*, *Yā Sīn*, *Al-Najm* and *Al-Ḥashr*.

in a series of books during his lifetime and after.¹⁰ The sermons, at least those which have been published, provide a different point of view from that which he recorded later in his *tafsīr*. Readers of al-Ghazali's *tafsīr* would perhaps be tempted to compare it with his sermons. Despite the fact that the issues he tackled recur in both his *khuṭab* and *tafsīr*, there are nevertheless many differences between them in terms of the length of the commentaries, the topics tackled and most importantly, the audience.¹¹ While his published *tafsīr* is aimed at attracting the educated, the sermons were delivered orally at different mosques to the masses.¹²

Naḥwa represents only part of his contribution to the field of thematic interpretation as al-Ghazali used to cite Qur'ānic verses in his books and to rely on the Qur'ān in his speeches as well as the short pieces he wrote for the press. This enabled him to experiment on the theme in a general sense, the verse,¹³ and even on a word.¹⁴ Among the topics he dealt with outside his *tafsīr* are the role of *sūra Al-Nūr* in building the Muslim family¹⁵ and the Jews according to the Qur'ān.¹⁶ Despite the fact that his engagement was continuous, it should not be understood as a conscious or deliberate effort on al-Ghazali's part as believed by some

¹⁰ They were edited in five volumes between 1987 and 1991 by one of his students, Quṭb 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Quṭb. They cover his sermons between 1972-1973, and were all published under the title *Khuṭab al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī fī Shu'ūn al-Dīn wa al-Ḥayā*, Dār al-'Itiṣām, Cairo.

¹¹ Some call this method of commentary "*al-tafsīr al-shafāhī*" (oral). It is adopted by personalities such as Muhammad al-Makī al-Baṣrī, Muḥammad al-Sha'rāwī and 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ibn Bādīs. See Aḥmad Ibn 'Uthmān Raḥmānī, *Manāhij al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī wa 'Alāqatuhu bi'l-Tafsīr al-Shafāhī*, Al-Jidār li'l Kīṭāb al-Ālamī, Amman, 2008, pp.2-3.

¹² Al-Ghazali, *Khuṭab al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī fī Shu'ūn al-Dīn wa al-Ḥayā*, Dār al-'Itiṣām, Cairo, Vol. 2, p.7.

¹³ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, Vol. 2, pp.87-88.

¹⁴ Such as his attempts to follow words such as *ulū al-Albāb* (the people of knowledge) and *Hikma* (wisdom), *Tilāwa* (recitation). See *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma'a al-Qur'ān*, p.23 and 102, and *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, Vol. 2, p.88 respectively.

¹⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt*, Vol. 2, p.141.

¹⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, Vol. 2, p.103-106

of his students who tend to classify the majority of his work as examples of thematic interpretation as suggested by a recent paper.¹⁷

The writer of the said paper has divided al-Ghazali's engagement with thematic interpretation into four stages. The first period goes back to his first book *Al-Islam wa Awaḍā' unā al-Iqtisādiyya* 1947-1950. The second covers 1950s and 1960s where most of his works illustrate his interest, mainly in one Qur'ānic theme. The third spans the 1970s through to the 1990s, during which al-Ghazali devoted most of his works to unity in the *sūra*.¹⁸ According to Ḥamīd, this period witnessed al-Ghazali's systematic engagement in thematic interpretation which manifests through his *khuṭab* and his work in Algeria.¹⁹ The fourth is the last period which continued until his death in 1996 during which al-Ghazali completed his efforts by writing his *tafsīr*. This classification may give an impression that al-Ghazali intentionally followed the method of thematic interpretation in his writings from the beginning of his career, which is incorrect. Nevertheless, it is true that al-Ghazali stated in many of his works that his main source has always been and will always be the Qur'ān. The fact that he always tried to discuss certain issues from a Qur'ānic perspective reflects this attitude.

In order to do it justice, the best way to approach *Naḥwa* will need to be found, followed by a discussion of some selected issues al-Ghazali tried to emphasise throughout his commentary be it social, theological or *fiqh* related. His method of *tafsīr*, how he approached each *sūra* and whether he was consistent in his approach, will be looked at. An attempt will

¹⁷ Afaf 'Abd al-Ghafūr Ḥamīd, *Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī fī Mu'lafāt al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, a paper presented to the symposium on the thematic interpretation of the Qur'ān, University of Shārah, 25-26 March 2010, accessed on 16 January 2011 at this website: uqu.edu.sa.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.13-17.

¹⁹ During the Algerian period he gave three lectures at the Islamic centre in Algiers between December 1984 and January 1985, which were eventually published in a book entitled *Al-Maḥāwir al-Khamsa fī 'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. According to Ḥamīd the same centre published a booklet entitled, *Examples of the Thematic Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, apparently based on al-Ghazali's lectures. See Ḥamīd, p.16.

be made to discuss major factors which influenced him, and to compare his *tafsīr* with that of his contemporaries as well as to assess his impact and legacy in the field of Qur'ānic exegesis.

Why "*Naḥwa*"?

Al-Ghazali's *tafsīr*, unlike other commentaries in the field, bears the word "*naḥwa*" (towards) which implies a call for the adoption of this method of commentary.²⁰ The call is itself significant as the al-Ghazali acknowledges the limitation of this method of *tafsīr*. In *Naḥwa*, al-Ghazali continues an already established tradition in thematic interpretation, but he presents his work as a "new study of the Qur'ān, I presented some examples of what I have written before".²¹ He says that since embarking on the study of the Qur'ān seriously, he is convinced that there is a need for this type of commentary.²² In the introduction, he briefly sets out the method which he adopts throughout the book. He prepares his reader from the outset that his method contains many gaps that need to be filled by the reader.²³ By doing so, al-Ghazali aims at seriously engaging Muslims to study the Qur'ān meaningfully rather than merely casually reading it.²⁴ In taking on such a "huge mission" as al-Ghazali describes it, he tries to convey to his reader a sense of inadequacy on his own part and fear of being unable to do the Qur'ān the justice it deserves.²⁵ He is also very specific on the type of *tafsīr* he adopts in his book when he says that this book is only concerned with the unity in terms of *sūra* rather than topic.

²⁰ When al-Ghazali's commentary was initially published in 1992, it was only on the first ten *suwar* of the Qur'ān. The second publication in 1995 contained his full commentary on all *suwar* of the Qur'ān, including the first ten which were initially published. It is worth noting, however, that there are slight differences between the introduction in the first publication and that in the complete *tafsīr*.

²¹ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa Tafsīr Mawḍū'ī li Suwar al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, second edition, 1992, p.5.

²² *Ibid.*, p.5.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.6.

²⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nata'āml ma' al-Qur'ān*, pp.83-91.

²⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa Tafsīr Mawḍū'ī li Suwar al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (the complete work), Dar al-Shurūq, Cairo, seventh edition, 2005, p.5.

The introduction indicates that *Naḥwa* seems to be the al-Ghazali's own reflections and appreciation of the Qur'ān, and his decision to go ahead with this project was for his own sake rather than for the reader.²⁶ Nevertheless, al-Ghazali was guided in this case by the pioneering work of Muḥammad 'Abd Allah Dirāz which he considers the first in the field of thematic interpretation as Dirāz was the first to apply thematic interpretation to *Al-Baqara* in his book *Al-Naba' al-'Azīm*.²⁷ Al-Ghazali commented that Dirāz presented it as "one beautiful bouquet, and I believe everyone knows that is this the first thematic interpretation of one whole *sūra*".²⁸ In reading *Naḥwa*, three main issues worthy of discussion are identified. These are al-Ghazali's comments on the rhetorical and structural style of the Qur'ān, his comments on social and theological concerns, and his reliance on scientific commentaries. The choice of these issues is not arbitrary: the first helps in the understanding of his method of thematic interpretation, and the second and third represent all that he fought for throughout his career, namely the place of reason in Islam, the state of Muslims in modern world, social justice, freedom and political system in Islam.

Texture, style and Qur'ānic discourse

An examination of Qur'ānic discourse reveals that it is characterised by a unique independent texture that is realised through two inseparable constituents – rhetorical and linguistic. The focus here is not to discuss Qur'ānic style from a linguistic or rhetorical stance since thematic interpretation, at least from al-Ghazali's perspective, avoids unnecessary discussion of these topics. However, the reader of *Naḥwa* will notice that al-Ghazali does not avoid commenting on the Qur'ān's unique style. For example, he comments on the way the Qur'ān uses the phrase "*bi kuli nafs*" (every soul) presenting the lexical

²⁶ See *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, p.168.

²⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.5.

meaning of the phrase in an abstract or general manner regardless of whose soul and what race or nationality it is.

Take for example Verse 3:25 which reads, "When every soul will be paid in full for what it has done, and they will not be wronged." According to al-Ghazali, divine justice is not based on race.²⁹ He comments that "the human soul in general will receive what it sows, as all human beings will be gathered (on the Day of Judgment) unclothed with nothing to cover themselves except the cloth of piety, if they were from the righteous".³⁰ Another of his observations in *Al-‘Imrān* is of an interruption in the narrative. The *sūra* has two themes, namely the People of the Book and the impact on Muslims of the defeat of the 625CE Battle of Uḥud. However, al-Ghazali notes that the interruption in the narrative occurs when the Qur’ān, in Verse 3:121, suddenly changes its course from speaking about the circumstances of the Uḥud defeat to speaking about *ribā* (usury). Al-Ghazali ponders over the significance of this shift and opines that the interruption is aimed at purifying the hearts of Muslims from any deviation so that they may deserve victory. He writes that "religious battles are not a victory for a person or persons. Rather they are a victory for a noble cause and good conduct".³¹ Al-Ghazali observes that the same type of interruption occurs at the end of Verse 3:172 of the same *sūra*, but the shift here is incomplete. The Qur’ān speaks about the Jews at one point and then shifts abruptly to idol worshipers until the end of the *sūra*. The change of tone here is important as both the Jews and idol worshipers in question pose the same threat to the new Muslim community in Arabia.

A point to note is that *Al-‘Imrān* ends with a *nidā’* (declamatory, emphatic direct call). Generally speaking, *nidā’āt* in the Qur’ān use phrasal ties such as "*yā*" or "*ayyuhā*"³² to

²⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.29.

³⁰ Ibid., p.29.

³¹ Ibid., p.38.

³² Hussein ‘Abdul Raof, *Qur’an Translation: Discourse, Texture and Exegesis*, Curzon, London, 2001, p.85.

directly address various entities, including *al-Nabī* (the Prophet), *al-mu'minūn* (the believers) and *al-nās* (mankind), with a specific command or reminder.³³ Thus, the use of "yā" in *Al-Mā'ida* serves the main object of the *sūra* in that each reference to the believer is followed by an instruction, insight, guidance or clarification.³⁴ All of God's covenants in the *sūra* are therefore presented to the believer in the form of binding obligations.³⁵

However, the use of "yā" in *Al-Anfāl* is slightly different. Here the purpose of "yā" is to remind Muslims after the 624 CE Battle of Badr victory that their gains would not have been possible without divine intervention. The *sūra* contains six such direct calls addressing the believers rather harshly and firmly, seeking to remind them of the virtues of humility and the suppression of arrogance, and to warn them against the un-Islamic behaviour of quarrelling over the spoils of war (Verses 24-29). In some cases, as in *Al-Aḥzab*, the *nidā'* is used to tackle social problems where five *nidā'āt* directly address the Prophet and six the believers mentioned in the *sūra*.³⁶

Al-Ghazali's discussion of *nidā'* and its usage in the Qur'ān is similar to Shaltūt, even though the latter goes on to analyse the different meanings and contexts where it is used. Shaltūt lays much emphasis on the calls from the beginning of his *tafsīr*. He points out that *nidā'* occurs after the Qur'ān creates the "jaww" (mood) or state in which the believers are ready to heed the call of Allah. The *nidā'*, therefore, serves to emphasise the unity and the distinct character of the Muslim community.³⁷

Another point related to Qur'ānic discourse is that al-Ghazali speaks about *taqrīrāt* (affirmations) and *talqīnāt* (instructions), which recur in *Al-An'am*. Al-Ghazali's definition

³³ Shaltūt, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, pp.110-159.

³⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.72.

³⁵ Ibid., p.72.

³⁶ Ibid., p.322 and 326.

³⁷ Shaltūt, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, pp.110-159.

of "*taqrīr*" is "stating a clear judgment concerning the belief in the oneness of God" as in Verse 6:1 which reads, "Praise belongs to God who created the heavens and the earth and made darkness and light, yet the disbelievers set equals to their Lord." Verse 6:3 emphasises this thus: "He is the God in the heavens and on the earth, He knows your secrets and what you reveal and He knows what you do."

Talqīnāt, in turn, are commands or instructions for the message to be conveyed using the imperative verb "*qul*" (say) which occurs forty-four times in *Al-An'ām*.³⁸ Al-Ghazali notes that the Qur'ān uses the verb "*qul*" once or twice in the same verse and sometimes four times as in Verse 19. The employment of this verb occurs in the context where God is giving instructions to his Prophet on how to conduct a debate with the polytheists.³⁹ According to al-Ghazali, the verb is used here in order to support His Prophet while he debates with the doubters.⁴⁰

Shaltūt in his definition of *talqīn* draws attention to the power of *ḥujja* (proof), whereby the Qur'ān throws it at the face of the doubters so they cannot escape from it.⁴¹ Although the *talqīn* and *taqrīr* styles are used in other *suwar* it is, however, used as in *Al-An'ām*. The reason, according to Shaltūt, is that the Qur'ān needs to establish the truth by using strong proof against a strong enemy who goes to extremes in rejecting the message.⁴² However, contrary to al-Ghazali and Shaltūt, Sayyid Quṭb looks at *taqrīr* to be part of the *shakḥiyya* (personality) of the *sūra*. For example in his introduction to *Al-Mā'ida*, Quṭb says that *taqrīr* is the most characteristic of the *sūra* from the start to the end.⁴³

³⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.92.

³⁹ Ibid., p.92.

⁴⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.92.

⁴¹ Shaltūt, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, p.304.

⁴² Ibid., pp.305-306.

⁴³ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 2, p.833.

Other structural and syntactic features of the Qur'ān concern the way God speaks to mankind in general, and to the prophets in particular. He speaks directly by using the majestic "We" in the first person to represent Himself. The aim is to question, alert, warn and direct mankind. The Qur'ān is full of dialogue between Allah and his prophets, such as with Mūsā, Ibrāhīm and Muḥammad. Al-Ghazali observes while commenting on *Al-An'ām* that God speaks to mankind in the third person singular (i.e. "He") as in Verse 6:97: "It is He who made the stars," as well as uses relative clauses (sing/mas).

According to al-Ghazali, the use of this third person singular pronoun serves to alert the reader, and to affirm the overwhelming presence of the unseen God as if He is speaking to the reader directly.⁴⁴ The uniqueness of *Al-An'ām* stems from these stylistic and syntactic features which highlight an example of the inimitability of the Qur'ān.⁴⁵ By highlighting this, al-Ghazali is pointing to a rhetorical practice in the Arabic language which is called "*iltifāt*" (turning from one thing to another). The Qur'ān uses this grammatical shifts, for instance, from third to second to first person, from singular to the majestic plural, and in the tenses of the verbs.⁴⁶

One interesting point in *Naḥwa* is al-Ghazali's attempt to link the whiteness of the Prophet's hair with the way God addresses him in *sūra Hūd*. He points to a *ḥadīth* reported on the authority of Abū Bakr who asked the Prophet, "What makes your hair so white?" The Prophet answered, "It is *Hūd* and its sisters."⁴⁷ Al-Ghazali tries to understand the reason behind the Prophet's concerns, which in effect amounts to fear, and dismisses the argument which links this fear to the stories of the fate and punishment of the ancient nations which

⁴⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.92.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.96.

⁴⁶ See M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A new translation*, p.xx.

⁴⁷ This *ḥadīth* is reported in *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī, Kitāb al-Tafsīr*, No. 3297.

the *sūra* mentions.⁴⁸ Al-Ghazali believes that the way the Prophet is addressed in *Hūd* may explain the Prophet's fear. In *Hūd*, God reminds the Prophet of his mission through syntactic devices which address the Prophet directly. On many occasions throughout the *sūra*, God issues such reminders to the Prophet as: "So perchance you (Prophet) may give up a part of what is revealed unto you, and that your breast feels straitened (oppressed) by it," (11:12). This sense of responsibility is conveyed to the Prophet through using the second personal pronoun, suffixed or independent, or both as in: "These accounts are part of what was beyond your knowledge [Muḥammad]. We revealed them to you. Neither you nor your people knew them before now, so be patient: the future belongs to those who are aware of God," (11:49).⁴⁹

Although he does so in passing, al-Ghazali does nevertheless look at one of the Qur'ānic structures namely reiteration. According to Abdul Raof reiteration is "a major hallmark of Qur'ānic discourse".⁵⁰ It plays a significant role in the realisation of cohesion from a lexical perspective. This is illustrated by Verses 14:32-34. Al-Ghazali observes that repeating the word "*lakum*" (to you) five times here serves to highlight the idea that "the believers in this world are independent rather than dependent, and God is saying to them that the world is theirs so that they may do whatever they wish to do".⁵¹ Accordingly, the lexical cohesion is achieved by both "*lakum*" (to you) and "*sakhar*" (to make use).

At times al-Ghazali takes the repetition of one word as a clue to the central theme of the *sūra*. For example, he links mercy with the birth of 'Isā (Jesus), noting that the God's name *Al-Raḥmān* is mentioned sixteen times.⁵² This is similar to the concept of *al-birr* (goodness)

⁴⁸ See al-Qurṭbī, Muḥammad, al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān, edited by, Abdallah al-Turkī, Mu'sasat al-Risāla, Beirut, 2006, pp.63-64.

⁴⁹ The same is noted in Verses 11:106-110 and 117-11.

⁵⁰ Hussein Abdul Raof, *Qur'an Translation: Discourse, Texture and Exegesis*, p.95.

⁵¹ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.196.

⁵² Examples of this in *sūrā Tāhā* are the words "*dhikr*" (remembrance) and "*nisyān*" (forgetfulness) being mentioned eleven times. The same occurs in *Al-Isrā'* where the word "*al-Qur'ān*" is mentioned eleven times.

in the verse "Goodness does not consist of turning your face towards the east or west," (2:177) which is identified by Shaltūt as the central theme of the *sūra*.

Shaltūt directs the reader's attention to what he calls "*wasīṭat al-‘iqd*" (the central note) or the axis that unites the two main goals of the *sūra* – the first is devoted to explain the nature of those opposed to Muḥammad and his message by invoking their history, and the second is devoted to specifying the types of goodness with which they should build their society. Shaltūt chooses this verse as it marks a new direction of *da’wa*, namely the change of the *Qibla* (direction of prayer) from Jerusalem to Makka, and what good that brought to the Muslim community in Madina.⁵³

Al-Ghazali on his part identifies "*al-taqwā*" (piety) in *Al-Baqara*, which is mentioned thirty times as the central theme of the *sūra*. The word "*taqwā*" may also mean "*al-birr*".⁵⁴ Therefore, the theme of piety runs through the *sūra* from the beginning where God thrice mentions the pious through to the *sūra*'s conclusion (2:281). Al-Ghazali reminds his readers that this verse about *taqwā* was the last of the Qur’ān to be revealed to Muḥammad.⁵⁵ Here al-Ghazali echoes what Riḍā had said in *Al-Manār* that the theme "*al-taqwā*" is what links *sūra Al-Baqara* with *sūra Al-‘Imran*. Riḍā says in the introduction to the commentary of the latter, "Amongst the ways of links between this *sūra* and the one preceding it is that it starts with what the previous one had concluded – that is the commandment of having *taqwā*."⁵⁶

Suffice to say that the discussion of structural and rhetorical aspects of the Qur’ān in *Naḥwa* is not systematic, and is used as a means to draw attention to the power of the

⁵³ Ibid., pp.74-88.

⁵⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.11.

⁵⁵ Al-Ghazali takes the view that Verse 2:281 was the last to be revealed to the Prophet. However, the question of the last verse to be revealed is mooted by the *‘ulamā’*. Al-Zarqānī himself believes that it was (2:282), but he presented ten different views debated by the *‘ulamā’*. They are (2:278), (2:282) or (3:195), (5:3) or (4:93) or (4:176) or (10:128,129). See al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-‘Irfān*, Vol. 1, pp.89-93.

⁵⁶ Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Vol. 4, p.321.

message, the difficulties faced by the Prophet Muḥammad in debating with his people, and the divine intervention that supports him through words rather than miracles.

Theology

Tawḥīd is the major theme which recurs in works of modern *tafsīr* from ‘Abduh to the present.⁵⁷ This is because *tawḥīd* is at the heart of the Qur’ān and because Muslim commentators have to varying degrees tried to relate its message of the Qur’ān to the context of the society in which they live. In this case al-Ghazali is no different. In addition to the major theological themes (mainly those related to *tawḥīd*) presented throughout his *tafsīr*, al-Ghazali highlights others which are related to practices, (especially modern ones) which Muslims follow that have a negative impact on their beliefs.

One of these issues is *al-walā’ wa al-barā’*, (loyalty and dissociation) where Muslims are urged to affirm their loyalty to God, and sever ties with the unbelievers. Al-Ghazali, while commenting on Verse 5:57, says that the principle of *al-walā’ wa al-barā’*⁵⁸ is based on the idea of love and hatred for the sake of God, providing that it is not based on desire and does not lead to the unjust treatment of others. This does not in any way mean that Muslims should cease any contact with non-Muslims as the last verse in *Al-Mumtaḥana* implies. In effect, differences should not entail hatred. Al-Ghazali links this idea to the politics of the superpowers whose aim is to protect their interests. If one were to be loyal to the superpowers, one's faith would be jeopardised.⁵⁹

Al-Ghazali is brief in his comments on such issues. This is due to the fact that most of them are tackled in all his books. They include issues such as *bid’a* (corrupted and false

⁵⁷ See ‘Abduh's comments on *surā* 112 in *Tafsīr Juzu’ ‘Amma*, Cairo, 1922, pp.176-178.

⁵⁸ This concept is one of the terms that is overused by Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb's followers in Saudi Arabia. Given his disagreement with them, it is little wonder that al-Ghazali was keen to draw the attention of his reader to its meaning and implication.

⁵⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p. 453.

religiosity), and free will and predestination. For example, when he comments on Verses 7:178 and 4:186, he concludes that none implies predestination. He says, "Human freedom is beyond doubt, else human beings would not be responsible and accountable for their acts, and the whole existence would be turned into a meaningless farce."⁶⁰

He provides a cross reference to Verse 19:75 which confirms choice in determining human fate.⁶¹ The endings of these verses and that of Verse 4:185 support the idea that the behaviour of wrongdoers would lead them to their bitter end in the Hereafter. These and other verses help al-Ghazali to emphasise that misunderstanding the proper meanings of the verses may be damaging, or may be considered as a bad omen that has led to the collapse of the Muslim empire. This is clear from his comment apropos the verse "Whoever comes before God with a good deed will receive a better reward; whoever comes with an evil deed will be punished only for what he has done," (28:84).

Al-Ghazali points out that the verse speaks about the nature of faith and alludes to the idea of *irjā'* (to defer) which, according to him, was a major factor in the destruction of the Muslim empire. He opines that faith is not a mere utterance, as the *Murji'a* used to believe. Rather, it requires actions or deeds. Here al-Ghazali points out that the spirit of the *Murji'a*, an early Muslim sect, is still alive today among some Muslims who believe that they are saved by merely professing the words of *tawhīd*.⁶² In the realm of faith al-Ghazali says that theoretical knowledge is insufficient, citing the fact that Iblīs refused to obey God's command despite knowing about the oneness of God.⁶³

Al-Ghazali's economical treatment of *al-qadā' wa al-qadar* is similar to Shaltūt who argues that human beings are neither predestined nor free. Instead, God created human

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.122.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.122.

⁶² Ibid., p.303.

⁶³ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.303.

beings with the ability to do good and evil. In reading the verses on this matter, Shaltūt concludes that human beings have the choice to be led to good or evil, and if he chooses one or the other, God will not interfere or prevent him from what he has chosen.⁶⁴ According to Shaltūt, God has the power to compel all of mankind choose the straight path, as well as the power to lead all of mankind astray. He created them thus to distinguish between the thankful and the ingrate. Shaltūt further explains that the concept of free will is all about God's justice and God's wisdom, and that there is a difference between human free will and God's knowledge which is infinite.⁶⁵

In similar vein, Quṭb felt that the issue is not a complicated matter. After analysing the Qur'ānic verses on free will and predestination, Quṭb concluded that the verses indicate that "everything that happens in this world happens by the will of God. At the same time human beings wish to act and to be rewarded or punished accordingly". According to Quṭb, as there is no contradiction between the Qur'ānic verses on this issue, there should be space for human freedom were his deeds do not contradict the will of God.⁶⁶

The above themes, which are related to the nature of *imān* (faith) and what constitutes true faith, run throughout al-Ghazali's *tafsīr* whether in relation to the way Christians and Jews have seemingly distorted their religions by projecting fabricated forms of their belief, or to the way some Muslim practices have deviated from the true message of the Prophet.⁶⁷ For al-Ghazali the true religion is one that is determined by revelation (*waḥy*) which in turn protects reason. Thus, whatever contradicts reason is not religion.⁶⁸ Therefore, any

⁶⁴ Shaltūt, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, p. 230.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.230-234.

⁶⁶ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qurān*, Vol. 2, pp.719 and 1066, and Vol. 3, pp.1204-1205.

⁶⁷ Commenting on the Verse 31 from *Al-'Arāf*, al-Ghazali criticised those who confuse true religion with the way they live or dress. See p.115.

⁶⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.416.

fabrication or innovative practices by so-called "religious" Muslims would fall well outside true religion.⁶⁹

Social and political issues

The most important aspect of *Naḥwa* is perhaps its emphasis on the social, moral and political message of the Qur'ān.⁷⁰ Al-Ghazali is not unique in his approach as most twentieth century *tafāsīr* focus on them, and al-Ghazali's *tafāsīr* falls under the category of the literary social trend in commentary.⁷¹ Most issues he mentions in his *tafāsīr* are the same issues he wrote about and championed all his life. These include women's rights and family life,⁷² political tyranny⁷³ and the effect of modern ideologies on Muslims.⁷⁴ Al-Ghazali avoids going into details, and explores such issues in the context of prophetic experiences throughout history which are mentioned in the Qur'ān.

Qur'ānic stories of the prophets, where those who are fond of the art of argument (*jadal*) for the sake of it are mentioned, as are those who refuse to forsake ancestral practices, and others still possessed of arrogance and self-importance resulting from their positions of power, wealth and physical strength, offer glimpses of the many different facets of human nature and behaviour.⁷⁵ The story of Thamūd, for instance, is used to demonstrate the risk of corruption that wealth poses; the story of the Seven Sleepers in *Al-Kahf* of political tyranny; and the story of Lūṭ (Lot) of moral bankruptcy.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.115 and 106.

⁷⁰ For more information on this issue, see "Political Interpretation of the Qur'an" by Stefan Wild in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, pp.371-391.

⁷¹ Shaltūt's *tafāsīr* is full of comments on social and moral issues such as Muslim solidarity, the rights of women and orphans. See pp.182-186.

⁷² Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, pp.20-22, 34-35, 48-50 and 68-69.

⁷³ Ibid., 74-75, 155 and 159.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.379.

⁷⁵ He pointed to the fact that the Qur'ān uses the word "*jadal*" (argument) five times.

The story of *Yūsuf* is told by al-Ghazali through the prism of politics and the management of the economy. It provides an example of good leadership and crisis management. Verses 12:55 and 56 specify the criterion of a good leader. When *Yūsuf* (Joseph) asked the Egyptian king to appoint him as Secretary to the Treasury, he cited his capability to manage the economic crisis caused by the seven years of draught, his qualifications being his knowledge and his trustworthiness. Al-Ghazali infers from this that it is right that the most able and capable people step forward and offer to lead.⁷⁶ Al-Ghazali says that *Yūsuf* was not only pious, but also an expert in economics and administration. Therefore, it is a matter of public interest and benefit to employ him rather than someone less able.⁷⁷

Similarly, the example al-Ghazali draws from *Luqmān*⁷⁸ shows how the collapse of familial relationships is likely to cause offspring in modern societies to neglect their filial duty, and condemn their parents to a life in geriatric residential homes.⁷⁹ He also tackles the issues of polygamy and adoption in the light of *sūra Al-Aḥzāb*.⁸⁰ These issues serve to highlight al-Ghazali's concerns apropos the rights and status of women in Muslim society, and the need to protect the family collapse and from immorality.⁸¹

Al-Ghazali's reflections on social issues were that of a *dā'iyyah* rather than a *faqīh*, and in the stories above it is the moral lesson that comes to the fore. In rare moments did al-Ghazali engage his reader in matters of *fiqh*. For instance, he highlights *sūra Al-Ṭalāq* as an example

⁷⁶ Al-Ghazali points to Khālīd Ibn al-Walīd (d. 642 AB) who came forward, and asked to lead during the Battle of Yarmūk (636 AD) by virtue of his proven military expertise. See *Naḥwa*, p.184.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.184.

⁷⁸ The majority of scholars consider *Luqmān* as a sage (*ḥakīm*). See *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr fī Mukhtaṣar Ibn Khathīr*, compiled by a group of 'ulamā' lead by Sayf al-Raḥmān al-Mbarakpouri, Dār al-Salām, Riyadh, 2000, p.1066.

⁷⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.317. The same idea was emphasised previously when he commented on Verse 23 from *Al-Isra* (The Night Journey). See p.221.

⁸⁰ In *Al-Aḥzāb*, the issue of polygamy is that concerns the prophet, but al-Ghazali (while commenting on *Al-Nisā'*) adopts the view of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal where a woman can stipulate in her marriage contract that her husband should not take another wife, and if he did the marriage will end. See *Naḥwa*, p.48.

⁸¹ Al-Ghazali. See *Naḥwa*, pp.47-51.

of how seriously Islam views *ṭalāq* (divorce). Unlike other issues, he considers *ṭalāq* as a social illness from a legal viewpoint where he criticises repugnant social practices as being associated with it. He opines that the responsibility for these deviances falls on corrupt scholars who have come to accept certain kinds of illegal divorces such as the so-called *al-ṭalāq al-bidʿī*.⁸² He also points to how Muslim men today misuse and abuse the *ṭalāq*, resorting it for any trivial reason.⁸³

Al-Ghazali's comments on *sūra Al-Ṭalāq* are more concerned with the legalistic aspects of the *sūra*. He believes that the *sūra* presents the conditions where *ṭalāq* would be legally binding. *Ṭalāq* should not be pronounced while the woman is menstruating or has just given birth, should be witnessed by two men, and the wife should not leave her house. Al-Ghazali reminds his reader that the legal rules presents are not his independent views, but are those which he has gathered and selected from established scholars without giving any detail about them.

Additionally, al-Ghazali does not omit to discuss issues of social behaviour and their legal implications for the family and society at large.⁸⁴ He condemns the policy of birth control as fruitless because the problem is not with the rate of birth, but sloth, which breeds over-reliance on charity.⁸⁵ He also comments on social customs (which, according to Qurʾānic teachings should be conditioned by moderation), the proper dress code, the etiquette of eating and the manners of socialising⁸⁶ as well as the manner of spending money.⁸⁷

⁸² This takes form when a woman is divorced during her menstruation or after she has just given birth. See Aḥmad Farāj Ḥusayn, *Aḥkām al-Uṣra fī al-Islam*, Al-Dār al-Jamiʿiyya, Beirut, 1998, pp.37-38.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.466.

⁸⁴ See for example his comments in *Al-Baqara* where he says that the woman has the right to seek divorce without her husband's consent. See *Naḥwa*, p.21.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.221-222.

⁸⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.397.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.116, 275 and 327.

One of the issues on which al-Ghazali gives an independent view (*ijtihād*) concerns the special prayer during war, *ṣalāt al-khaww* (fear prayer). This prayer is normally performed during battles and Verse 4:102 teaches the Prophet how to perform it. Based on the verse and around seven *aḥādīth* the *fuqahā'* present different ways of how it should be performed. However, they agree that the prayer must be performed by one *imām* because, according to the verse, the Prophet is asked to lead the prayer.⁸⁸ Al-Ghazali believes that the statement in the verse applies only to the Prophet because it is inconceivable that someone else would lead the prayer in his presence. Moreover, prayers today may be held in the battlefield by several groups by different *a'imma* and at various times without fear of being taken unawares by the enemy.⁸⁹

The lack of legal discussion in *Naḥwa* is in stark contrast to Shaltūt who paid much attention to issues of *fiqh*, taking every opportunity to discuss in detail and in the spirit of the *sūra* any legal question. Most of the questions he addressed are subject to debate among Muslim scholars and relevant to Muslim daily life. For example, Shaltūt tried to give Islam's position on imported meat from non-Muslim countries, the permissibility of eating the food of *Ahl al-Kitāb*, *al-qawāma* (stewardship) in the house, and whether the Muslim who kills a non-believer is subject to punishment.⁹⁰ Shaltūt, as he comes up with new rulings, displays the knowledge of the traditional *'ālim* in his discussion of such issues, but at the same time demonstrates the qualities of a man who understands the needs of modern day Muslims.

Some of Shaltūt's views, such as the killing of non-believer by a Muslim, have been adopted by al-Ghazali.⁹¹ That said, it is not suggested that al-Ghazali lacks understanding of

⁸⁸ Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna*, Al-Fatḥ li'l-'Ilam al-Arabī, Cairo, Vol. 1, pp.199-202.

⁸⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.63.

⁹⁰ Shaltūt, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, pp.174, 292, 294, 305, 413, 426 and 5010.

⁹¹ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, pp.18-19.

the legal concerns of the needs of his society. On the contrary, his *tafsīr* is full of comments on the reforms which Muslims societies are in need of.

Furthermore, one may attribute the rarity of legal issues in *Naḥwa* to al-Ghazali himself as he did not devote any of his books to *fiqh*, and he tackled few legal questions. Those he did mainly relate to women's issues and the economy.⁹² This explains the lack of any legacy from him related to *fatāwā*, unlike Shaltūt or ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, who were both *Shaykhs* of Al-Azhar; or even al-Qaraḍāwī who wrote many books on matters of *fiqh* and gives *fatāwā* on regular bases on Al Jazeera satellite television channel and on his website.

One thing that al-Ghazali did do in terms of *fiqh* issues is that he gave prominence to the views of Ibn Ḥazm on certain issues which were not widely accepted by *salafī* scholars. Examples of these issues are his views on women’s role in public life, women’s testimony and Ibn Ḥazm’s view on singing. Moreover, it is noticed that the Azharites, at least Shaltūt and Abū Zahra, are mindful of legal issues in their *tafāsīr*.⁹³ In *Zahrat al-Tafāsīr* for instance, Abū Zahra speaks the language of a *faqīh* especially when it comes to verses of *aḥkām* (laws). One such example is his comments on Verse 2:221, especially on the rules that constrain marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims.⁹⁴

Despite being Azharite al-Ghazali's *tafsīr* suggest that he read the Qur’ān as most Islamic activists do – as a book of *da’wa* and reform where the message and lessons of the book take precedence over details of *fiqh*. However, al-Ghazali does not go as far as Quṭb who was accused by some of calling for the deferment of the discussion on legal issues at the *da’wa* stage. Quṭb made the building of a Muslim community, as imagined by him, a pre-

⁹² Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Ghazālī Kamā ‘Araḥtuḥu*, p.157.

⁹³ *Zahrat al-Tafāsīr* was published by the family of the Abū Zahra and carries on its cover the name of the publishing house, Dār al-Fikr al-Arabī. The book was published with an endorsement letter by the Islamic Research Academy dated 1987.

⁹⁴ Abū Zahra, *Zahrat al-Tafāsīr*, pp.722-728.

conditioned of the implementation of *sharī'a*.⁹⁵ Muslims, according to Quṭb, are still at same stage as they were in Makka when the Qur'ānic message lay emphasis on the idea of the Oneness of God, and that detailed legal issues would have to wait until the *hijra* to Madina (or the Madanī stage). Quṭb's supporters argue that he had never called for the abrogation of the *sharī'a*. Rather he called for a proper understanding of the meanings of *fiqh*, where he differentiated between scriptural *fiqh* and dynamic *fiqh* (*fiqh al-ḥaraka*).⁹⁶ It is this latter that is needed at this stage of *da'wa*.

The discussion on Quṭb brings to mind al-Ghazali's concerns with political issues which are apparent throughout his *tafsīr*. As mentioned previously, according to al-Ghazali the issue of tyranny (as evident in the stories of the Pharaohs⁹⁷ and Qarūn in *sūra Al-Qaṣaṣ*) embody Capitalism and its oppressiveness.⁹⁸ It is noted that al-Ghazali employs the same political and ideological language found in Quṭb's *Fī Zilāl*.

Scientific signs

Scientific allusions and facts which try to connect the natural world (as well as human nature) to the world of the Qur'ān abound in *Naḥwa*. Al-Ghazali relishes the opportunity to link modern scientific achievements to the Qur'ān.⁹⁹ Where science and technological achievements are concerned, he seizes the opportunity to provide factual background to the particular verse, or marvel at God's great design. Science provides al-Ghazali with a tool to prove the relevance of religion to modern life and the existence of God. This is to say that the "Work of God" (Nature and its fixed laws) is identical to the "Word of God" (Qur'ān).

⁹⁵ In his famous and most influential book, *Ma'ālim fi 'l-Ṭarīq*, he called for reviving the experience of the early *ṣaḥāba* or "Qur'ānic generation" as he calls them, and those who represent the Qur'ānic example in order to confront modern *jāhiliyya*.

⁹⁶ Salāh al-Khālidi, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān fi 'l-Mizān*, pp.237-249.

⁹⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, pp.299-301.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.302-304.

⁹⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, pp.202, 210, 210, 222, 385, 441 and 522.

He also uses science to urge Muslims to return to their roots and understand the true meaning of the Qur'ān.¹⁰⁰

Conversely, Shaltūt, al-Ghazali's teacher was against the scientific interpretation of the Qur'ān. In the introduction to his *tafsīr*, Shaltūt clearly states his rejection, his main argument being that the Qur'ān, the Unchangeable, should not be subject to changeable theories.¹⁰¹ However, al-Ghazali does not rely on science to prove the inimitability of the Qur'ān, but relies instead on empirical sciences, borne of his awareness of scientific theories, such as the Quantum Theory, to advance the understanding of the mysteries of the universe.¹⁰² Nevertheless, his belief in science as a way to appreciate God's creation and unlock the mysteries of the world is not uncritical as illustrated by his scepticism of claims made by geologists of their discovery of a human skull millions of years old.¹⁰³

Al-Ghazali recognises that this is a scientific age where human beings are able to establish certainties about the world. However, in the midst of massive achievements, there is a need for mankind to pause and ponder on the sublime power and great wisdom behind Creation,¹⁰⁴ and acknowledge human limitations. Commenting on the last verse of *Luqmān*, al-Ghazali compares limited human knowledge to God's infinite wisdom by illustrating that the science of meteorology is based on forecasting rather than determining the weather. Humans may have the ability to forecast a likely outcome on the balance of probability, but this is different from determining a definite outcome.¹⁰⁵ Knowledge of the universe is a way to understand the *sunan* or laws of nature which the Qur'ān enjoins upon mankind to

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.62.

¹⁰¹ Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 1983, pp.11-14. The Shi'ī scholar Muḥammad Husayn Faḍlallah adopts the same stance in his Qur'ānic lectures in *Min Durūs al-Tafsīr: Min Waḥy al-Qur'ān*, Dār al-Zahra', Beirut, 1979, Vol. 1, p.7.

¹⁰² Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, pp.112, 119, 174 and 191.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.119.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.441.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.318.

understand and explore, thus underscoring al-Ghazali's position that science is a way to appreciate the Qur'ān as a force of positive change in the life of a Muslim.¹⁰⁶

Al-Ghazali's views on science and the Qur'ān reflect in many ways the views of the Al-Manār school, mainly of al-Afghānī¹⁰⁷ and 'Abduh,¹⁰⁸ about the role of science in proving that Islam is not against modernity. Although 'Abduh is accused of interpreting the Qur'ān in the light of modern science, he did not go as far as Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī for example. Other scholars like Muṣṭafā al-Rāfi'ī¹⁰⁹ for instance, support this approach without relying on it too much. However, Shaltūt's rejection of the scientific interpretation of the Qur'ān reflects the views of other scholars who are uncomfortable with it. They include al-Dhahabī¹¹⁰ and Amīn al-Khūfī.¹¹¹ It is worth noting that despite criticising those who link the Qur'ān to scientific discovery Quṭb, in *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, mentions some books which explain how science leads to the discovery of God.¹¹²

The methodology of *Naḥwa*

Al-Ghazali's statement in the introductory chapter of *Naḥwa* that he would select the most prominent theme in each Qur'ānic *sūra* to guide the reader, yet leave lessons to be drawn by that reader, affects the way he approaches each *sūra*. He seems unconcerned with following a clear set of rules characteristic of today's commentaries which are of the same ilk.¹¹³ For example, the practitioner of thematic interpretation would emphasise the importance of drawing up a plan before embarking on the process of commenting on the

¹⁰⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nata'āmal Ma' al-Qur'ān*, pp.65-67.

¹⁰⁷ Aḥmad Amīn, *Zu'amā al-Iṣlāh fī l-'Aṣr al-Ḥadīth*, p.114.

¹⁰⁸ 'Abduh, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, p.7.

¹⁰⁹ Muṣṭafā al-Rāfi'ī, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, Dār al-Kitāb al-Arabi, Beirut, 1973, p.127.

¹¹⁰ Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasirūn*, Vol. 2, pp.491-494.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.512.

¹¹² Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, p.181.

¹¹³ Such as in the case in *Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī li Suwar al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, compiled by a committee supervised by Muṣṭafā Musalam, Sharjah University, 2010.

Qur'ān. Scholars vary on the nature of the conditions a student should fulfil before beginning to comment on a specific *sūra*, but agree on the general principles, such as the need to introduce the *sūra* and determine its goals and divide the long *suwar* into sections.¹¹⁴

While *Naḥwa* does not adhere to these strict conditions, and sometimes combines *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* with *tafsīr mawḍi'ī* (verse to verse commentary),¹¹⁵ at a closer look one can see that al-Ghazali is aware of these conditions without stating them. He is mindful of the relationship between opening themes and those at the end.¹¹⁶ Efforts to examine the uniformity between the central issue and others that come in between are also apparent in *Naḥwa*.¹¹⁷ Although these efforts are not obvious at the beginning, they become more apparent as his presentation unfolds, and his attempt to create a link between the opening verse with the final ones becomes clear.

Very often al-Ghazali addresses the central issue in the middle of a discussion where he directs the reader's attention to the main theme of the *sūra*. This is in contrast with one of the sermons he delivered, where he clearly specifies the subjects of the *sūra* he was commenting on and the themes it contains from the outset.¹¹⁸ Instead, in *Naḥwa*, he analyses the stylistic features of the *suwar*, or provides their historical context (i.e. their Makkī or Madanī identity).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Salāh al-Khalidī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī*, pp.78-85.

¹¹⁵ For example (7: 4-5 and 168), (4:70), (24:5) and (3:186).

¹¹⁶ This is clear in *Al-Naḥl* and *Al-Isrā'*. In *Al-Kahf* it is clear that the beginning (concerned with the importance of good deeds) ties in with the end (concerning winners and losers on the Day of Judgment). Also in *TāHā*. See *Naḥwa*, p.239 and 250.

¹¹⁷ See for example *Al-Ḥajj*, *Naḥwa*, p.262.

¹¹⁸ *Khuṭab al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, Vol.2, pp. 231.

¹¹⁹ For example, when commenting on *Al-R'ad* (The Thunder), he states that some exegetes classify the *sūra* as Madanī, but he believes that the style and the tone give an indication that it belongs to the Makkān period. See *Naḥwa*, p.188.

In most cases al-Ghazali uses the first verse to open the discussion on further issues.¹²⁰ In long *suwar* such as *Al-Imrān*, *Al-Nisā'* and *Al-'Arāf* he speaks as Quṭb does in *Fī Zīlāl* of the main axis in them and follows this to the end. Commenting on *Al-Baqara*, al-Ghazali looks at it as a multi-layered *sūra* in that it remained open-ended and incomplete until the last days of revelation.¹²¹ He identifies within it many issues such as the family, the pillars of Islam and the differences between the true believers (the pious), the blasphemous and the Hypocrites. This he also does with *Al-Tawba* which he says revolves around purging Arabia of polytheism and fighting the Hypocrites.¹²² In *Al-Nisā'*, for example, he identifies two main themes namely the family (the small community) and society as a whole. They in turn revolve around a main axis, namely social relationships.¹²³

Contrary to al-Ghazali, Shaltūt introduces the *sūra* by explaining its name and goals. He sometimes pauses to discuss some issues which are subject to debate among scholars such as the meaning of "*al-muqāṭa'āt*" (the opening letters of the *suwar*),¹²⁴ something al-Ghazali did not feel he needs to address. Then Shaltūt proceeds to identify the central theme or *waṣīṭat al-'iqd* (central note). Around it he discusses many issues, be they ethical or legal, such as the significance of banning *ribā* (usury),¹²⁵ the family,¹²⁶ and war and peace in Islam.¹²⁷ According to Zebiri, by giving an overall picture of the *sūra* Shaltūt feels free to explore its main topics.¹²⁸

One of the salient features of thematic interpretation is the attempts by the commentators to match the opening verse with the closing verse in order to show that they share the same

¹²⁰ As in *Hūd* and the *Al-Kahf*. See *Naḥwa*, pp.167 and 229 respectively.

¹²¹ See in this chapter footnote (52) above.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.41. See also his 1973 sermon on the same *sūra*, *Khuṭab al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 2, pp.59-60.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.47.

¹²⁴ Shaltūt, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, pp.46-55.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.140-152.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.169-182.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.243-258.

¹²⁸ Zebiri, *Maḥmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism*, p.157.

theme. This is obvious in *Naḥwa* and Shaltūt's *Tafsīr*. Al-Ghazali says that *sūra Ibrāhīm* starts and ends with a warning, and *sūra Al-Naḥl* emphasises the importance of striving for *da'wa* (spreading the message), and ends with a call for striving for the perfection of the soul through ' *ibāda* (worship). As for Shaltūt, he pays attention to *nidā'* which unites *sūra Al-Imrān* from the beginning until the end.

Another strategy employed by thematic commentators is the attempt to match the *sūra* with the one that follows or precedes it. For example, al-Ghazali notes that *Al-R'ad* and *Ibrāhīm* share the same theme,¹²⁹ namely the nature of the truth.¹³⁰ He also notes the same similarity between *Al-An'ām*, *Yūnus* and *Al-Isrā'* as they share the same goal of trying to prove the existence of God through His creation.¹³¹ This cross-referencing helps to demonstrate unity within the *sūra*, as well as the relationship between one *sūra* and another.

Interestingly, al-Ghazali refers to the commonality between *suwar* briefly and shares this point with Shaltūt, who makes a constant effort to find the affinity between the *suwar* in terms of themes, such as his attempt to link *Al-An'ām* with the four preceding *suwar*.¹³² Shaltūt's detailed analysis of the relationship between *Al-Anfāl*, and the preceding *sūra*, *Al-Tawba* gives us a clear indication of the importance of this method in the realm of thematic interpretation. According to Shaltūt both *suwar* tackle the issue of war, so he brings his reader's attention to what he calls " *al-jaw*" (the mood), in which the *sūra* was revealed. Shaltūt then proceeds to give an overview of the overall themes of the *sūra* and explains

¹²⁹ Quṭb made a previous attempt where he notes that *Al-Jum'a* tackles the same theme as *Al-Ṣaff*. See *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 6, pp.3550, 3562 and 3563.

¹³⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.195.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.157.

¹³² Shaltūt, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, pp.352-360.

them. While doing so, he tries to rebut some opposing ideas about the nature of war in Islam, especially the ones which claim that Islam was spread by the sheer power of the sword.¹³³

Shaltūt is mindful that the many issues he tries to discuss may divert the attention of the reader as he presents them. However, he always takes his reader back to the beginning of the *sūra*.¹³⁴ He also addresses matters of theology such as the effects of sin on faith.¹³⁵ Shaltūt ends his comments by explaining the nature of *nida'āt* (calls) in *Al-Anfāl*.¹³⁶ Needless to say that al-Ghazali and his teacher were following 'Abduh and Riḍā because linking *suwar* of the Qur'ān is one of the main features of the Al-Manār school. Thus we find Riḍā listing in the introduction to the third *sūra*, *Al-Imrān* six matters through which it is connected with the preceding *sūra*, *Al-Baqara*. One of these matters is that "each of them is engaged in debates with the People of the Book, the former goes at length in argument with the Jews, and the Christians were briefly mentioned while the latter did the reverse".¹³⁷

Al-Ghazali's *Naḥwa* also shares with modern *tafāsīr* their attempts to minimise the role of traditional exegesis, and in this his attitude reflects the Al-Manār school's criticism of classical *tafāsīr* for their lengthy discussions, which were not closely related to the verses they were commenting upon.¹³⁸ Furthermore, 'Abduh did not pay much attention to traditional *tafāsīr* and the reports about the occasion of revelation.¹³⁹ An example of how classical commentators go too far in their discussion of some topics is Abū al-Su'ūd's (1490-1574) detailed description of the banquet God sent to Jesus and his apostles mentioned in *Al-Mā'ida*. Shaltūt felt that this description is full of exaggerations and trivialities and devoid

¹³³ Ibid., pp.522-533. See also al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, pp.141-142.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.106.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.567.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp.574-582.

¹³⁷ Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafāsīr al-Manār*, Vol. 3, p.153.

¹³⁸ Ibid., Vol. 1, pp.18-19.

¹³⁹ An example of this tendency is his comments on *Al-Fatiha*. See *Tafāsīr al-Manār*, Vol. 1, pp.1135-138.

of reason.¹⁴⁰ The Al-Manār school's criticism of classical *tafāsīr* does not absolve its founders, especially Riḍā, from the same charge levelled against those who write pages on subjects that have no connection to the verses at hand. He seems very keen to rid the side of Islam of the criticism of Western scholars.¹⁴¹

Modern commentators' attitudes to the old commentaries reflect the centrality of the Qur'ān itself in their work, as the source of *tafāsīr*. Zebiri explains in the case of Shaltūt that cross-referencing indicates Shaltūt's reluctance to judge the Qur'ān by any criteria apart from itself.¹⁴² This kind of inter-textuality stems from the fact that different parts of the Qur'ān explain each other, and relating parts of the Qur'ān to each other is considered by Ibn Taymiyya as the best way to comment on the Qur'ān.¹⁴³ Al-Ghazali uses this method throughout his *tafāsīr*. For example, in commenting on (2:231) which explains the rules of divorce, he cross-references this verse with others from *Al-Nahl*, *Al-Rūm* and *Ghāfir*.¹⁴⁴

Al-Ghazali does not use this method excessively, unlike Muḥammad Mutawālī al-Sha'rāwī who relies on it extensively in his *tafāsīr*.¹⁴⁵ He uses it to draw the attention of his readers. For example, his comment on Verse 2:164 which starts with "In the creation of heaven and earth", al-Sha'rāwī takes his readers on a journey where he brings verses from fifteen *sūra*, and relates them to the meaning of this verse. In recalling all these verses, al-Sha'rāwī tries to compare them in terms of structure and the meaning of the vocabulary.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ Shaltūt, *Tafāsīr Al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, pp.48-50, and 269.

¹⁴¹ See for example his detailed discussion on polygamy, *Al-Manār*, Vol. 4, pp.349-374.

¹⁴² Zebiri, *Mahmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism*, p.161.

¹⁴³ This notion is formulated by Muslim linguists and encapsulated by the dictum "*al-Qur'ān yufasiru ba'ḍahu ba'ḍan*" (different parts of the Qur'ān explain one another). Ibn Taymiyya considers this as the best method of *tafāsīr*. See *Majmū' Fatawā ibn Taymiyya*, Vol. 16, pp.522-523.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.20.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Sha'rāwī says that his efforts in commenting on the Qur'ān does not qualify as a *tafāsīr*. He refers to his work as *khawāṭir* (thoughts). He comments, "My thoughts on the Qur'ān should not be called "*tafāsīr*" because they are sheer gifts that come to the heart of the believer from one or a few verses." See *Tafāsīr al-Sha'rāwī*, Vol. 1, p.14.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp.706-689.

Being a linguist, he follows the different meanings of words through their different usage in the Qurʾān.¹⁴⁷

Finally, by choosing not to follow a rigid method or a set of rules, al-Ghazali wanted to give himself the freedom to present his thoughts in a loose way without violating the spirit of thematic interpretation experimented on by ‘Abduh, Riḍā and their followers such as Shaltūt and Dirāz. By doing so al-Ghazali keeps his voice alive and continues speaking to his reader without being forced to give a detailed analysis such as in the case of the most recent *tafsīr* published by the University of Sharjah in 2010, which tends to expand the scope of analysis and has its share of problems, one of which is that the *tafsīr* was written by a committee of scholars who followed the same framework and the same set of rules which they agreed upon, but in the final analysis, the *tafsīr* presents us with different voices. Nevertheless, this *tafsīr* also reflects the latest developments in the field of thematic commentary, a development which points to a more rigid and systematic approach.

Influences and sources

Before elaborating on scholars who and literary sources that influenced al-Ghazali, it is important to note that his interpretation of the Qurʾān reflects the intellectual and political atmosphere in Egypt during the second half of the twentieth century. When he wrote his commentary at the back of his mind were Arab defeats in battlefields and strife in the fields of knowledge. These are reflected in *Naḥwa* where al-Ghazali speaks about Muslim unity, Muslims being slaughtered in Bosnia and their mosques being razed to the ground (the Babri Mosque in Ayudya, India in 1992 for instance). He speaks about the crisis of modern civilisation and the damage it has caused to the wellbeing of the world.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ This as he did with the word *ḥasbunā* (is enough) in Verse 104 from *Al-Māʾida*, Vol. 2, p.679.

¹⁴⁸ On these, see *Naḥwa*, pp. 264, 289, 307, 314 and 315.

Al-Ghazali refers to the work of Muḥammad al-Madanī (1907-1968) in *sūra Al-Nisā'* on many occasions without naming him.¹⁴⁹ However, the major influence and inspiration for *Naḥwa* are works in this field by his Shaltūt and al-Bannā, although the book does not expressly mention them. Al-Ghazali considers Shaltūt as the leading light in the field of thematic interpretation, mainly of the general type i.e. following a theme throughout the Qur'ān.¹⁵⁰ Al-Ghazali acknowledges his indebtedness to al-Bannā in an article where he summarises the latter's method as one based on contemplation, *dhawq* (taste), reflections and reading with understanding.¹⁵¹

The influence of both these scholars helps in the task of tracing the genesis of al-Ghazali's *tafsīr* back to his student days in Alexandria.¹⁵² As the discussion above shows, Shaltūt's influence on al-Ghazali is more pronounced. Student followed teacher in taking an independent view when differences arose on certain issues.¹⁵³ However, Shaltūt shows this tendency more often, such as in *Al-A'rāf*, Verse 7:46, "A barrier divides the two groups with men on its heights recognising each group with their marks." Both Shaltūt and al-Ghazali believe that these people are "the *du'ā* and the martyrs who spread the message of the prophets and the messengers of Allah".¹⁵⁴

They also agree on the question of the death of 'Isā (Jesus) who they believe died as any human being does, and accept the view of Ibn Ḥazm who believes that 'Isā did not ascend to heaven in body and soul. Although they differ on the use of scientific evidence in explaining the Qur'ān, they share the idea that the Qur'ān is a moral source for all practical and theoretical solutions, and that the Qur'ān is "a book whose ultimate goal is to open the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p.70.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Ghazali mentions Shaltūt's work on *tafsīr* on many occasions. See *Turāthuna al-Fikrī*, p.129.

¹⁵¹ Al-Ghazali, *Dustūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfiyya*, p.6.

¹⁵² Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt*, Vol.3, p.165.

¹⁵³ Such as his views on *sūra Al-Ra'd* (The Thunder) which it is believed to be revealed in Madina, but on its style and mood, al-Ghazali believes that it was revealed in Makka.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, p.111 and Shaltūt, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, p.56 and 382.

hearts and the minds of the believers".¹⁵⁵ Similarities between them does not mean that al-Ghazali did not take a different stance on other issues such as the origin of Gog and Magog, who al-Ghazali believes are from China rather than being Tatar or Mongol, which is the view taken by Ibn 'Ashūr.¹⁵⁶ Al-Ghazali's logic is that their names sound like Chinese.¹⁵⁷

This leads to the question as to the type of sources al-Ghazali consulted in writing *Naḥwa*. As mentioned above, al-Ghazali consulted few classical and modern *tafāsīr*, but he followed the line of 'Abduh and Riḍā and showed an interest in the work of the Tunisian scholar, Al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*. In respect of the *sunna* al-Ghazali cites, we find dozens that criticise particular social practices, or emphasise the merits of the *suwar* discussed. Occasionally, al-Ghazali expresses his reservation regarding some *aḥādīth* related to Makkī and Madanī *suwar*.¹⁵⁸ Despite this, he cites some *aḥādīth* from *Mu'jam al-Ṭabarānī* which contains *aḥādīth* of different categories,¹⁵⁹ though on the whole, al-Ghazali quoted many *aḥādīth* as well as misquotes some.¹⁶⁰ This reflects al-Ghazali's views on *sunna* and its status with regard to the Qur'ān, as will be explained in the next chapter.¹⁶¹ Apart from the main sources discussed above, al-Ghazali also mentions a number of secondary sources. He mentions books he has read,¹⁶² television documentaries he has seen,¹⁶³

¹⁵⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Ilal wa Adwīya*, p.201.

¹⁵⁶ Al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, Al-Dār al-Tunusiyya li'l-Nashr, 1984, Vol. 16, pp.22-23.

¹⁵⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Naḥwa*, pp.138 and 257.

¹⁵⁸ For example, he argues against reports that speak of *Al-An 'ām* as being a Madanī *sūra* by saying that most of these reports are either weak or fabricated. The weakness of *aḥādīth* stems from the fact that the reports assume that all the verses which speak of the People of Book are Madanī in nature. They also lead to this belief because the *sūra* mentions *zakāt* details of which were regulated during the Madina period. Al-Ghazali dismisses these arguments on the basis that *zakāt* was sanctioned before the *hijra*, but its details were regulated later. See *Naḥwa*, p.93.

¹⁵⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Min Khuṭab al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 2, p.100.

¹⁶⁰ Such as the *ḥadīth* "many men were complete and few women were perfect". See Bukharī, *Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥāba*, No. 3769.

¹⁶¹ Suffice it to say that al-Ghazali narrows the usage of *sunna* in matters of creed. See *Dustūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfiyya*, pp.55-69, and *Kayfa Nata'āml Ma' al-Qur'ān*, p.112.

¹⁶² For example, *The Story of Civilisation* by the American William Durant.

¹⁶³ These are likely to be by the National Geographic.

newspaper articles and even other media reports, such as the Voice of America radio programme.¹⁶⁴

It is important to point out at this juncture, that al-Ghazali's writing style and his educational approach to the Qur'ān is similar to that of al-Bannā. In some cases, al-Ghazali's literary style suggests that he may have been inspired by Egyptian romantic writers such as Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī (1976-1924).¹⁶⁵ We also know that although al-Ghazali admired Quṭb's literary style, he was nevertheless critical of the latter's commentary, *Fī Zilāl*, describing it as “shallow from scholarly point of view”.¹⁶⁶ Being a poet himself and with a penchant for both classical and modern Arabic poetry, al-Ghazali quotes many Arabic poems in *Naḥwa*, but does not attribute many of them to the poets who wrote them.

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, al-Ghazali's *tafsīr* has been translated into English, and is well received among Arab readers and Muslims in Southeast Asia and the West. It is the subject of many academic studies in Egypt, Algeria and Malaysia, to mention just a few.¹⁶⁷ He followed a trend in *tafsīr* which he felt is suitable for educating the masses. Some of his disciples consider him a pioneer in thematic interpretation, a claim which al-Ghazali never made.¹⁶⁸ Perhaps what they mean by this is his continuous effort to endorse and promote this kind of *tafsīr*, and his long engagement with *tafsīr* spanned nearly half a century. Moreover, al-Ghazali was able to achieve this because of his academic work in many countries, along

¹⁶⁴ *Naḥwa*, p.191.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.96.

¹⁶⁶ Khalafallah, *Rethinking the Islamic Law*, p.101. See also John Calvert, *Sayyid Quṭb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, Hurst And Company, London, 2010, pp.204-205.

¹⁶⁷ To this researcher's knowledge, the last MA study on his efforts on *tafsīr* was submitted to Al-Azhar University by Ramaḍān Khamīs al-Gharīb. Mas'ūd Falūsī also wrote a book on the efforts of al-Ghazali in Qur'ānic studies in 2000 under the title *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazali Rā'id al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī*, Dār al-Wafā', Egypt, 2000.

¹⁶⁸ This claim is not only made by al-Ghazali's disciples, but also by Quṭb's followers. Al-Khālīdī in his numerous books on Quṭb made this claim and 'Adnān Zarzūr held the same belief in his book, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*.

with his extensive travels over Arab countries and beyond. Al-Ghazali was therefore able to engage with a large number of people, and was able to publicise his views on thematic interpretation which he did at conferences, from the altars of the mosques, during lectures, in newspapers and books, and on radio and television.

Despite the fact that al-Ghazali was merely following a trend he was nevertheless an authentic voice in this field of study. Thematic interpretation during his life and after his death continued to grow as it became an independent field of inquiry worthy of study and impartation. Recent developments point to a tendency to canonise the field by introducing rules and laws on how to study *suwar* from a thematic viewpoint. The term "*mawḍūʿī*" is usually used by the majority of scholars, but others use alternatives. For example, the Sudanese scholar Ḥasan al-Turābī uses "*tawḥīdī*" (unified) instead.¹⁶⁹ In his commentary, *Al-Tafsīr al-Tawḥīdī*, al-Turābī speaks about a unified approach to the Qurʾān which is no different from what other scholars have expressed, except in language and presentation.¹⁷⁰ Al-Turābī seems to emphasise the importance of "*maqām*" or the context in understanding the structure of the Qurʾān.¹⁷¹

In summarising, this chapter has attempted to chart al-Ghazali's efforts in the field of thematic interpretation of the Qurʾān. Although focus has been on *Naḥwa*, an attempt has been made to present the development of his ideas on thematic interpretation from a chronological point of view. It traces his work on this subject from before he wrote *Naḥwa*. These efforts were cemented when he started to rely on this form of *tafsīr* while preaching. It is argued here that his use of *tafsīr mawḍūʿī* helped him to achieve his dream of writing his

¹⁶⁹ According to Khālīdī, "*al-tafsīr al-tawḥīdī*" is another name for "*al-mawḍūʿī*". *Tawḥīdī* is used because the commentator gathers the verses in one theme, then arranges them in order to infer from them different meanings and facts. See *Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍūʿī*, pp.47-48.

¹⁷⁰ Ḥasan al-Turābī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Tawḥīdī*, Saqi Books, Vol. 1, 2004.

¹⁷¹ M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qurʾan: A new translation*, pp.xxx.

tafsīr. *Naḥwa* is interesting in that al-Ghazali manages to comment on the whole Qurʾān in just one volume, thus defying the traditional route of commentary.

In order to analyse *Naḥwa*, the first part of this chapter has been devoted to following his early and formative period when his books included sections and chapters on themes and certain topics of the Qurʾān. It is found that in the majority of his talks and public speeches, al-Ghazali preferred this form of commentary because it enabled him to draw live lessons from the Qurʾān, and relate it to the lives of his audience. His views on thematic interpretation which he presents in his books have also been discussed. Attention has been drawn to his sermons as an important part of the maturation of his views on *tafsīr*. His sermons have later been discussed as a source of comparison to *Naḥwa*, and to draw a parallel between them and his *tafsīr*.

The second part of this chapter focuses on al-Ghazali's *tafsīr*. *Naḥwa* is considered as a culmination of his efforts. An analysis some of the themes al-Ghazali tried to emphasise has been attempted. The reading of his *tafsīr* in the light of modern *tafāsīr* mainly in Egypt has also been attempted. Al-Ghazali's book shares the main social and political concerns with these *tafāsīr*. It bears similarities with that of Maḥmūd Shaltūt's, but is different in terms of focus and detail. Al-Ghazali's contribution to thematic studies is unique in its presentation which makes it a book of reflection on the Qurʾān. The way al-Ghazali presents his work in this form brings to mind other efforts by him in his attempt to produce an alternative narrative which serves the purpose of his *daʿwa*, which may be taken to be the call of the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. The thoughts behind *Naḥwa* and the other books that he wrote are always either to help the cause of *daʿwa* or to dispel some misconceptions about Islam. In the field of Qurʾānic studies, al-Ghazali did not cause any controversy or was subject to criticism from the any of Islamic circles, but it is his writing on *sunna* that did not

indear him to many especially the salafi scholar in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. Next chapter will discuss his views on *hadīth*.

CHAPTER FOUR

Weak and solitary *aḥādīth*: Issues of chain and text

Before the publication of his book, *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya Bayna Ahl al-Fiqh wa al-Ḥadīth*¹ (hereafter *Al-Sunna*) in 1989, al-Ghazali wrote constantly about the relationship between *sunna* and *fiqh*.² *Al-Sunna* caused a stir among Muslim intellectuals all over the Arab world and later the rest of the Muslim world following its translation into other languages. It is no surprise that those most critical of the book were the *salafīs*, al-Ghazali's long-time critics.

In *Al-Sunna*, al-Ghazali attempts to test his maxim of the interdependent nature of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*, i.e. *lā ḥadīth bidūn fiqh wa lāfiqh bidūn ḥadīth*, a thesis he tries to test in many of his books.³ *Al-Sunna* is nevertheless the only book al-Ghazali devotes entirely to the subject of *ḥadīth*. It gives rise to numerous questions about his credentials as a *muhaddith*.⁴ It is apparent that *Al-Sunna* is not a book of theory. Rather, it is a book concerned with the implications of misunderstanding Prophetic *aḥādīth*.

Al-Sunna's popularity, however, stems from the kinds of issues that al-Ghazali chose to explore including, inter alia, modern challenges, women, music, the *jinn*, free will and predestination (*qaḍā' wa qadar*), and above all, the implications of misunderstanding *sunna* relating to the Qur'ān. Unfortunately, the book does not achieve all its aims and objectives as al-Ghazali faced fierce criticism from his most vitriolic opponents who were quick to

¹ This book is translated into English by Aisha Bewley and is called *The Sunna of The Prophet: The People of Fiqh versus the People of Hadith*, Dar al-Taqwa, 2001.

² Al-Ghazali used the term "*fiqh*" in the same way as jurists do. He was trying to highlight the differences between two schools (the school of *fuqahā'* and *muhaddithūn*) and the way they deal with *ḥadīth*. See *Kaifā Nata'āmal ma' al-Qur'ān*, p.69.

³ Al-Ghazali, *Dustūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqafīyya Bayna al-Muslimīn*, p.27.

⁴ Al-Ghazali compiled another book on *ḥadīth*, *Min Kunūz al-Sunna* which comprises mainly of a selection of *aḥādīth*.

accuse him of being a rationalist influenced by the West and an "anti-sunna" apologist.⁵ They pointed to inconsistencies and his eclectic approach to the *sunna* despite the fact that al-Ghazali never claimed to be a scholar of *ḥadīth* in the technical sense.⁶

This chapter will attempt to depict al-Ghazali's ideas on the *sunna* as presented throughout his books. An overview of the way he perceived *sunna* and its relation to the Qur'ān will be provided, after which an overview of the nature of the *sunna* and its authority will be assessed. Some issues deemed to be problematic, namely the authority of weak *aḥādīth* (*al-ḥadīth al-ḍa'īf*), solitary *aḥādīth* (*ḥadīth al-āḥād* or *khābar al-wāḥid*) and the relationship between *fiqh* and *sunna*, will be identified and examined from his perspective. It is hoped that by tackling these issues the development of his views on *sunna* could be followed in order to discover if, at some stage, he changed some of his views.

Before al-Ghazali's overall thoughts on *sunna* are introduced, it is perhaps important to note that *Al-Sunna* completes the shifts that had taken place in his writings on *sunna*. Comparatively speaking, it is his strongest book in tone and language. The shift in tone may be said to have occurred in the early seventies. Prior to that al-Ghazali was more measured, and strived to ensure that his sources were sound. He would frequently seek the help of Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (1914-1999), the renowned *muḥaddith* to check the authenticity (*ṣiḥḥa*) of *aḥādīth* he quotes in *Fiqh al-Sīra*, his biography of the Prophet.⁷

A survey of the first seventeen books he published between 1947 and 1957 show that al-Ghazali presented his views on *sunna* in a confident and calm manner, knowing that he was writing for an audience or readership who would not attack him even if they disagreed with

⁵ There are many pieces of evidence to show that al-Ghazali was provoked by the Saudi *salafīs* and meant to vent his anger and pour out his frustration on them. See for example, *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, pp.15, 22, 29, 129 and 149. See also *Sir Ta'khur al-Muslīmīn*, pp.116-118.

⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, p.93.

⁷ However, al-Ghazali did not accept some of al-Albānī's rulings due to al-Ghazali's views regarding *al-ḥadīth al-ḍa'īf*. See *Fiqh al-Sīra*, pp.10-14.

him. This may explain the absence of criticism of the *salafīs* in his early books as his strong views toward extreme and ritual *salafīs* developed later.⁸ This coupled with rise of Islamism, which led to the emergence of various militant groups, compelled al-Ghazali to address the challenge they posed. It should be considered that in the 1950s and the 1960s the Saudis, as representatives of the *salafīs*, were fighting for the same cause as the Muslim Brotherhood. During this period, al-Ghazali directed his criticism towards Saudi rulers. He eventually changed his views while working in Saudi Arabia in the late 1970s when he came to know the *salafīyya* representative there better. Al-Ghazali explained how during his seven years there he managed to change his old stereotype about the country.⁹

The authority of the *sunna*

The authority of the *sunna* is one of the most debated issues amongst both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars in modern times. The root of this debate may be traced back to the eighteenth century when Muslim revivalists found themselves facing the challenge of the issue of *bid'a*. They had to make great efforts from this period onwards to affirm the authority of *sunna*.¹⁰ It must be made clear that apart from some who doubted *sunna* or some aspects of it, the majority of past or present Muslim scholars believe that the *sunna* is the secondary source of belief and law in Islam. However, uncertainty has always surrounded the *ṣiḥḥa* and function of *sunna* in relation to the Qur'ān. Debate in this regard has continued vibrantly throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to present times.

⁸ Al-Ghazali was critical at the time of the *Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya*. This group was established in 1926 by Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Faqī, an Azharite who was closer in thinking to Egypt's *salafīyya* than the *salafīyya* of Saudi Arabia. See *Min Hunā Na'lam*, p.97 and *Sir Ta'khur al-Muslimīn*, p.63.

⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Awdā' al-Iqtiṣādiyya*, pp.7-8.

¹⁰ Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp.21-27. See also Jonathan C. Brown, *Ḥadīth, Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2009, p.240

Many factors have influenced the debate, including internal and social factors or those arising from the course of Muslim intellectual life during the period known as "the age of *taqlīd*". Other factors relate to Western influences on the Muslim world – whether colonialism or missionary activities – and above all, the influence of Western scholarship on the way Muslim intellectuals look at their Islamic heritage; that is, the impact of Orientalism and its critical approach to Islamic traditions.¹¹ Although Western influence has been immense, this does not merit great emphasis as the fundamental debate on the function of *sunna* pre-dates these Western-Muslim encounters.

It may be opportune at this juncture to briefly consider the above in light of those who either totally or partially reject the *sunna*. Some *sunna* rejectionists have been associated with such groups as the *Ahl al-Qur'ān* in India or rationalist thinkers such as Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817-1898).¹² Muslim modernists in Egypt, including those associated with Muḥammad 'Abduh's camp had their own perspective on the *sunna*. While not rejecting it totally, they tried to critically engage and understand *aḥādīth* rationally, judging those that are problematic either in accordance with their understanding of the Qur'ān, or in some cases, interpreting them in the light of scientific facts.¹³

Al-Ghazali's views on the authority of the *sunna* sometimes appear contradictory. However, all show that its authority is directly linked to knowledge of the Qur'ān. In asserting this, al-Ghazali reduces the authority of the *sunna* to a matter of mere understanding. To him, *sunna* is not a matter of applying rules and conditions established by scholars who claim expertise in the field (*'ulūm muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīth*) or of merely memorising

¹¹ One of the popular books that deals with the Orientalists and *ḥadīth* is by Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī, *Al-Sunna wa Makānatuhā fi 'l-Tashrī' al-Islāmī*, published in 1949 with many later editions. See also M. M. Azami, *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature*, American Trust Publication, 2001 (especially Chapter Five).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.45-46.

¹³ Such as Riḍā's attitude towards the insect *ḥadīth*. See *Al-Manār*, Vol. 29, pp.48-49.

thousands of *aḥādīth*.¹⁴ Rather, to study and become a "true scholar" of prophetic *sunna*, al-Ghazali believed one would need to acquire "*fiqh*" (proper understanding).¹⁵ In turn, the acquisition of *fiqh* requires in-depth study of the message of the Qur'ān.¹⁶ Al-Ghazali therefore puts emphasis on the organic relationship between the Qur'ān and *sunna*¹⁷ which he feels is needed to counter those (i.e. the *salafīs*) who emphasise on studying *sunna* more than the Qur'ān.¹⁸ Al-Ghazali asserts his belief that true *sunna* originates from the Qur'ān, and on this point he echoes Imām Shāfi'ī who raised this in his book, *Al-Risāla*.¹⁹ Al-Ghazali affirmed that he believes "like most of the well-established scholars, that the rulings of *ṣaḥīḥ aḥādīth* were originally taken and deduced from the Qur'ān. The Prophet inferred divine support and heavenly elucidation from them".²⁰ Al-Ghazali explains later that the Prophet was, in his life and his actions, the embodiment of the teachings of the Holy Book.²¹

The Prophet's teachings, utterances, actions and affirmation are all a reflection of his deep understanding of the Qur'ān.²² Al-Ghazali may be contradicting himself as on the one hand he speaks about the divine nature of the *sunna*, and on the other he speaks of the relation between actions and the understanding of the Qur'ān. One explanation of this possible contradiction may be attributed to his style of writing, but it may be that al-Ghazali is trying

¹⁴ In *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya* (p.20) he said that "a little recitation of al-Qur'ān and lots of reading of *aḥādīth* will never give a very good picture of Islam". See also *Al-Islam wa al-Tāqāt al-Mu'aṭala*, p.58 and al-Qarāḍāwī, *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Sunna*, p.27.

¹⁵ The term is used here differently from the way it is used by jurists as the word itself is often used to mean "laws". However, al-Ghazali and other modern scholars go beyond this narrow usage. They point to the way that the Qur'ān uses it as the verse "these people are devoid of understanding," (59:13).

¹⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Laysa Mina al-Islam*, p.27 and *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Qur'ān*, pp.61-62.

¹⁷ A similar point may be found in Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ's '*Ulūm al-Ḥadīth wa Muṣṭalaḥu*, Dār al-'Ilm li'l-Malāyyīn, Beirut, 1987, pp.301-306.

¹⁸ In *Humūm Dā'iyyah*, al-Ghazali said, "Neglecting the Qur'ān and the failure to understand its meaning is a mental and psychological infirmity which will not be cured by an addiction to reading books on *sunna*," (p.23). See also Ṣafīḥ, '*Ulūm al-Ḥadīth wa Muṣṭalaḥu*, p.301.

¹⁹ Muḥammad bin Idrīs Shāfi'ī, *Al-Risāla fī Usūl al-Fiqh (Treatise on the Foundation of Islamic Jurisprudence)*, translated by Majid Khaduri, Islamic Texts Society, 1987, pp.58-60 and pp.111-112.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.208.

²¹ On the authority of *sunna* and its relationship with the Qur'ān, see Ibn 'Abd al-Birr, *Jāmi' Bayān al-'Ilm wa Faḍliḥī* Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1978, Vol. 2, pp.188-190; Abu Ishāq al-Shaṭībī, *Al-Muwafaqāt*, Ṣubḥī al-Ṣafīḥ, '*Ulūm al-Ḥadīth wa Muṣṭalaḥu*, pp.291-294 and pp.301-303; and Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Qawā'id al-Taḥdīth*, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, (n.d.) p.58.

²² Al-Ghazali, *Min Hunā Na'lam*, p.207 and *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*, p.150.

to draw the attention to the difference between Muhammad the infallible (i.e. *ma'ṣūm*), a "man who was divinely inspired and rightly guided"²³ and would never have said anything which would contradict the core message of the Qur'ān;²⁴ and Muḥammad the human being (*bashar*). To this end al-Ghazali quotes a lengthy passage by Shaykh Muḥammad al-Madani which differentiates between two types of prophetic actions i.e. those that reflect Muḥammad's mission as a Prophet which must be taken as acts of *sharī'a*, and ones which reflect his actions as a human being.²⁵

Accordingly, al-Ghazali's emphasis on the complete conformity between the Qur'ān and *sunna* (between what he calls practical and theoretical) means that a *ḥadīth* will never convey a message that contradicts the spirit of the Qur'ān, and if this were the case such a *ḥadīth* would never be accepted.²⁶ This standpoint is further cemented when al-Ghazali observes the way *aḥādīth* are misused by those claiming to defend them. In one of his attacks, he commented that *ḥadīth* is as an excuse to spread anarchy.²⁷

Al-Ghazali was eager to establish the interrelation between the Qur'ān and *sunna* for two reasons. Firstly to be in a position to be able to engage the critical evaluation of *sunna*, and secondly to be part of a process which would enable him to find ways to understand a *ḥadīth* to use for the good of the Muslim community. He was convinced of his position because a vast collection of *ḥadīth* containing hundreds of thousands of *aḥādīth* exists and some may be of questionable value or used in the wrong context.²⁸ Yet, here lies the crux of the matter where al-Ghazali finds himself in deep water. In one fell swoop he simultaneously attempts

²³ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazālī*, p. 217.

²⁴ Al-Ghazali reflects the views of Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, Ibn Ḥazm and Abū al-Baqā' (who considers the *sunna* as a form of *wahy* [revelation] in his *Kuliyāt*). They differentiate between two types of *wahy* – the recited (Qur'ān) and the inspired or taught to Muḥammad by the Angel Gabriel. See al-Ṣāliḥ, *Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, pp.301-303 and al-Qāsimī, *Qawā'id al-Taḥdīth*, pp.58-59.

²⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*, pp.151-154.

²⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Ṭāqāt al-Mu'aṭala*, p.58.

²⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Sir Ta'khur al-Muslimīn*, p.115.

²⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*, p.153.

to deal with both his grievances – against the *Ahl al-Qurʿān* group in Egypt²⁹ whose claims he finds worthless and unable to withstand academic scrutiny,³⁰ and against forces that manipulate prophetic *aḥādīth* to suit their aims.³¹ As will become evident, al-Ghazali was more concerned with the latter. As for the *Ahl al-Qurʿān* in Egypt, he was aware of their writings especially that of their lead intellectual Aḥmad Ṣubḥī Maṣṣūr who is said to have a love-hate relationship with al-Ghazali. It is worth noting that Maṣṣūr claims that al-Ghazali appropriated many of his views in *Al-Sunna*.³² He was a harsh critic of al-Ghazali with regard to the Foda affair where he tried to expose al-Ghazali's contradictions in terms of freedom of expression.³³

In establishing the Qurʿān-*sunna* relationship, al-Ghazali believed that he would be able to question the *ṣiḥḥa* (authenticity) of prophetic *aḥādīth*. As he had planned, he went on to question the *ṣiḥḥa* (authenticity) and value of many *aḥādīth*, according to the criteria he set, as the following examples will show. One of the *aḥādīth* al-Ghazali felt uncomfortable with is the one narrated by ‘Abd Allah bin ‘Awn who wrote to Nāfi’ (*mawlā* of ‘Abd Allah Ibn ‘Umar), a companion of the Prophet, inquiring about whether it is allowed to attack one’s adversaries unawares. Nāfi’ replied that it was practiced by the Prophet and he cited the campaign against the tribe of Banī al-Muṣṭlaq (6H/628CE) where, according to Nāfi’, Muslims raided them while they were "heedless (*ghārūn*) and their cattle were being watered at the watering place".³⁴ The *ḥadīth* is *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) and is reported in both Bukhārī and

²⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Laysa Mina al-Islam*, p.39.

³⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Miʿat Suʿāl ʿan al-Islam*, Vol. 1, p.240.

³¹ He lamented the tendency of some groups to accept some fabricated *aḥādīth* and to find some bases to strengthen weak *aḥādīth* while they misunderstand the meaning of *ṣaḥīḥ* ones. See *Sir Taʾkhur al-Muslimīn*, p.115.

³² Al-Ghazali was full of praise for Maṣṣūr, and included excerpts of Maṣṣūr's book as an example of how Muslims should re-read their history with a critical eye. See *Turāḥunā al-Fikrī*, pp.108-113.

³³ Aḥmad Ṣubḥī Maṣṣūr, *Hadd al-Ridda* (p.3 of the electronic copy accessed on 17 June 2012).

³⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.103; *Fiqh al-Sīra*, pp.10-11 and *Jihād al-Daʿwa*, pp.12-16.

Muslim³⁵ which unfortunately, according to al-Ghazali, depicts the Prophet as a leader bent on waging war rather than making peace.³⁶ Al-Ghazali rejects it and argues that it contradicts the essence of the Qur'ān which affirms human choice and opposes compulsion in religion – "*lā ikrāha fī al-dīn*," (2:256).

Al-Ghazali highlights the same contradiction found in the *ḥadīth* known as "*gharānīq*" which claims that the Prophet added verses in praise of Makkan idols to *sūra Al-Najm*.³⁷ According to al-Ghazali the whole *ḥadīth* contradicts the essence of the revelation which affirms the Oneness of God. The idea that the Prophet praised the Makkan idols seems bizarre to al-Ghazali. Likewise, the verses they claim to have been added contradict Verse 53:21-23.³⁸

Despite the fact that *sunna* is the second source of Islamic law, al-Ghazali reiterates that *sunna* by its nature varies both in *ṣiḥḥa* and meaning. Additionally, in order to give it due importance, al-Ghazali affirms the status of *sunna* as "the second pillar of the religion",³⁹ albeit with a reminder that *sunna* "needs someone knowledgeable of its *isnād* (chain of narration) capable of understanding its contents and, above all, well-versed in the Qur'ān, its meanings and its purposes".⁴⁰ This said, al-Ghazali always believed that differences exist between the Qur'ān and *sunna*, not least because the Qur'ān stands as eternal proof of Muḥammad's prophethood. This merits a more focused discussion on *sunna* in the next section.

³⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Kitāb al-ʿItq*, 2541 and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Jihād*, 4519.

³⁶ Another example of a *ḥadīth* which contradicts the Qur'ānic verses (17:15), (6:131), (32:3) and (34:44) is one reported on the authority of Abū Hurayra where the Prophet pleaded with God to allow him to pray for his mother.

³⁷ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Dār al-Rayān, Cairo, Vol. 8, pp.293-294.

³⁸ Al-Ghazali lashed out at Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī regarding this story. See *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, pp.157-158 and *Fiqh al-Sīra*, pp.116-117. He also lashed out at one who he describes as a big name in the *salafī* camp who claimed that *gharānīq* reports may be elevated to the status of *ṣaḥīḥ*. See *Humūm Dāʿiyah*, p.84. Al-Ghazali made no mention of the name of this prominent *salafī*, but Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī wrote the book *Naṣb al-Majānīq li Nasf Qiṣat al-Gharānīq*, published by Al-Maktab al-Islami in Beirut in 1996, on this issue.

³⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Min Hunā Naʿlam*, p.213.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.213.

The status of *sunna* with regard to the Qur'ān

It is accepted by all believing Muslims that the Qur'ān that exists today is exactly as revealed to the Prophet fifteen hundred years ago despite contrary arguments from sceptics. However, the consensus breaks down in respect of *sunna* despite all efforts to protect it from corruption and fabrication. Fabricated *aḥādīth* are rejected and strict criteria have been set to regulate the assessment of others, yet the task of separating the *ṣaḥīḥ* from the *mawḍū'* (fabricated) is still beset with problems. Al-Ghazali does not question *ḥadīth* collection and compilation methodology⁴¹ provided any word attributed to the Prophet must be judged according to the Qur'ān in order to prove its *ṣiḥḥa*.⁴²

The problem is not what the Prophet has or has not said, rather it lies with the *ḥadīth* itself and those who attribute *aḥādīth* to him. Al-Ghazali supports his view by referring to Abū Hanīfa (93-179H/712-795CE) who said, "My rejection of reports contradicting the Qur'ān, and which someone attributes to the Prophet, is not a rejection of the Prophet himself, but a rejection of the person who falsely reports from him. In this case the accusation falls upon him (the one who reports falsely), not the Prophet."⁴³ Based on this, al-Ghazali tries to present his case on *sunna*.

As explained, al-Ghazali's approach to *sunna* is motivated by many factors such as Muslims' misunderstanding of it, the spread of *aḥādīth* that leave a negative impact on Muslim life thereby further distorting the image of Islam and finally, the lack of proper

⁴¹ In fact, he praised the process of *ḥadīth* collection, and described the *ḥadīth* collections in his book *Laysa Mina al-Islam* as a "perfect process of historical documentation", p.36. See also *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazālī*, p.218.

⁴² Brown appreciates al-Ghazali's attitude to *sunna* through the prism of the revivalist approach to it. He claims that the revivalists, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, gave primacy to the Qur'ān over *ḥadīth*. See *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, p.110.

⁴³ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazālī*, p.219.

understanding of the function of *sunna*. Al-Ghazali was aware from the start that the distortion of *sunna* affects the approach to the Qu'ran and its message.⁴⁴

Taking these concerns together, al-Ghazali advocates an approach to *sunna* based on four aspects. The first is the acceptance of *aḥādīth* deemed by experts to be weak, provided they do not contradict basic beliefs, and as long as the *ḥadīth* itself remains within the boundaries of established knowledge regarding ethics and morality. The second calls for an evaluation of *aḥādīth* deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by experts, but where their meaning contradicts the message of the Qur'an. In applying this, he rejected some *aḥādīth ṣaḥīḥa* when he wrote *Fiqh al-Sīra*, the biography of the Prophet. The third calls for a proper understanding of the time and context of the occasion on which the *ḥadīth* was reported, or *aḥādīth* that the experts term "*asbāb wurūd al-ḥadīth*".⁴⁵ Al-Ghazali believes that by collating the variations, the scholar would be in a position to see that the emphasis shifted from one issue to another according to the time, place and the priorities of the Muslim community. The fourth lays much emphasis on teaching the important elements of the faith while discarding the less important issues.⁴⁶ On one occasion, al-Ghazali asserted that Muslims need only know a few *aḥādīth* to manage their religious life.⁴⁷ He said, "Muslims ought to be taught what is important and relevant to their needs, and according to their mental capacity. Reports which give details of the Day of Judgment (known as *aḥādīth al-fitān*), free will and predestination will not benefit the

⁴⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, pp.102-103.

⁴⁵ Al-Ghazali had heard of some books on this subject published in Syria. He regretted that these books were not made available to him since "the spread of these books will serve (defend) *sunna* against those who attack it". See *Laysa Mina al-Islam*, p.30.

⁴⁶ In *Dustūr al-Waḥada al-Thaqāfiyya* (p.28) al-Ghazali observes that the mass publication of many *ḥadīth* books such as the *Muwata'* of Mālik, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari* and *Muslim* has made it easy to consult these books on the one hand, but has led to disputes and problems on the other hand because they were not introduced to the masses by proper scholars of *aḥādīth*. See also *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazālī*, p.220.

⁴⁷ In *Sir Ta'khur al-Muslimīn* (p.117), al-Ghazali says that Muslims need only a dozen of *aḥādīth* to observe their religious obligations. See also *Mi'at Sua'al 'an al-Islam*, Vol. 1, p.244.

masses who are not mentally capable of studying them."⁴⁸ In this al-Ghazali echoes Rashīd Riḍā who questioned the relevance of such *aḥādīth* in the life of Muslims.⁴⁹

Al-Ghazali attempts to show how varying reports differ in their meaning and the emphasis through the example of *aḥādīth* concerning the question "What deed does Allah like best?" On one occasion the Prophet responded that the best deed is reading the Qur'ān. On another, he mentioned that the best deeds are first, to perform prayers on time; second, to care for one's parents; and third, *jihād*.⁵⁰ A further report states that the Prophet said that the deeds Allah likes best are first, the articles of faith; the second, *jihād*; and third, a blessed Ḥajj.⁵¹

In interpreting these *aḥādīth* al-Ghazali means to show how *sunna* serves the *maqāṣid* (goals) of the Qur'ān.⁵² His aim is to show that each of these narrations is meant to alert Muslims to the most important ethos needed at any particular time. The Prophet, in giving these different responses, was taking into account the circumstances of the people and their needs. Al-Ghazali concludes that each of these narrations should not be taken in isolation, and that Muslims should extract the moral of the *ḥādīth*, and prioritise their needs according to their situation.⁵³ It seems obvious, therefore, that al-Ghazali tried to determine the proper approach to *sunna* – an approach guided by Qur'ānic teachings. However, despite the safeguards he tried to put forward, al-Ghazali still ran into problems. One of these concerns his treatment of weak *aḥādīth*. He is seen by his opponents as trying to use *aḥādīth* belonging to this category while rejecting those proven to be *ṣaḥīḥ*.

⁴⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Sir Ta'khur al-Muslimīn*, p.118.

⁴⁹ Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*; Vol. 6, pp.493-500.

⁵⁰ Bukhārī, *Kitāb Mawāqīt al-Ṣala*, 527; *Kitāb al-Jihād*, 5970 and *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 7534. Muslim reported this *ḥādīth* in *Kitāb al-Imān*, pp.137-140.

⁵¹ There are similar *aḥādīth* where the Prophet was asked what is best in Islam, and he gave different answers to different people. See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Kitāb al-Imān*, 11, 12 and 28; and *Kitāb al-Ist'idhān*, 6436. It is reported in *Kitāb al-Imān*, 63 in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.

⁵² Al-Ghazali, *Laysa Mina al-Islam*, p.33.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.29-30.

Weak *ḥadīth*

Critics of *ḥadīth* differentiate between two types of *ḥadīth*. Those with a strong *sanad* are *ṣaḥīḥ* and those with a discontinuity in the chain of narration or a chain with a questionable narrator are *ḍaʿīf* (weak). Weak *aḥādīth*, popular among preachers, ascetics, Sufis and to a certain extent *quṣṣāṣ* (storytellers),⁵⁴ are therefore defined in relation to *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth*. Thus, any *ḥadīth* lacking the classification of *ṣaḥīḥ* is deemed to be weak.⁵⁵ However, this is not as clear-cut as it may seem due to the introduction by scholars of *ḥadīth* of an array of different classifications of weak *aḥādīth* varying in strength within '*ilm al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* (critique of the reliability of *ḥadīth* narrators) according to the requirements of the then established theory of *ḥadīth* criticism.

The views of these scholars on the status of weak traditions may be divided into three strands, namely the total rejection of the use of or reference to weak *aḥādīth*,⁵⁶ the rejection of these *aḥādīth* in matters of law (but allowing their use in matters relating to *faḍā'il al-'amāl* [good deeds] or *wā'iz* [preaching]),⁵⁷ and lastly the elevation of these weak *aḥādīth* to the status of *ṣaḥīḥ* by tracing the different narrations – for example, where there is more than one report on the same issue, the scholar would be able to determine the origins of the *ḥadīth* and accord it more substance.⁵⁸

Weak *aḥādīth* also have their origins in books on *sīra* (the Prophet's life) and his *maghāzī* (expeditions). They later became integrated into history books. The existence of a vast

⁵⁴ See al-Ghazali's views in *Kayfa Naḥam al-Islam*, p.211.

⁵⁵ On the definition of *ḍaʿīf*, see *Muqadimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ fī 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1978, p.20; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, edited by 'Abd al-Wahhāb 'Abd al-Laṭīf, Maktabat al-Turāth, Cairo, 1972, Vol. 1 pp.179; Subḥī al-Ṣalīḥ, '*Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, p.165; al-Qāsimī, *Qawā'id al-Taḥdīth*, p.108 and al-Khaṭīb, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, p.337.

⁵⁶ Imām Muslim devoted a chapter on "warning of reporting from weak reporters" in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Mawsū'at al-Ḥadīth al-Sharīf*, Dār al-Salām, Riyadh, 1999, pp.675-679.

⁵⁷ For example, see al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, Vol. 1, pp. 296-299 and al-Qāsimī, *Qawā'id al-Taḥdīth*, pp.113-114.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.296-299 and al-Qāsimī, *Qawā'id al-Taḥdīth*, p.114.

volume of weak *aḥādīth* led Muslim scholars to introduce a new field of *ḥadīth* criticism known as "*takhrīj*", where other reports are sought to corroborate a *ḥadīth* to enable it to reach the status of *ṣaḥīḥ*.⁵⁹ Some scholars even went so far as to set conditions on how weak *aḥādīth* could or should be used. These include, inter alia, the condition that a *ḥadīth* must not be too weak, not be related to belief and laws, and not state something contrary to common sense.⁶⁰

Taking these constraints into consideration, al-Ghazali understands the limited role of weak *aḥādīth* within these requirements. However, he then deviates from it by saying that the criteria of *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḍaʿīf* is not so much related to the chain, rather it is linked to the *matn* itself. In order to judge the *ḥadīth*, one must look closely at the text. If, for example, a *ḥadīth* praises honesty and lambasts falsehood then, according to al-Ghazali, there is no harm in accepting it as it does not add any new information or knowledge.

Sometimes a *ḥadīth* has a weak *sanad*, but its *matn* either confirms or complements a Qurʾānic virtue. In this situation al-Ghazali poses the question why a *ḥadīth* should be judged to be weak on the basis of a defect in its chain while the *matn* is sound? Al-Ghazali does not suggest that conditions laid down by scholars should not be taken into consideration. Rather, he suggests that there are ways to strengthen an *al-qarīb al-ḍaʿīf* (a relatively weak *ḥadīth*) with other strong *aḥādīth* with similar meanings, even if they have different chains of narrators.⁶¹ He further argues that weak *aḥādīth* are not related to practical aspects of life and, as such, scholars through the ages have tolerated and used them

⁵⁹ A famous example is the work done by Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī on al-Ghazali's *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*.

⁶⁰ Al-Qāsimī, *Qawāʿid al-Taḥdīth*, p.114 and al-Khatīb, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, pp.353-354.

⁶¹ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, p.93.

in *da'wa*.⁶² Al-Ghazali sees no harm in using "words" attributed to the Prophet within the roles agreed by the *'ulamā'*.⁶³

The realm in which weak *aḥādīth* have been confined to is that of preaching. In this al-Ghazali brings into the discussion his experiences as a *dā'iyyah*. He explains that the nature of preaching is based on stirring the audience's emotions, and opening their hearts using every means at the preacher's disposal, including the use of fact or fiction. According to al-Ghazali, when he worked as a preacher he "worked hard to establish the meaning of the *ḥadīth* on a solid base, and then use it in the right place".⁶⁴ This alludes to his view that not everyone is capable of using *ḥadīth ḍa'īf*; therefore, only the knowledgeable should have the authority to use them responsibly in the right context and only on issues other than faith and law.⁶⁵ Additionally, the preacher must possess proper knowledge of the religion, its principles, its goals and, most importantly, the true *sunna* of the Prophet. Al-Ghazali recognises that it may be problematic for a preacher to take a weak *ḥadīth* on its own where there may not be conformity with the general teachings of the faith.⁶⁶ In such situations, his view is that it would be "better to close the gate".⁶⁷

Al-Ghazali, it would seem, feels that lay Sufis are more attached to weak *aḥādīth*,⁶⁸ leading scholars to call for a ban on the use of weak *aḥādīth*.⁶⁹ While al-Ghazali values their view, he nonetheless believes that even *ṣaḥīḥ aḥādīth* should not be taught without a broad

⁶² Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*, p.196.

⁶³ Ibid., p.197.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.197.

⁶⁵ See *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, pp.64-65 and al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Sunna*, pp.84-86.

⁶⁶ On the conditions of how to use weak *aḥādīth*, see for example al-Qāsimī, *Qawa'id al-Taḥdīth*, p.113 and al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Sunna*, pp.70-99.

⁶⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, p.200; *Al-Islam wa al-Tāqāt al-Mu'tala*, p.110 and al-Qāsimī, *Qawa'id al-Taḥdīth*, pp.175-179.

⁶⁸ On this point, see al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Tāqāt al-Mu'tala*, p.58 and *Duṣṭūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfiyya*, p.45.

⁶⁹ Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī seems to be very strict in his approach to what is *ḍa'īf* and is very critical of those who use it, even in preaching. He is very close to Aḥmad Shākir and al-Albāni in this view. See *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Sunna*, p.65-84.

understanding of the *maqāṣid* (aims) and *uṣūl* (principles) of Islam. He also emphasises the need to support *ṣaḥīḥ* with other highly established and sound reports namely from the Qur'ān and *mutawātir*.⁷⁰ According to him, "If we accepted a *riwāya* (weak report) and afterwards find one which is stronger, then we should only accept the authentic report until we have a stronger one to support it."⁷¹ He therefore considers the criteria used by scholars to rule on a *ḥadīth* as *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḍa'īf* to be one and the same. This said, only the *ṣaḥīḥ* should be accepted when there is stronger evidence.⁷²

Al-Ghazali's idea that a weak report should not be accepted until a stronger one to support is found, is confusing. If there is stronger evidence, why should weak reports be accepted? Again al-Ghazali seems to neglect the *muḥaddithūn*'s view on the relationship between *ṣaḥīḥ* and *mutawātir*, for if every *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth* is to be judged in the light of the *mutawātir*, then all *aḥādīth* would end up being rejected because the majority of them are narrated through a single chain, and only a few are judged to be *mutawātir*. In order to illustrate al-Ghazali's understanding and application of *ḍa'īf*, the debate on the religious basis for the celebration of the night of Sha'bān, will be assessed in detail.

Night of Sha'bān celebrations

Celebrating the night of the fifteenth of Sha'bān is an area where al-Ghazali tries to convince people that weak *aḥādīth* may be effective without having a negative impact on belief, and that it may even enhance faith as well as encourage believers to remember the Almighty.⁷³ For many years, Muslims around the world have been accustomed to observing

⁷⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*, p.200.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.200.

⁷² Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*, p.200.

⁷³ Al-Ghazali's views on the observance vary from one book to another. However, the essence is the same. For example, in *Hadhā Dinunā* he discusses the observance of the night in the light of the relationship between the Qur'ān and *sunna*, pp.208-209.

particular rituals such as fasting and holding special gatherings to mark the occasion.⁷⁴ This is an issue which has long divided the scholars due to the lack of *aḥādīth ṣaḥīḥa* to indicate that this night should be celebrated.

All the *aḥādīth* cited in support of this observance are weak and do not have the status of *ṣaḥīḥ*.⁷⁵ These include *aḥādīth* which say that the night mentioned in Verse 3 of *Al-Dukhān* is in fact the night of Sha'bān. Al-Ghazali says that the night in question is *Laylat al-Qadr*, and he cites Ibn Kathīr on this matter,⁷⁶ all of which means that no authentic religious basis for the observance of the night exists when in Islam any "religious" festivity must be justified on solid grounds. Regardless, while accepting that Muslims who mark this night go beyond what is accepted, al-Ghazali also indicates that the issue merits a closer look at the *aḥādīth* used to validate the celebration.

He gives some indication that there is a religious basis for it, even if it is gleaned from a number of different narrations. He points to the fact that most of the *aḥādīth* reported in al-Mundhirī's (581-656H) *Al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb* supports, albeit theoretically, the observance.⁷⁷ The underlying message is similar to *aḥādīth* reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* in which the Almighty at a particular time of the night answers the prayers of his servants.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Shaltūt, *Min Tawjīhāt al-Islam*, p.348.

⁷⁵ According to Ibn al-Dubaiḥī (558-637H) all *aḥādīth* on the merits of the night of Sha'bān are either forged, weak, very weak, or suffer from discontinuity in the chain. See *Dhikr Ahādīth Riwayāt fī Dikr Laylat al-Niṣf Min Sha'bān wa Faḍā'iluhā*, edited by 'Umar 'Abd al-Munī'm Salīm, Dār Qurṭoba, Cairo, 1995.

⁷⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Hadhā Dinunā*, p.209.

⁷⁷ Under the chapter entitled *Reports on the encouragement of fasting during Sha'bān: The reports about the Prophet's fast during the month and the merits of the celebration of the 15th night of the month*, al-Mundhirī reports fifteen *aḥādīth*, some of which speak specifically about the night of Sha'bān while the rest deals with the prophet's fast and the merits of the month itself. According to the editors, most of the *aḥādīth* are judged to be weak, especially the one attributed to 'Ā'isha where she is reported to have asked the Prophet about his fast during the whole month of Sha'bān. His response to her was that in Sha'bān God will determine the death of each living soul and that his wish is to meet his *ajal* (time of death) while fasting (*aḥādīth* number 1514). See *Al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb*, Dār Ibn Kathīr, Damascus, 1993, Vol. 2, pp.48-53.

⁷⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb Ṣalat al-Musāfirīn*, p.166-167.

Al-Ghazali remarks that as the observance concerns prayer and contemplation, there is no harm in marking this night.⁷⁹

Al-Mundhirī reports that the only issue al-Ghazali has with some of these *aḥādīth* is the amount of dubious detail they go into in respect of belief and the Hereafter, going so far as to designate those who will be rewarded by God, and those who will incur His wrath.⁸⁰ However, al-Ghazali seems to accept the reports that speak generally of God's blessings on this night, such as the one attributed to 'Ā'isha who is reported to have said that the Prophet told her that Jibrīl came to him and told him that "this is the night of Sha'bān where Allah saves many from Hellfire, and He will not look at the unbeliever, the one who harbours hatred in his heart and causes troubles in the society".⁸¹ Al-Ghazali says that by excluding such people from the blessings of the night, Allah is urging Muslims to purge society from what he calls "crimes".⁸²

Al-Ghazali believes that as long as the spirit and traditional acts of the night are acceptable in themselves, there can be no harm in observing them if it is merely considered as an act of devotion. However, problems arise when it is considered to be an extra special moment, more so than at any other time when God's benevolence would prevail upon the good. Thus al-Ghazali appears to be torn between favouring the night on the basis that *aḥādīth* supporting it do not contradict other authentic *aḥādīth* on the benefits of nightly vigil, and being well aware that more importance than it merits is attached to it, particularly as a special night of salvation.⁸³

⁷⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*, p.198.

⁸⁰ Most *aḥādīth* are associated with Verse 4 of *Sūra Al-Dukhān*. See al-Dubaiṭhī for a critical analysis (pp.128-133).

⁸¹ Al-Mundhirī, *Al-Targhīb*, Vol. 2. *Hadīth* No. 1518, p.51.

⁸² Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*, p.198.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.198.

The above discussion shows that al-Ghazali judges *aḥādīth* on celebrating the night of Sha'bān on the basis of their meaning rather than the soundness of the *isnād*. His approach runs against the way the *muḥaddithūn* read *aḥādīth* on this issue. For them all *aḥādīth* concerning this night are *ḍa'īf*, *munkar* (odd), or *wāḥī* (unfounded).

Unlike al-Ghazali, Shaltūt argues that any religious celebration must be based on *nāṣṣ* (text).⁸⁴ The latter is not against the celebration, but rejects attaching a religious label to it as he believes that all *aḥādīth* cited to support it are weak, if not fabricated.⁸⁵ He additionally believes that prayer and supplication pertaining to that particular night have no religious basis, and leads to the distortion of the true meaning of the Qur'ān.⁸⁶ Shaltūt states that the verses which are often quoted by supporters of the celebration are taken out of context.⁸⁷

Al-Ghazali's approach to the use of *aḥādīth ḍa'īfa* is true to his approach where the meaning of *aḥādīth* becomes more important than the chain. In such a case, however, he does not generate controversy as he limits the use of weak traditions to the realm of preaching. He may be forgiven for taking this stand but for the fact that he goes too far in testing his approach when using it to tackle the function of *āḥād aḥādīth* where he becomes unstuck because he rejects some *aḥādīth* considered to be authentic. Al-Ghazali's views on *ḥadīth al-āḥād* warrant further discussion below.

Ḥadīth al-āḥād

Aḥādīth al-āḥād are one of the issues that al-Ghazali tried to tackle, and which has probably courted the most heated response from the *salafī* camp who disagree with him as

⁸⁴ Shaltūt, *Min Tawjīhāt al-Islam*, pp.438-439 and *Al-Fatāwā*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, 2001, p.191.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.440.

⁸⁶ The supplication contains two elements, one in which the believers ask God to change their fate written in *al-Lawwḥ al-Maḥfūz* (the Mother of Books), and the second is the belief that on this night the Almighty will determine life, sustenance and other great events in the universe. The verses cited in this context are those in Verses 1 and 2 of *Al-Dukhān*.

⁸⁷ Shaltūt, *Min Tawjīhāt al-Islam*, pp.440-441.

will be explained below. The disagreement revolves around the status (*ḥujjiyyat*) of *āḥād* in matters of creed. It should be said that the debate intensified when al-Ghazali published *Al-Sunna*. The controversy the book created still remains long after al-Ghazali's death.

Al-Ghazali laid out his views on *khavar al-āḥād* on many occasions.⁸⁸ He reiterated the same idea over and over again, but the gist of his thinking on this issue emphasises his view that any *ḥadīth* belonging to this category only yields a *ẓann* (strong probability) of what the report is stating. This is compared with the *mutawātir* which yields *yaqīn* (certainty). As such, *āḥād* can only be used in *fiqh*, and has no role to play in *‘aqīda* (faith). To him, any *ḥadīth* reported by one or two narrators, and whose *ṣiḥḥa* has been established comes second in strength after the Qur’ān and the *mutawātir*. He opines, "The destiny of the world of Islam should not hang on a *ḥadīth* which was reported by only one or two persons."⁸⁹ According to al-Ghazali, any *ḥadīth āḥād* should be rejected if it contradicts the *mutawātir*.⁹⁰ On one occasion al-Ghazali even said that he refused to link the future of Islam to the "insect" *ḥadīth*⁹¹ and the *ḥadīth* where Mūsā (Moses) was reported to have poked the eye of the Angel of Death.⁹² He reaffirms his view by saying, "Our *‘ulamā’*, the majority of them, believe that

⁸⁸ See for example, *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*, p.148; *Kayfa Nata’amal ma’ al-Qur’ān*, pp.113-116; *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazali*, p.217; *Al-Islam wa al-Ṭāqāt al-Mu’tala*, p.59; *Turāthuna al-Fikrī*, pp.170-182; *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, pp.14-33; *Dustūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfiyya Bayna al-Muslimīn*, pp.26-27; *Mi’at Su’āl ‘an al-Islam*, Vol. 1, pp.242-248 and *Humūm Dā’iyah*, pp.83-84.

⁸⁹ *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazālī*, p.217.

⁹⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Humūm Dā’iyah*, pp.87-88.

⁹¹ This *ḥadīth* tells of an insect that fell into a bowl of food. The Prophet said that it is advisable to immerse it totally in the food as one half of the insect carries bacteria, while the other half carries anti-bacteria. It is reported in Bukhārī, 5782. It is also reported by Ibn Māja, Abū Dāwūd and Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal. It is subject to numerous debates as to whether it is compatible with scientific facts. See Riḍā's views in "Baḥṭh al-‘Amal bi ḥadīth al-Āḥād wa al-Ḥadīth al-Mutawātir," *Al-Manār*, Vol. 11, No. 6,(1908), pp.456-457.

⁹² This *ḥadīth* is reported in both Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Anbiyā’*, *Bāb Wafat Mūsā*, No.3407 and Muslim, *Kitāb al-Janā’iz*, No. 1329 as well as *Kitāb al-Anbiyā’*, 3457. Al-Ghazali accepts the *ṣiḥḥa* (authenticity) of this *ḥadīth*, but argues that Mūsā is depicted as a man who fears death, and who was so incensed that he hit the Angel of Death, which is not in keeping with the character of a prophet. Furthermore, the *ḥadīth* contradicts another which states that "whoever desires to meet Allah, Allah loves to meet him". This *ḥadīth* is reported by both Muslim and Bukhari. See *Al-Lu’lu’ wa al-Marjān Fimā Itafaq Alyhi al-Shaykhān*, Muḥammad Fu’ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī, Dār Iḥyā’ Al-Kutub al-Arabiyya, Cairo, Vol. 3, No.1719. See also *Al-Sunna*, pp.34-38 and *Sir Ta’khur al-Muslimīn*, p.118.

āḥād ḥadīth are a source of law in terms of *furū'* (branches), but it will be dismissed if we have a stronger source."⁹³

According to al-Ghazali, "a stronger source" includes the general meaning of the Qur'ān, a strong analogy (*qiyās*) and the like.⁹⁴ In order to show how the narrator's short memory could affect the strength of the *ḥadīth*, al-Ghazali gives as an example a report on the number of *'umra* the Prophet performed during his life. It is established that he performed four, all of which were during the month of Dhu al-Qa'ida.⁹⁵ However, 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Umar, one of the Companions said that the Prophet performed one of them in the month of Rajab. 'A'isha rejected his claim, saying that the Prophet never did such a thing.⁹⁶ In commenting on this, al-Ghazali remarks, "How can *āḥād* yield certainty?"

Al-Ghazali, in limiting the function of this type of *āḥādīth*, asserts that he was merely reporting the classical views on *āḥād*.⁹⁷ He argues against those who take *āḥād* to mean certainty as with *mutawātir*. He rejects the view which is attributed to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (577-643H/1181-1245CE) that *āḥād* yields certainty.⁹⁸ Al-Ghazali says that this view is neither accepted by the majority of the *'ulamā'*, nor is it popular among them.⁹⁹ However, he also points out that the Ḥanbalī school of *fiqh* employs *āḥād* in both *'usūl* (fundamental) and *furū'* (details/branches)¹⁰⁰ because the Ḥanābila and their followers of *ahl al-ḥadīth* concentrate on the soundness of the *sanad*, and ignore conditions relating to the *matn* such as the absence of *shudhūdh* (irregularities) and the absence of *'illa qādiḥa* (hidden defects).

⁹³ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Qur'ān*, p.114.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.114.

⁹⁵ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya discussed all the existing reports and established that the Prophet did indeed perform four *'umra* during his life, all in Dhu al-Qa'ida and none in Rajab as Ibn 'Umar claimed. See *Zād al-Ma'ād fī Hady Khayr al-'Ibād*, Mu'asasat al-Risāla, Beirut, 1991, pp.90-100.

⁹⁶ This *ḥadīth* is *ṣaḥīḥ*, and is reported in both Muslim and Bukhārī. See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the Book of 'Umra, No.1775, and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* in the Book of Ḥajj, No.3033.

⁹⁷ On this point see, for example, al-Khatīb, *Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth: 'Ulūmuhu wa Muṣatlaḥu*, pp.302-303.

⁹⁸ This claim cannot be located in *Muqadimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ* or in the commentary on it by Ibn Kathīr. However al-Suyūṭī gives some useful analysis on this point in *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, Vol. 1, pp.70-73.

⁹⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Dustūr al-Waḥḍa al-Thaqāfiyya Bayna al-Muslimīn*, p.53.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.53.

Al-Ghazali gives four reasons to support his view on the status of *āḥād*. The first concerns the narrator or narrators. He raises questions on the capacity of their memory because, as human beings, they are prone to forget or ignore some details of the report.¹⁰¹ Further, reporters often differed in the way they report one single event. The second is based on analogy and relates to measures taken in order to ensure equity of the *sharī'a*. For example, judges ask for two witnesses (*shuhūd*) to establish the legal process. If this is deemed necessary in worldly affairs, what more in faith?¹⁰² The analogy here might not convince the *muḥaddithūn*, but this is al-Ghazali's way of showing that *āḥād* cannot be taken as evidence for matters of faith. It is worth pointing out here that the *muḥaddithūn* say that there are many differences between *shahāda* (testimony) which is presented to courts of justice and *riwāya* which, according to the scholars of *ḥadīth*, is the transmission of a report to a *muḥaddith*, but not a judge. Al-Suyūṭī in *Tadrīb al-Rāwī* discusses twenty-one differences between the two. For example, they are different in that a particular number is necessary in *shahāda*, but not in *riwāya*.¹⁰³

Al-Ghazali's third reason relates to the way *fuqahā'* of *the madhāhib* disagree between themselves on one issue, namely the way they come to know of a report or miss another. He says that some of them may have heard of the *āḥād*, while others may have heard, but have forgotten it.¹⁰⁴ In this situation, al-Ghazali asks whether this is the right way to report

¹⁰¹ As an example, al-Ghazali highlights the case where 'Abd Allah Ibn Mas'ūd, a companion forgot the prophetic ruling on someone who has a wet dream and cannot find water to perform ablution for purification. The *ḥadīth* is reported in Bukhārī in the Book of *Tayamum*, *Bāb Idha Khāfa al-Junubu 'lā Nafsihi al-Marāḍ aw al-Mawt aw Khāfa al-'Aṭash yatayamam*, No. 345. See al-Ghazali's comments in *Dustūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfiyya Bayna al-Muslimīn*, p.55.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.56.

¹⁰³ Al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, Vol. 1, pp.331-334.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Ghazali points to the fact that Abū Ḥanīfa affirmed his view on the *iḥrām* (the manner of dress during Hajj or 'umra), when he relied on the established *ahādīth* and rejected an unproven one. See *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazālī*, p.219. Al-Ghazali also attributes the report to Ibn 'Abd al-Birr. The example shows that Abū Ḥanīfa puts strict conditions on how to accept a *ḥadīth*. One of the conditions is that the reporter must possess the required *fiqh* (knowledge) for the *ḥadīth* to be accepted. See Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, p.69.

matters of faith.¹⁰⁵ He likens *āḥād* to a press report, or an interview conducted by one or two reporters with a head of state.¹⁰⁶

As for the fourth reason, al-Ghazali points to the fact the *al-mutawātir* is contents (*matn*) "protected", whether in part or wholly, while in the case of *āḥād* some "have been rejected by the *fuqahā'* on the basis of their strength".¹⁰⁷ According to him, *āḥād* is very good evidence in itself, as long as there is no other stronger report to override it. For example, Imām Mālik (80-150H/699-767CE), may have preferred the practice of the people of Madina over an *āḥād* report.¹⁰⁸ Also, the Aḥnāf may take analogy as a stronger source of law, rather than an *āḥād ḥadīth* with a questionable *sanad*.¹⁰⁹

Despite the fact that al-Ghazali has a seemingly strong argument, it is obvious that approaches to *āḥādīth al-āḥād* presented in his writings are very similar to the method employed by the *fuqahā'* as opposed to the *muḥaddithūn*.¹¹⁰ He seems to accept the Ḥanafī line on *āḥād*. Abū Hanīfa refused to employ *āḥād* on issues relating to what is *ḥalāl* (permissible) and what is *ḥarām* (prohibited) because he believed that such matters needed proof which carries absolute authority.¹¹¹ Al-Ghazali also seems to be guided by what he had acquired at Al-Azhar, where he was taught only one line of argument – that *āḥād* has no

¹⁰⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Dustūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfiyya Bayna al-Muslimīn*, p.57

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.57.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.57.

¹⁰⁸ Based on this, the Mālikīs do not perform the opening *du'ā* in prayers, and neither do they perform *Tahiyat al-Masjid* (two *rak'a* prayer) when entering the mosque while the *imām* is giving the Friday *khutba*. Some Malikīs do not accept the *āḥādīth* which forbid the eating of some animals, and allow consumption of dog and horse meat. They base this on the general meaning of Verse 145 in *Al-An'ām*. The same may be said about the Shāfi'ī assertion that in order for her marriage to be officiated, the bride needs her guardian to be present.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Qur'ān*, p.114.

¹¹⁰ In *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, al-Ghazali presents his case in strong terms based mainly on the argument of the *fuqahā'* as well as *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, pp.170-174.

¹¹¹ Al-Ghazali, *Dustūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfiyya Bayna al-Muslimīn*, p.56

absolute power and only works in matters of *furū'*.¹¹² Given al-Ghazali's view on *āḥād*, it would be useful therefore to analyse its treatment by the *fuqahā'* and *muḥaddithūn*.

Āḥād* according to the *muḥaddithūn* and *fuqahā'

It is important to note from the outset that the jurists were the first to classify *ahādīth* into *mutawātir* and *āḥād*, while the *muḥaddithūn* based their classification of the *ṣiḥḥa* of the *ḥadīth* on whether it is *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḍa'īf*. Although *āḥād* can mean any *ḥadīth* reported by one transmitter, most scholars accept that *āḥād* is any *ḥadīth* that does not fulfil the requirements of the *mutawātir*. As such, it is possible that an *ahād ḥadīth* is transmitted by one or more.¹¹³ As for the strength of a *ḥadīth*, this may be judged according to its *matn* – *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḍa'īf* or *ḥasan*, or in accordance with the number of transmitters – *mashhūr*, *'azīz* or *gharīb*.¹¹⁴

The strength of a *ḥadīth* is therefore subject to much debate among scholars. The *jumhūr* (majority of the *'ulamā'*) believe that *āḥād* yields only a *ẓann*, which means that the *ḥadīth* should not be followed or applied in practical matters.¹¹⁵ This is the opinion of the Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī schools of *fiqh*, together with the majority of the Mālikīs. However, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū Dāwūd al-Zāhirī and Ibn Ḥazm believed that *āḥād* yields a certain knowledge which entails *'ilm* and *'amal* (application/practice).¹¹⁶

¹¹² Ibid., p.52.

¹¹³ On the definition of *āḥād*, see Muḥammad Diyā' al-'Azamī, *Mu'jam Muṣṭalahāt al-Aḥādīth wa Laṭā'if al-Asānīd*, p.141.

¹¹⁴ The *'ulamā'* use very complicated terms to differentiate between the categories of *ḥadīth*, and even in the same category they sometimes added new sub-categories. For example, the Ḥanafīs use the term *āḥād mashhūr* on the strength of the number of its transmitters. For more information, see Muhammad Hashim Kamali, *A Text Book of Hadith Studies: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification and Criticism of Hadith*, The Islamic Foundation, Leicestershire, 2005, p.169 and al-Khatīb, *Usūl al-Ḥadīth*, pp.302-303.

¹¹⁵ It is worth noting that the whole debate about the strength of *āḥād* produces the same conclusion which implies that if the *ṣiḥḥa* of the *ḥadīth* is proven, then it must be taken as strong evidence. See al-Khatīb, *Usūl al-Ḥadīth*, p.303.

¹¹⁶ Al-Sibā'ī devotes one chapter to this point, and summarises the defence of al-Shāfi'ī in *Al-Risāla*. See *Al-Sunna wa Makānatuhā fi 'l-Tashrī' al-Islamī*. Al-Maktab al-Islami, Beirut, 1985, pp165-175.

As highlighted previously, among the *fuqahā'* who accept the authority of such *āḥādīth*, some tend to prefer certain practices over *āḥād* on the basis of strength. This explains Imām Mālik's preference for '*amal ahl al-Madīna* over *āḥād*. The logic behind this is that the Madanī practice is more reflective of the Prophet's teachings.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, both the *fuqahā'* and *muḥaddithūn* laid down five conditions in order for *āḥād* to be accepted as evidence in *sharī'a*, three of which relate to the transmitter in terms of his intelligence, manners and so on as well as the consistency of the chain. Two of the conditions are to do with the nature of the *matn* in that the *ḥadīth* should be free from *shudhūd* (irregularity or contradiction with other strong sources) and '*illa qādiḥa*.¹¹⁸ Al-Ghazali believes that these last have not received due attention from the scholars.¹¹⁹

Since content criticism forms the centrepiece of al-Ghazali's approach to *sunna*, he is very strict in respect of *āḥād*, and even rejects some *ahādīth* deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by *ḥadīth* scholars. Al-Ghazali's consideration of *āḥād* forms part of his attempt to lay down a strong theoretical foundation for his position based on practical issues. Al-Ghazali's views on *āḥād* should be understood in the context of the debate in Egypt regarding the authority of *sunna* in general and *āḥād* in particular. This debate began roughly at the beginning of the twentieth century and first appeared in *Al-Manār* magazine. It also involves other scholars who came under the influence of 'Abduh. They all reject, albeit in different ways, the use of *āḥād* to prove matters of faith.¹²⁰ Some, like 'Abduh reject certain *ahādīth* which do not conform to reason.

¹¹⁷ Kamali, *A Text Book of Hadith Studies*, pp.173-175.

¹¹⁸ Al-Khatīb al-Baghādāfī adds a sixth condition which requires that *āḥād* should not contradict another *āḥād* which has the same status. See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Faqīh wa al-Mutafaqīh* (abridged edition by Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmān Al-'Azāzī, Dār al-Waṭān, Riyadh, 1997, pp.132-138).

¹¹⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Tāqāt al-Mu'aṭala*, p.68.

¹²⁰ Muḥammad Ḥamza gives a very detailed analysis of the debate in his book, *Al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī wa Makānatuhu fi'l-Fikr al-Islamī al-Ḥadīth*, Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-Arabī, Beirut, 2005.

He rejected, for example, *aḥādīth* about *siḥr* (the spell put on the Prophet by a magician)¹²¹ because they contradict the Qurʾān and the spirit of its message.¹²² His student Riḍā rejected the *ḥādīth* which speaks of the splitting of the moon even though it is reported in Bukhārī and Muslim.¹²³

Riḍā, in applying *matn* criticism on this and similar *aḥādīth*, felt that the *muḥaddithūn* were lenient in their acceptance of the different reports of the *ḥādīth*, and that they were motivated by the zeal to increase the numbers of the miracles of the Prophet because it is easy to convince the lay Muslim in this way more than through the Qurʾān.¹²⁴ Shaltūt, on his part, has some reservations about the punishment of the renegade.¹²⁵ He considers the *ḥādīth*, "*man badala dīnahū fa uqtulūh*" (whoever reneges on his belief, kill him) used to punish the renegade as *āḥād*, while the revealed Qurʾānic verse (2:217) does not specify any punishment except for the nullification of the deeds of the renegade in the Hereafter.¹²⁶

Al-Ghazali, being seen as continuing ‘Abduh’s views, is rejected by the followers of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb who accuse him of being a rationalist and follower of the Qurʾānis. Their views are not surprising, and could have been ignored had al-Ghazali not engaged them in a long and heated debate. Both sides traded accusations and did not spare anything at their disposal to rebut, and at times discredit, each other. The war of words took its final shape when al-Ghazali published *Al-Sunna*. This resulted in a stream of publications

¹²¹ This *ḥādīth* is reported in Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Ṭib, Bāb al-Siḥr*, 5763, 5765 and 5766; Muslim, *Kitāb al-Ṭib*, 2189; al-Nassāī in his *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā, Kitāb al-Ṭib*, 7615 and Ibn Māja, *Kitāb al-Ṭib, Bāb al-Siḥr*, 3545. See also ‘Abduh, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, pp.202.

¹²² See ‘Abduh, *Al-‘Amāl al-Kāmila*, edited by Muḥammad ‘Amāra, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, Vol. 5, p.544. See also al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Ṭaqāt al-Mu’aṭala*, p.68 and *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, 13th edition, p.76. For a detailed discussion on this question, see Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Razāq Aswad, *Al-‘Itjāhāt al-Mu’aṣira*, pp.534-545.

¹²³ Bukhārī, *Kitāb Manāqib al-Ansār, Bāb Inshiqāq al-Qamr*, Nos. 3868 and 3869.

¹²⁴ Riḍā, *Al-Manār*, Vol.29, p.511 and Vol.30, p.372.

¹²⁵ Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *Al-Islam ‘Aqīda wa Sharī‘a*, pp.292-293.

¹²⁶ Reported in Bukhārī, *Kitāb Istitābat al-Murtaddīn wa al-Mu’anidīn wa qitālihim, Bāb Ḥukm al-Murtadd wa al-Murtadda*, No. 6922.

in response which attacked the book and what they deemed to be anti-*sunna* views. Two examples of how al-Ghazali was attacked follows in the next section.

The Reaction

Among the many books published to rebut al-Ghazali's views, two were written by Saudi scholars, each one representing a trend within the Saudi *salafī* movement. The books are *Fī Ḥiwār Ḥādī' Ma'a al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī* (1988) and *Kashf Māwqif al-Ghazālī min al-Sunna wa Ahlihā* (1988).¹²⁷ The first is by Shaykh Salmān Ibn Fahad al-‘Aūda who represents what is known as "*mashāyikh al-ṣaḥwa*" (the *Shuyūkh* of the Awakening),¹²⁸ and the second by Rabī' Bin Ḥādī al-Madkhālī who represents a group called "*Al-Jāmiyya*", known for their close relationship with the late Saudi Crown Prince Nāyif Bin ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (1934-2012).

The founder of this group is Muḥammad Ibn Amān al-Jāmī (1930-1995). It emerged before (or during) the first Gulf War in 1990 to counter the rise of the Ṣaḥwa leaders. It is interesting to see the way they tried to rebut al-Ghazali's views as they were politically, and to a certain extent ideologically, at opposite ends. Despite their differences, they were united in their condemnation of al-Ghazali, and one can infer from their criticism the following points they shared:

1. his lack of knowledge of *ḥadīth* due to him being a *wā'iz*,¹²⁹
2. their accusation that he disrespects the scholars of *ḥadīth*,¹³⁰
3. his selective approach in accepting weak *ḥadīth* while rejecting *āḥād*,¹³¹

¹²⁷ Al-‘Aūda's book was published in Riyadh. An electronic copy of al-Madkhālī's book was accessed from his website www.rabec.net on 21 June 2012.

¹²⁸ For more information about this trend, al-‘Aūda in particular, see Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, St. Martin Press, New York, 1999, pp.89-113.

¹²⁹ Salmān al-‘Aūda, *Fī Ḥiwār Ḥādī'*, pp.38-39 and al-Madkhālī, *Kashf Mawāqif al-Ghazālī Min al-Sunna*, pp.5-6 and pp.133-134.

¹³⁰ Al-Madkhālī, pp.63-63 and al-‘Aūda, p.68.

4. he follows his own desires by accepting and rejecting as he pleases,¹³²
5. his emotional style affects his judgment of the *sunna*,¹³³
6. they consider him a rationalist as well as an Ash‘arite,¹³⁴ and
7. he sows the seeds of division among Muslims.¹³⁵

On the question of *āḥād*, al-‘Aūda and al-Madkhalī follow the same method to examine al-Ghazali's views. However, their tone as well as the manner in which they presented their case differ. Al-‘Aūda rejects that *āḥād* means only *ẓann*, and states that *ḥadīth* scholars never differentiated between *āḥād* and other *aḥādīth* concerning ‘*aqīda*.¹³⁶ He advances a proposition that *aḥādīth* which deals with *sharī‘a* also carry elements of belief, meaning that when one follows the injunctions instilled in the report, one in fact obeys God.¹³⁷ Al-‘Aūda adds that any *āḥād ḥadīth* may yield certainty if there is strong evidence supporting it.¹³⁸ However, the presence of strong evidence may lead the *faqīh* to reject *āḥād*, as was the practice of the *fuqahā’*. As for al-Madkhalī, he argues that the strength of *āḥād* stems from the acceptance of the *umma* of the *ḥadīth*, that the *ḥadīth* is known to the *muḥaddithūn* and, above all, is supported by the Qur‘ān.

In order to prove the weakness of al-Ghazali's argument and to expose what they see as the lack of his knowledge of *ḥadīth*, al-‘Aūda and al-Madkhalī examined most of the *aḥādīth* rejected by al-Ghazali on the bases of being *āḥād*. It is worth looking at what follows to show the differences between al-Ghazali's approach and that of al-‘Aūdah and al-Madkhalī.

¹³¹ Al-‘Aūda, *Fī Ḥiwār*, pp.26-28 and pp.29-30.

¹³² Ibid., pp.26-27 and pp.29-30.

¹³³ Ibid., pp.34 and 68.

¹³⁴ Al-Madkhalī, *Kashf Mawāqif al-Ghazālī*, p.5.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.91.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.44.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.45

¹³⁸ Salmān al-‘Aūda, *Fī Ḥiwār Ḥādī’*, p.45.

Wailing for the dead

One of the *āḥādīth* which al-Ghazali criticised is one reported in Bukhārī and Muslim which states that "a dead person is punished by the wailing of his family".¹³⁹ Al-Ghazali reports ‘Ā’isha's objection of the *ḥadīth* and how she reminded those who reported it that it contradicts the Qur’ānic verse "no soul will bear another's burden," (39:7). According to al-Ghazali what ‘Ā’isha did should be the basis of how we judge *sunna* in relation to the Qur’an.¹⁴⁰ However, despite ‘Ā’isha's objection, al-Ghazali comments upon the *ḥadīth* by saying that it is "still in *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*".¹⁴¹

Al-‘Aūda and al-Madkhālī believe that ‘Ā’isha's view does not represent the majority and even if she rejected it many of the *ṣaḥāba* did report it. Al-‘Aūda in particular points out that the "wailing" in the *ḥadīth* does not mean the punishment of the deceased, but that the deceased will be in pain when he hears their wailing for him, a point al-‘Aūda believes al-Ghazali failed to understand. Al-Madkhālī on his part says that al-Ghazali has no right nor is he even qualified to reject a *ḥadīth* which has been accepted by the whole *umma*. He goes on to present a long-winded rebuttal without structuring his argument as al-‘Aūda did by representing his argument in six points. At times it is difficult to follow al-Madkhālī's argument because he thinks that his strength lies in how many references he cites.¹⁴²

Al-Ghazali defends his position by accusing his critics of lacking proper methodology in approaching *sunna*, and emphasising that he is merely conveying the views of the early *ḥadīth* scholars.¹⁴³ He said the rejection of one or two *ḥadīth* does not amount to a rejection of *sunna*. While al-Ghazali rejects the role of *āḥād* in matters of *‘aqīda*, he says that the

¹³⁹ Būkhārī, 1286 and Muslim, 2149.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, pp.15-16.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.16.

¹⁴² Al-Madkhālī, *Kashf Mawāqif al-Ghazālī*, pp.133-136.

¹⁴³ See al-Ghazali's argument in *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, pp.170-174.

founders of the four schools of *fiqh* rejected some *aḥādīth* on the basis of strong evidence.¹⁴⁴ He further says that his approach does not deviate from the criteria agreed upon by the *muḥaddithūn*, and which is articulated by Rashīd Riḍā who said, "It is necessary to differentiate between laws which are sanctioned by the Qur'ān, and those which are based on *āḥād* and the analogies of the *fuqahā'*. Anyone who rejects the former will be considered a *kāfir* (unbeliever), while he who rejects any of the latter will have to find a reason for the rejection. It is reported that many *mujtāhid* have views which are in stark contrast to *ṣaḥīḥ*."¹⁴⁵

The most important point in the *salafī* criticism of al-Ghazali is their inherent failure to understand the evolution of al-Ghazali's ideas. They therefore tend to overlook the intellectual phases he experienced throughout his life. It is fair to say that al-‘Aūda acknowledged this, but did not follow it up throughout his book, especially when he presented al-Ghazali's view on women.¹⁴⁶ The same defect is noted in al-Madkhalī's criticism which accuses al-Ghazali of supporting socialism even though al-Ghazali later changed his views.¹⁴⁷

Al-Ghazali may well have put himself in an awkward position by assuming that he is able to tackle a sensitive issue such as *sunna* by merely relying on his reputation as an international *‘ālim* and a moderate voice.¹⁴⁸ Al-Ghazali's valiant efforts to defend his stand notwithstanding, it has fallen on his long-time friend and erstwhile student, al-Qaraḍāwī to further clarify his position and defend his approach.

¹⁴⁴ On al-Ghazali's Ash‘arite influence, see *Mushkilāt fī Ṭarīq al-Ḥayā al-Islamiyya*, pp.141-143.

¹⁴⁵ Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Vol. 3, p.94.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.49-51 and al-Madkhalī, pp.49-50.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Madkhalī, *Kashf Mawāqif al-Ghazālī*, pp.44-48.

¹⁴⁸ Not only that, but according to Muḥammad Jalāl Kishk it is also because he overlooks the kind of forces that dominate and finance the Islamic scene. See *Al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī Bayna al-Naqd al-‘Atib wa al-Madh al-Shāmit*, Maktabat al-Turāth al-Islami, Cairo, 1990, p.20.

Al-Qaraḍāwī's defence of al-Ghazali

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, al-Ghazali's views on *sunna* were defended by an array of books written to ward off *salafī* attacks, but al-Qaraḍāwī is foremost in defending him. Al-Qaraḍāwī's *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Sunna* was commissioned by the same institute (IIIT) that commissioned al-Ghazali before him, and is seen as an attempt to clarify and defend al-Ghazali's position.¹⁴⁹ Al-Qaraḍāwī generally acknowledges the fact that his friend and teacher is harsh and impatient in tackling issues related to *sunna*, and may have gone too far in rejecting some valid *aḥādīth*.¹⁵⁰ However, he nevertheless strongly defends the manner in which al-Ghazali treats *āḥād*. He purports to demonstrate that al-Ghazali's views on the issue are not at odds with the majority of the '*ulamā*'¹⁵¹ (meaning *ḥadīth* scholars), and he went so far as to say that there is a body of evidence from Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal which supports al-Ghazali's views on *āḥād*. Al-Qaraḍāwī says that Hanbalī scholars' disagreement on '*āḥād*' is due to different reports from Ibn Ḥanbal himself on the status of *āḥād*, but according to al-Qaraḍāwī research has led him to conclude that the leading Hanbalī scholars are of the view that *āḥād* yields only strong a possibility.¹⁵² Consequently, al-Qaraḍāwī believes that matters of '*aqīda*' have to be based on *yaqīn* (certain knowledge).¹⁵³

Al-Qaraḍāwī does not go as far as his teacher, and tries to take a neutral stance concerning sensitive issues. Al-Qaraḍāwī's endeavour to present a convincing argument fights shy of courting controversy¹⁵⁴ as in the case of the *ḥadīth* "*inna abī wa abāka fī'l-nār*".

¹⁴⁹ This is what Tāhā Jābir al-al-'Alwānī, the director of IIIT wrote in the introduction to the first edition of the book.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhu*, p.127.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.128.

¹⁵² Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araftuhu*, p.129.

¹⁵³ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Marjī'yya al-'Ulya li'l-Qur'ān wa al-Sunna*, Maktabat Wahba, Cairo, pp.115-125.

¹⁵⁴ Neutrality is good as far as it relieves the scholar from his moral responsibilities, but according to Muḥammad Saḥīm al-'Awā, it leaves students perplexed as to which side they should take. See Muḥammad Saḥīm al-'Awā, *Juhūd al-Qaraḍāwī fī khidmat al-Sunna*, in *Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī Kalimāt fī Takrimih*, Vol. 2, p.744.

In response to a question as to where his father was, the Prophet is said to have replied, "My father (parents) and yours are doomed to Hellfire." This *ḥadīth* is reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*,¹⁵⁵ but is rejected by al-Ghazali on the grounds that its meaning contradicts certain Qur'ānic verses.¹⁵⁶ Al-Qaraḍāwī states that the reason for his neutral stance is that "when it comes to *ṣaḥīḥ aḥādīth* I prefer not to rule it out in case there are hidden meanings I am not able to discern".¹⁵⁷

It would appear that al-Qaraḍāwī is in total agreement with al-Ghazali's methodology, but differences lie in the way al-Ghazali tries to address thorny issues. On *āḥād*, al-Qaraḍāwī does not disagree with al-Ghazali on some of the decisions he has taken in respect of certain *aḥādīth*. Looking at the overall discussions in his book, *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Sunna*, close similarities between the two may be found.

The role of the *muḥaddith* and the *faqīh*

Al-Ghazali's understanding of the role of *āḥād* is linked to the way he understands the relationship between *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. In order to clarify his position, it is necessary to revisit his emphasis on the separate roles of the *muḥaddith* and the *faqīh* regarding *sunna*. Al-Ghazali makes it very clear that they function in separate realms. At times he would speak of their roles as being complementary,¹⁵⁸ while at other times he would emphasise the superiority of the *faqīh* over the *muḥaddith*.¹⁵⁹ This may be taken as his approach to the reinstatement of the role of the *faqīh* in reading *sunna*.¹⁶⁰ The importance of *aḥādīth* to the study of law forms the basis upon which modern Muslim scholars have re-read and re-

¹⁵⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Imān*, No. 347.

¹⁵⁶ The Qur'ān (5:19), (17:15) and (34:5).

¹⁵⁷ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Sunna*, pp.53-59.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Humūm Dā'iyyah*, p.18.

¹⁵⁹ In *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, al-Ghazali emphasises this point on many occasions. See pp.11, 30, 116 and 129.

¹⁶⁰ See *Turāthunā al-Fikrī* where he speaks about two different currents and the need to understand each properly (p.1549).

evaluated *aḥādīth* as a way of both implementing *sharīʿa* and questioning certain practices. Al-Ghazali's interest may be understood in this light, but his concern with *ḥadīth* and law should not be separated from his overall concern with *sunna* itself, as understood and practised by those who claim to champion its cause.

As previously mentioned, al-Ghazali sometimes uses the term "*fiqh*" in the generic sense, especially when he speaks about the function of *sunna* in relation to the Qurʾān.¹⁶¹ When a question arises about *fatwā*, he speaks specifically about the vital role of the *fuqahāʾ* in understanding *sunna*. He believes that by using *ḥadīth* appropriately, *fiqh* scholars make *aḥādīth* more accessible to the layman in a way which enables answers to be obtained concerning life's daily challenges.¹⁶² In this way al-Ghazali gives jurists a key role in understanding *sunna*. He rationalises this saying that only a trained *faqīh* would be able to interpret a specific report in light of the Qurʾān. Accordingly, the *faqīh* is the one capable of understanding *ḥadīth* according to *fiqh al-maqāṣid*.

Al-Ghazali is aware that the role of the *faqīh* is important as long as it leads him to intervene and settle differences that arise in the reading of *aḥādīth* concerning minor issues in *sharīʿa*. This is contrary to important matters of *al-Sunan al-ʿAmaliyya* (*ʿaqīda* and worship) which are all based on *mutawātir* reports, and therefore never subject to debate.¹⁶³ According to al-Ghazali debate occurs on secondary matters such as how the Prophet used to drink, eat or dress. He opines that raising such trivial issues is unnecessary, and accuses "shallow people"¹⁶⁴ of exaggerating their importance. An example is the way Muslims should drink. The majority of *aḥādīth* indicate that the Prophet used to drink while sitting, but there

¹⁶¹ Al-Ghazali, *Humūm Dāʿiyah*, p.23.

¹⁶² Ibid., p.18.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p.19.

¹⁶⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Humūm Dāʿiyah*, p.19.

are cases where he was seen drinking while standing.¹⁶⁵ In this case the *fuqahā'* rule that it is *sunna* to drink while sitting, but that it is not unlawful to drink while standing. They feel that the *aḥādīth* are not decisive. The same may be said about how Muslims should use the bathroom, and whether they should eat with their hands or cutlery.¹⁶⁶

The danger in al-Ghazali's approach to the role of the *faqīh* is, in effect, that it encourages the call to *madhhabiyya*,¹⁶⁷ which revivalist scholars since the eighteenth century have tried to eliminate, and which they hold responsible for the decay of the Muslim *umma*. It is a well-known fact that the different reports on and the different ways of understanding *sunna* in the early history of Islam has led to the emergence of the main schools of *fiqh*. The division between what is known as the school of *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* and *Ahl al-Zāhir* (traditionalists or literalists), and *Ahl al-ra'y* (the people of reason) reflects the scholars' attitudes to *sunna*.¹⁶⁸ Al-Ghazali is not in favour of any particular *madhhab*, but holds views on both the *ḥadīth* and *ra'y* schools.¹⁶⁹ Like most modern revivalists, he gives his readers the impression that he is not in favour of any school of *fiqh*. However, his arguments demonstrate his tendency towards favouring Abū Ḥanīfa, although it does not preclude his support for Ibn Taymiyya. He also supported the *talfīq* (eclectic) school which takes from other schools what is suitable in the relevant context and environment, without being wholly obliged to follow any specific school of law.¹⁷⁰

Al-Ghazali's view of the *faqīh* as one better suited to interpret *ḥadīth* appears to some as absurd as the *fuqahā'* themselves were renowned for not being careful on the issue of the

¹⁶⁵ Al-Nawawī, *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn Min Kalām Sayyid al-Mursalīn, Kitāb: Bayān Jawāz al-Shurb Qā'imān wa anna al-Akmal wa al-aḥdal qā'idān*, No.766-771.

¹⁶⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Humūm Dā'iyah*, pp.19-20. See also *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, the chapter on the etiquette of dining, pp.82-85.

¹⁶⁷ Al-Ghazali prefers for the layman to follow the *madhhab* and specialists in the sciences as well as other empirical fields because this will help them to concentrate on their fields of specialization. See al-Qaraḍāwī, *Naẓrāt fī Turāth al-Ghazālī, Islāmīyat alMa'rīfah*, Vol.7, p.44.

¹⁶⁸ See Jonathan Brown, *Ḥadīth: Muḥammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, pp.153-155.

¹⁶⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 2, p.154.

¹⁷⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Dustūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfiyya*, pp.63-64.

ṣiḥḥa of *aḥādīth*. Their books, especially those produced from the tenth century onwards, are filled with *aḥādīth* without *isnād*, weak traditions, or even fabrications.¹⁷¹ Giving the *fuqahā'* the lead role in *sunna* interpretation is therefore not closing the gap between them.

Al-Ghazali's keenness to emphasise the role of the *faqīh* over the *muḥaddith* has to do with his quarrel with certain representatives of the *salāfi*s and how they scorn the founders of the schools of *fiqh*. To a certain extent it has also to do with young *salāfi* and how they understand *sunna*.¹⁷² According to al-Ghazali their attitude to the founders of the schools of law is compounded with disrespect characterised by hostility.¹⁷³ He also feels that this group tends to give preference to the commentaries of the people of *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* over the Qur'an.¹⁷⁴ At this stage it is important to seek another viewpoint in order to contextualise al-Ghazali's approach, for which reason al-Qaraḍāwī's view on this matter will be assessed further.

Al-Qaraḍāwī and his guidelines

Al-Qaraḍāwī, agrees in principle with al-Ghazali that the role of the *faqīh* differs from that of the *muḥaddith* apropos the *sunna*. It should be noted when discussing the role of *faqīh* and *muḥaddith* that the discussion concerns jurists who take the views of their *madhhab* to the letter. Here, al-Qaraḍāwī lays the blame on both the *fuqahā'* for their lack of knowledge of *ḥadīth* and the *muḥaddithūn* for their lack of understanding of the tools of the *faqīh*. He calls upon each to learn in depth the details of both fields of religious studies. As a way of

¹⁷¹ Jonathan Brown believes that the establishment of the principles of *ḥadīth* tradition led the established scholar to feel that he is under no obligation to cite a *ḥadīth* with a full chain of narrators. See Brown, *Ḥadīth*, pp.153-155 and Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Sunna*, pp.55-56.

¹⁷² Al-Ghazali, *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, p.153.

¹⁷³ Comments are often made by them about Abū Ḥanīfā's limited knowledge of *ḥadīth*. They say that his knowledge does not exceed 17 *aḥādīth* which are considered *ṣaḥīḥ*, a claim that is rebutted by the '*ulamā'*'. See *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, p.145 and al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Sunna*, p.52.

¹⁷⁴ In *Mustaqbal al-Islam Khārija Arḍihi*, he gives many examples where preference is given to what al-Ṣan'ānī, for example, says about the actual meaning of the *ḥadīth* itself, pp.42-43.

clarifying their roles, al-Qaraḍāwī sets guidelines for the *faqīh* on how best to approach *sunna* which in principle are no different to what al-Ghazali says in terms of, for example, understanding *sunna* in light of the Qurʾān, collecting all *aḥādīth* on one theme, understanding the different reports of the same *ḥadīth* and analysing the reports according to time.¹⁷⁵ Both al-Ghazali and al-Qaraḍāwī are in total agreement about the need for an exegetical approach to *sunna*, but not without a slight difference between them.

Al-Ghazali begins with the assumption that any *faqīh* who deals with *sunna* is himself a *muḥaddith*, thus reviving an old tradition whereby the scholar is both an established *faqīh* and a *muḥaddith*. He also shows more tolerance towards the *fuqahāʾ* "whose knowledge in *sunna* is not extensive, than he does to the *muḥaddithūn* who he feels lack legal insight in their approach to the Qurʾān".¹⁷⁶ Unlike al-Ghazali, al-Qaraḍāwī is more realistic and tends to speak of a separate role for each – the jurist to deal with already accepted *aḥādīth*, therefore leaving the business of validation of *aḥādīth* to the *muḥaddith*. In this way he differentiates between *fiqh al-dirāya* and *fiqh al-riwāya*.¹⁷⁷

Final comments and conclusion

Matn or content criticism¹⁷⁸ as it is commonly referred to by the modern scholar, is not new. It has been practised by rationalists¹⁷⁹ and traditionalists alike.¹⁸⁰ The trend has

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., from p.93 onwards.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Mustaqbal al-Islam Khārij Arḍih*, p.40.

¹⁷⁷ According to Huwayḍī the separation occurred due to historical and political factors as well as the expansion of Muslim scholarship. See *Al-Tadayyun al-Manqūṣ*, pp.111-117.

¹⁷⁸ Jonathan Brown believes that "content criticism" is more accurate to convey what Western scholars understand as *matn* criticism, which indicates that the content or the meaning of the *ḥadīth* is problematic. See "How We Know Early Ḥadīth Critics did Matn Criticism and Why It's so Hard to Find" in *Islamic Law and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2008, p.146. The article was included in the collection of *The Ḥadīth: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, Mustafa Shah (ed.), Routledge, 2010, II, 179-213.

¹⁷⁹ The Muʿtazilites, at least of the early generation, were the first to advance this argument whereby they accepted only the *mutawātir*, and stipulated that any *ḥadīth* must first agree with the Qurʾān and second with reason in order to be accepted. Their conditions are considered by the majority of classical scholars to be extreme. See al-Sibāʿī *Al-Sunna wa Makāntuhā fi ʾl-Tashrīʿ al-Islami*, p.280 and al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-Rāwī*, p.72.

continued to the present day.¹⁸¹ Therefore, it is perhaps necessary to assess al-Ghazali's views in light of this method, and to see the significance of his contribution to modern scholarship. One way to understand al-Ghazali's contribution is to place him within the traditions of ‘Abduh, Riḍā and Shaltūt. They are renowned for their views on the status of *aḥādīth al-āḥād* in particular, and the *sunna*'s authority in general. Although al-Ghazali continues the traditions of ‘Abduh's school, he nevertheless registers his disagreement over some of their views albeit in passing without giving details,¹⁸² and he pointed in the same manner to some of Shaltūt views.¹⁸³ As the discussion shows al-Ghazali applied *matn* criticism in the same way as ‘Abduh where the meaning of *ḥadīth* should not contradict both reason and the Qur’ān. The way al-Ghazali presents his ideas take into account the criteria established by ‘Abduh which shows that he (al-Ghazali) continued the traditions of Egypt's *salafīyya* school. Although al-Ghazali was very close to ‘Abduh's ideas, Detlev believes that al-Ghazali (as well as Riḍā) represents what he calls "the conservative wing" of ‘Abduh's thought as he tends to interpret his ideas in favour of traditions (i.e. *naṣṣ*). However, al-Ghazali is always seen as being close to ‘Abduh's rationalism more than Riḍā's conservatism, albeit in his second phase of thought, as pointed out by ‘Amara.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Jonathan Brown believes that the traditionalists coated their criticism of the *matn* with what he calls "*isnad* criticism". He provides fifteen examples where *matn* criticism was practised by many scholars as early as the third century Hijrah/eighth century. See "How We Know Early Ḥadīth Critics did Matn Criticism and Why It's so Hard to Find" in *Islamic Law and Society*, pp.143-185.

¹⁸¹ The argument returned in modern times in the context of the Western approach to *sunna*. This may be seen in the early writings of William Muir (1819-1905), Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) and Joseph Sachacht (1902-1969). It should be emphasised here that content criticism is only one of the arguments deployed by Western scholars in their approach to *sunna*. See Johnathan Brown, *Ḥadīth: Muhammad's Legacy*, pp.205-210 and Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, pp.32-42.

¹⁸² Al-Ghazali believes that ‘Abduh went too far in his interpretation of Qur’ānic verses by using scientific language. See *‘Ilal wa Adwiya*, p.74.

¹⁸³ He said, without giving any details, that some of Shaltūt's *fatāwā* needed to be reviewed. See *Dustūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfīyya*, p.65.

¹⁸⁴ Detlev Khalid, "Aḥmad Amīn and the Legacy of Muḥammad ‘Abduh", *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 1970), pp.1-31.

As previously mentioned, some of the representatives of the *salafī* school in Saudi Arabia accuse al-Ghazali of being a rationalist-modernist, but only to a certain extent.¹⁸⁵ Others label him as a member of the anti-*sunna* movement.¹⁸⁶ The heart of the problem lies in the failure of this group to differentiate between the spirit of ‘Abduh and his disciples, and the tendency of some scholars to overrule *sunna*. It is difficult to speak of a unified school that binds together ‘Abduh's and Riḍā's ideas on this issue. Accordingly, any attempt to compile a list of those who adhere to Riḍā's and ‘Abduh's school is a limited exercise.¹⁸⁷ Rather than simply identifying al-Ghazali with the different camps such as the modernists and the revivalists,¹⁸⁸ it is perhaps more beneficial to place al-Ghazali in the context of twentieth century debate on *sunna* to be able to pin down his motivation. Al-Ghazali felt that he needed to defend *sunna* against literalists and anti-*sunna* forces against the liberal camp, thus convincing himself that by defending *sunna* he was, by default, defending the Qur’ān.

Al-Ghazali's first preoccupation is how *sunna* is understood and used by certain groups. His second is the need for proper *fiqh* and the rehabilitation of the *faqīh* as the standard bearer of *aḥādīth*. The third concerns the function of *sunna* in the modern world, an issue that brings to the fore his fear of Western intellectual or military interference in the Muslim world. This fear colours his attitude towards *aḥādīth* that deal with irrelevant issues such as whether Moses had poked the eyes of an angel.¹⁸⁹ He believes that rather than concern themselves with these issues, Muslims should worry about the "enemy" who is busy trying to

¹⁸⁵ Al-‘Aūda, *Fī Hiwār Hādī’ Ma’ al-Ghazālī*, pp.15-18.

¹⁸⁶ Miqbil Bin Hadi al-Wādi represents the extreme end of this camp when he, in his book *Al-Saḥīḥ al-Musand min Dalā’il al-Nubwa*, lumped al-Ghazali together with Abū Raya, Aḥmad Amīn and the like, pp.9-11.

¹⁸⁷ Muhammad ‘Abd al-Razāq Aswad mentions five main scholars as representative of the rationalist trend in *sunna* – Afghānī, ‘Abduh, Riḍā, Shaltūt and Darwaza. He lists 65 scholars who he believes were influenced by this trend or by the books of ‘Abduh and his disciples. His criteria of grouping them into one is based on the understanding that they all embraced rational thinking at one point or another in their career, but the list resembles a mish-mash of names with different points of view. See *Al-Itijāhāt al-Mu’āsira fī Dirāsāt al-Sunna fī Miṣr wa Bilād al-Shām*, Dār al-Kalim al-Ṭayyib, Damascus, 2008, pp.477-485.

¹⁸⁸ Jonathan Brown attempts the same in *Ḥadīth: Muhammad's Legacy*, p.261-263.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Ghazali believes such *aḥādīth* must be dealt with by specialists who are qualified to explore the relationship between the *sanad* and *matn*, hence affirming his view that their authenticity, whether established or not, will have no bearing on belief. See *Sir Ta’kḥur al-Muslimīn*, p.181.

lay siege on the land of Islam.¹⁹⁰ It is by highlighting these concerns that his contribution may be placed in the context of the twentieth century debate on *sunna*.

Additionally as shown, al-Ghazali's thinking is that the threat to *sunna* comes not only from anti-*sunna* forces in Egypt, but also from defenders of *sunna* themselves, whom he accuses of appropriating *sunna* to suit their purpose. This leads him to underscore the importance of understanding the Qur'ān before engaging in *sunna*. This means that the *ṣiḥḥa* of the *ḥadīth* is no longer an important condition for its acceptance. The discussion of al-Ghazali's views on *sunna* shows that they were shaped, especially in the final stage of his career, by his relationship with the *salafīs*. This explains his responsive approach to their practices. This is contrary to his early writings on *sunna* which are characterised by the lack of tension. The discussion also shows that al-Ghazali called for the contextualisation of *ḥadīth* reports and understanding them thematically. Al-Ghazali advanced a minimalist approach where ordinary Muslims ought to be taught only what is relevant to their daily life. This said, al-Ghazali's approach suffered from many setbacks due to the hostility he garnered. He opened himself to criticism from many quarters, and his critics were quick to highlight his lack of knowledge in *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. Ironically, the controversies he created assisted him in drawing attention to the challenges faced by Muslim scholars. They also underline the limitations of the scholars who deal with their opponents by attacking them. Finally, al-Ghazali's writings on *sunna* provide a case study of how the modern Muslim scholar may understand modern problems through the prism of traditions, as long as there is courage and the ability to re-read and re-evaluate a particular stance whenever required.

Having discussed al-Ghazali's views on the Qur'ān and *sunna*, his efforts on *tafsīr* and how to understand the *sunna* of the Prophet in the light of the Qur'ān from a critical point of view, we turn our attention in the next chapter to examining the practical issues where the

¹⁹⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, 13th edition, pp.35-36 and 190.

lack of *fiqh* of the Qur'ān and *sunna* has led to the distortion of the essence of Islam as well as to the prevalent sense of futility which are related to the way Muslims understand their belief, the role of Sufism and other aspects of *'aqīda*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Issues of Muslim theology as reflected in al-Ghazali's writings

Introduction

In his book *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldūn (d.1406) discussed *kalām* (dogmatic theology) in terms of its function and usefulness.¹ According to his understanding, *kalām* is deemed unnecessary for "contemporary" students because the enemies of Islam "have been defeated".² Ibn Khaldūn opines that the infiltration of theology by philosophy has led to confusion between the two disciplines, thus making theological works untenable. He adds that Muslim theologians needed *kalām* to defend Islam against the heretics.³ However, his statement does not sound the death knell for *kalām*. Rather, it indicates the level of its decline as a discipline during Ibn Khaldūn's time.

One may perhaps disagree with Ibn Khaldūn and argue that *kalām* has continued in Shi'ī traditions for example, but his remarks should be understood in their historical context. *Kalām* at the time of Ibn Khaldūn had lost its appeal to Sunnī theologians due to a number of factors. One such factor is the dominance of anti-*kalām* forces, namely the people of *ḥadīth*, the rise of the Sufī orders, the blurring of the boundaries between theology and philosophy, and Sunnī credal solidarity.⁴ The impact of *kalām* on Islam is one of the main issues al-

¹ On *kalām* and the Mu'tazilites, see Josef Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, translated by Jane Marie Todd, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2006, Chapter 3. See also Tilman Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology: From Muhammad to the Present*, Markus Wiener Publishers, Princeton, 2000, pp.100-115. Majed Fakhry provides valuable information about this early school in his two books, *Introduction to Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism* and *Islamic Philosophy*. Also Montgomery Watt, *History of Muslim Theology and Philosophy*, E. I., VII, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1995, pp.900-909.

² Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh al-'Alāma Ibn Khaldūn: Al-Muqaddima*, Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, Beirut, 1982, p.838.

³ *Ibid.*, p.838.

⁴ According to Jeffery Halverson, Sunnī solidarity means the policy of fostering peaceful coexistence between the four *madhāhib*, a policy encouraged by the Zangids, and continued throughout the reign of the Ayyūbids and the Mamlūks. See *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam: The Muslim Brotherhood, Ash'arism and Political Sunnism*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010, pp.52-53

Ghazali kept coming to in his writings. He blames *kalām* of all that went wrong in Islam and therefore casts the role it played in an unfavourable way.

This chapter will attempt to present al-Ghazali's views on *kalām* and explore other main themes of theology that appeared in his writings. It is acknowledged here that al-Ghazali, like most scholars who were traditionally taught, was not trained in philosophy. However, his writings reflect a certain degree of concern for the state of Islam as a religion and set of beliefs. In addition to *kalām*, this chapter will discuss free will and predestination, Sufism, *Salaf* and *Salafiyya*. Before doing so a brief historical background on the state of Muslim theology in modern times will be outlined.

Muslim modernists and theology

In modern times, many Muslim scholars blame *kalām* for the decline of Muslim intellectual life, arguing that *kalām* is no longer the science which celebrates reason although its practitioners, the *Mutakallimūn*, were seen as the champions of rationality and free will in Islam. Therefore, modern Muslim scholars try to avoid discussing theological questions based on *kalām* methodology, such as proofs, rebuttals and expositions. They believe that *kalām* was the source of disunity in the *umma*, became irrelevant to the practical life of Muslims and failed to solve any problem as well as complicated the simple faith of Islam. Therefore, they endeavour to present 'aqīda by stating the articles of belief – *arakān al-imān* or *uṣūl al-dīn*. In order to avoid using the term "*kalām*" they use other substitutes such as *tawhīd*, 'ulūm al-wahy (revelation) and *al-ilāhiyyāt* (theology) to denote this field of study.

In the nineteenth century, Muslim reformers sought to reconcile Islam with the spirit of modern science. In order to defend Islam against accusations from Western intellectuals, the reformers lay emphasis on the inherited rationalism in Islam. 'Abduh was especially

concerned with liberating Islamic thought from the shackles of *taqlīd*. His treatise on the Muslim faith, *Risālat al-Tawhīd* set the tone for the way in which Muslim intellectuals examine Islamic theology.⁵ Although he condemned, to a certain degree, the ways of the theologians (*mutakallimūn*) in his book, he nevertheless retained elements of Mu'tazilite methodology.⁶ According to Shaykh 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (1910-1978), 'Abduh was the first scholar in modern times to embrace the Mu'tazilite spirit, but he presented his ideas in a disguised way, and made them seem as if they belong to the *salafiyya* before Ibn Taymiyya's time.⁷ 'Abduh paved the way for a new style of writing on Muslim theology. According to some, 'Abduh's book though important, is not so much a book on theology as it is a book about Islam and Muslims in the modern world.⁸

Meanwhile in the Indian subcontinent, Sayyid Ahmed Khan called for a new *kalām*. Addressing a Muslim gathering in Lahore in 1884, he said "Today we are, as before, in need of a modern theology – *jadid 'ilm al-kalām* – whereby we should refute the doctrine of modern sciences, or undermine their foundation, or show that they are in conformity with Islam."⁹ According to Fazlur Rahman, Khan believed that without reforming *kalām*, Islam

⁵ Originally a series of lectures he delivered while exiled in Lebanon, at the newly established Sulṭāniyya School in Beirut. The book was later published by his student, Rashīd Riḍā in 1897. The English translation was published in 1966 under the title *Theology of Unity* (translated by Ishāq Musa'ad and Kenneth Cragg), George Allan and Unwin, London, 1966.

⁶ For a critique of 'Abduh's book, see Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of Intellectual Tradition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995, p.153; Zaki Badawi, *Refomers of Egypt*, p.20, Elie Kedouri, *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*, Frank Cass, London, 1966, p.2 and Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, p.141.

⁷ 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd seems to differentiate between "original" *salafiyya* known before Ibn Taymiyya and the one he represented. The idea seems to be strange, but it fits his view on the three currents in Islamic thought. the literalists represented by Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal; *al-Baṣīriyyūn* (those having insight), represented by al-Ḥārith al-Muḥṣabī (781-857) the rationalists represented by the Mutazilites. Accordingly, Ibn Taymiyya represents a continuation of Ibn Ḥanbal's school. See *Qaḍiyat al-Taṣawwuf*, p.232-233.

⁸ Mark Sedgwick, *Muhammad 'Abduh*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2010, pp.63-64. See also Jeffery Halverson, *Theology and Creed*, pp.55-56.

⁹ Christian Troll, *Sayyid Ahmed Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology*, University of California Press, 1978, p.311.

would be in real danger. He added that both Khan and ‘Abduh did much to resurrect Mu’tazilite rationalism.¹⁰

Muslim scholars in the twentieth century sought to present *tawhīd* in a modern and simple style. Rather than revisiting the old debates, they tried to project a theology based on the Qur’ān and link it to the universe – the new theology should embrace the "Book of Revelation" and the "Book of Creation". This means that it takes its inspiration from the revealed Book and takes into consideration scientific discoveries which are mainly made by the West. As previously mentioned, Muslim scholars have realised that there is a need for an approach to present and teach theology to the masses which would have an extensive outreach. Any quick survey of modern Muslim writings on creed will clearly demonstrate that scholars followed a clear and similar format in explaining the Muslim creed to both the masses and intellectuals alike.¹¹ By "clear format" it is meant that they explain the five principles of faith: believe in God, the Angels, the Books, the Prophets, and the Day of Judgment. Within these principles they discuss other issues with regard to the nature of jinn, life in heaven and punishment in hell. In discussing these issues the reference point is the Qur’ān and *al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥa*

The majority of books have titles that link *imān* with modern sciences.¹² Most, if not all, would pepper their arguments with scientific facts that are used to prove the relevance of religion to modern times.¹³ With little understanding of the intellectual basis of modern sciences, Muslim religious scholars depended on books written by leading Arab scientists

¹⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of Intellectual Tradition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995, p.153.

¹¹ For example, this tendency is clear in the writings of Sayyid Sābiq, ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād in Egypt and Muḥammad Sa’īd al-Būṭī in Syria.

¹² Books written by Zaghūl an-Najār (Egypt) and ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Zandānī (Yemen) fall into this category.

¹³ One such book that had an impact on the relation between science and faith was written by Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science: The Holy Scriptures examined in the light of modern knowledge*, translated from French into English by Alastair D. Pannell as well as by the author. Al-Ghazali later defended Bucaille when a journal published by the Papal Institute in the Vatican criticised his views on the scientific signs in the Qur’ān. See *Al-Ṭarīq Min Hunā*, pp.89-101.

and those translated from other languages (mainly English), to try and prove the existence of God and the impact of scientific discoveries on the belief in God in a godless age.¹⁴ Not surprisingly books written by Western scholars who found faith through science have been widely circulated in the Arab world.

Among the many translated books published in several editions, one may perhaps mention *Man Does not Stand Alone* (1944) by Abraham Cressy Morrison.¹⁵ Another, *The Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe* edited by John Glover Monsoma and published in New York in 1958, was widely circulated in the Arab world. In it forty American scientists declared their affirmation of religion.¹⁶ Alexis Carrel's (1873-1944) book published in 1935, *L'homme cet inconnu (The Unknown Man)*,¹⁷ is without doubt the most famous book which has exerted its influence on the Muslim scholars, and found popularity among the Islamists.¹⁸ Among those who kept referring to its views was Sayyid Quṭb,¹⁹ his brother Muḥammad Quṭb and Muḥammad al-Ghazali.²⁰

Between 'Abduh and al-Bannā

Al-Ghazali's views on theology were formed by his traditional learning at Al-Azhar, but two books left their impact on him. These were 'Abduh's *Risālat al-Tawḥīd* and *Al-'Aqā'id*

¹⁴ Among the leading scholars were Aḥmad Zakī (1894-1975), the first editor of *Al-Arabi*, one of the most celebrated Arabic magazines published in Kuwait since 1958. In his books, Aḥmad Zakī tries to simply present science to the masses. One of his books that follows this approach is *Ma'a Allah fi'l-Sama'*, which ran into many editions.

¹⁵ The translator, Maḥmūd Ṣāliḥ al-Falakī gave it the new title of *Al-'Ilm Yad'ū li'l-Imān*. It was originally published by the Islamic Research Council at Al-Azhar, but has since then appeared in many editions. One of these is by Dār al-Qalam, Beirut, 1965.

¹⁶ The Arabic edition was translated by Al-Dimirdāsh 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Sarḥān and Muḥammad Jamāl Al-Fandī, published under the title *Allah Yatajalā fi 'Aṣr al-'Ilm*, Dār al-Qalam. The last edition is dated 2004.

¹⁷ The book was translated into Arabic by Shafiq 'Asad Farīd under the title *Al-Insān Dhālik Al-Majhūl*.

¹⁸ Yussef Chouciri believes that al-Nadawī was the first to give a glimpse of the book to the Islamists. See *Islamic Fundamentalism: The Story of Islamic Movements*, Continuum, New York, 2010, pp.185-196.

¹⁹ In fact, one of the chapters in Quṭb's *Al-Islam wa Mushkilāt al-Ḥaḍāra* is called *The Unknown Man*. See pp.8-24.

²⁰ As will be seen, his book, *Raka'iz al-Imān Bayna al-'Aql wa al-Qalb* is based on Carrel's book. The name of the book is also mentioned in *Ayna al-Khalal*, p.174 and in *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, Vol. 1, p.88.

(Creed) by Ḥasan al-Bannā.²¹ Al-Bannā tries to present the Muslim creed free from the influence of *kalām*. While ‘Abduh, as mentioned earlier, retains certain elements of *kalām* or the Mu’tazilite spirit in *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, al-Bannā is clear from the outset that he is only presenting ‘*aqīda* as found in the Qur’ān and *sunna*.

Al-Bannā was neither interested in literary debate that usually centres around *muḥkamāt* (clear) and *mutashābihāt* (ambiguous) verses, nor in presenting the views of theologians influenced by *al-mutakalimūn*. In this he adopted the way of the *salaf*: By this it is meant that he avoided (*tawaqafa*) any discussion of the question of God's Names and Attributes (*al-Asmā’ wa al-Sifāt*). Another feature of al-Bannā's book is the emphasis on the social and moral aspects of the creed, and how it affects and shapes the daily life of the believers.

Despite the difference between ‘Abduh and al-Bannā, Muḥammad ‘Imāra is of the view that they represent a school which combines reason, emotion (heart) and revelation which are the foundation of knowledge in Islam. He calls this school of thought "the rational Sufi *salafīyya*".²² He bases this on what ‘Abduh calls the "four guides" namely reason, revelation, experience and emotion that steer Islamic knowledge.²³ Al-Bannā, on his part, defines Islam as the religion which combines both reason and *al-ghayb* (the unseen).²⁴

One of the early books al-Ghazali wrote on ‘*aqīda* was ‘*Aqīdāt al-Muslim*.²⁵ His main purpose for writing this book was to close a gap that he believed existed and needed to be filled by new books that follow a new approach in presenting Islamic beliefs to Muslims

²¹ Ḥasan al-Bannā, *Al-‘Aqā’id*, Dār al-Shihāb, Cairo, 1979. Al-Ghazali was influenced by *Risālat al-Ta’ālīm* in which al-Bannā sums up the belief of the Muslim Brotherhood in twenty points. Al-Ghazali believes that this can be taken as a basis for the Muslim cultural unity. He wrote *Dustūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfiyya Bayna al-Muslimīn* with the aim of explaining them.

²² Moḥammad ‘Amāra, "Al-Qaraḍāwī: Al-Madrasa al-Fikriyya", in *Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī: Kalimāt fī Takrīmihi wa Buḥūth fī Fikrihi*, Vol.2, p.806.

²³ Riḍā, *Tarīkh al-Ustādh al-‘Imām*, Vol. 1, p.303.

²⁴ Al-Bannā, *Majmū’ Rasā’il al-Imām al-Shahīd*, pp.110-112.

²⁵ The book was published in 1952 and has since appeared in many editions. One was published in Kuwait (by Dār al-Bayān) in 1970. The tenth edition was published by Dār al-Qalam, in Damascus in 1999.

from the perspective of the *salaf* (early Muslims).²⁶ Despite this, al-Ghazali could not escape the influence of *kalām* in the way he organised the book and the themes he discussed. This is due to the influence of his traditional religious education leading up to Al-Azhar where he was taught the Ash‘arite brand of theology.²⁷

The historical context in which al-Ghazali wrote *‘Aqīdāt al-Muslim* (1952) is important because it was published following three books which he devoted to the issues of socialism and capitalism.²⁸ Hence the book could be seen as a reaction to what was happening in the East and West where new ideas were challenging the efficacy of religion. Great emphasis has been put on the necessity of religion for the modern man. The argument seems to be that man cannot live without religious values that would regulate his relationship with the universe and beyond. Ideologies such as communism and capitalism are seen as threatening to the welfare of human beings, so must therefore be rejected and rebutted.

Issues discussed in *‘Aqīdāt al-Muslim* form the basis of the future argument that al-Ghazali reproduced in many articles and books. They would appear in different contexts in almost all of his books.²⁹ The next section will present some thoughts on his approach to *‘Ilm al-Kalām*.

‘Aqīda or Kalām?

In his writings al-Ghazali uses many terms to discuss theological issues such as *‘aqīda*, *tawhīd*, *kalām*, *fikr Islāmī* and *imān*. He has on many occasions, denounced *kalām* and the

²⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Sir Ta‘akhur al-Muslimīn*, p.69.

²⁷ Al-Ghazali in *Humūm Dā‘iyah* pointed to the criticism levelled at him by some of the followers of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, p.11. See also *‘Aqīdāt al-Muslim*, p.6 and *Turāthunā al-Fikrī fī Mizān al-Shar’ wa al-‘Aql*, p.54.

²⁸ *Al-Islam wa al-Istirākiyya* (1947) and *Al-Islam al-Muftarā ‘Alīhi* (1950).

²⁹ Chief among them are *Laysa Mina al-Islam*, *Mi‘at Su‘āl ‘An al-Islam*, *Hadhā Dīnunā* and *Humūm Dā‘iyah*. In these books, al-Ghazali devoted chapters to dealing with theological matters, *kalām*, Sufism and the like.

way it was taught at Islamic universities.³⁰ He believes that all Muslim theological schools which he categorises as "Islamic Thought" are the product of two elements, namely political strife in the formative years of Islam and foreign elements which originated mainly from Greek philosophy.³¹ In dealing with *‘Ilm al-Kalām* al-Ghazali emphasises the shortcomings of this science.

Al-Ghazali follows the way classical theologians define Islam, *imān* and *iḥsān*. Each represents a different level of faith. However, he sees no difference between them. According to al-Ghazali, they all point to one truth. In this sense Islam (submission) means "belief with certainty", and *imān* means "certainty with submission".³² Furthermore, al-Ghazali speaks of two levels on which religion functions. Revelation, the first level, requires total submission without question. The second is human endeavour, where human beings try to understand what has been revealed. Here, the degree of submission depends on the original interpretation of the text. According to al-Ghazali, one has to differentiate between the Islam of revelation and the Islam understood by Muslims who believe in the religion, and try to realise its teachings in their daily lives – most importantly, the way they strive to be faithful to its original message with the passing of time.³³

Al-Ghazali keeps to Ibn Khaldūn's idea with regard to the emergence of sciences in Islam. Ibn Khaldūn divides the sciences into natural or rational-based sciences³⁴ and the traditional or revelation-based sciences. Al-Ghazali uses this categorisation to criticise *kalām* and its legacy in Islam, and he believes that the early generation of Muslims understood faith according to the Qur'ān and authentic *sunna*. Muslims based on a rational impulse, after the

³⁰ Al-Ghazali, *‘Aqīdāt al-Muslim*, p.6.

³¹ Al-Ghazali, *Laysa Mīna al-Islam*, p.176.

³² Al-Ghazali, *‘Aqīdāt al-Muslim*, p.122.

³³ Al-Ghazali, *Laysa Mīna al-Islam*, p.140. See also *Rāk'iz al-Imān*, p. 142.

³⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh al-‘Alāma Ibn Khaldūn: Al-Muqaddima*, p.870.

establishment of their state, were able to respond to new challenges as the empire continued to expand. It was then, when Muslims were confronted with new ideas that they sought to initiate a new science able to take on foreign ideas by its intellectual premises. Al-Ghazali agrees that '*Ilm al-Kalām* is a science of necessity which emerged to defend the Muslim faith against foreign and un-Islamic elements, be it Greek, Hellenistic, Persian and other Eastern cultures whose effect al-Ghazali characterised as a "poisonous injection" that afflicted "our pure believers".³⁵

As al-Ghazali emphasises the rational nature of this science,³⁶ he believes that true *kalām* is the one that is guided by revelation which characterises the early period of Islam. He refers to the famous answer Mālik Ibn Anas gave to the question of how God is "firmly established on the Throne,"³⁷ and the attitude of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal to the question of the created nature of the Qurʾān.³⁸ He takes their attitudes to embody a rational stance as opposed to the *kalām* which is exemplified by foreign elements which distorted the nature of *tawḥīd*. This type is represented by the Muʿtazilites and their followers.³⁹ Al-Ghazali often describes this type of *kalām* as "irrational rationality" – sometimes "trivial" or "superstitious" *kalām*.⁴⁰

Al-Ghazali does not accept that the Muʿtazilites were the first to celebrate reason in Islam, saying that Islam itself is based on reason, and no religion has ever celebrated reason more than Islam.⁴¹ Here he cites Ibn Khaldūn's views on the historical role of *kalām*.⁴² This

³⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Ṭāqāt al-Muʿaṭala*, p.83.

³⁶ See for example his comments in *Kayfa Naḥam al-Islam*, pp.123-125.

³⁷ "A man asked Imām Mālik about and how the *Most Gracious is firmly established on the Throne* (20:5). Malik lowered his head and remained thus until he was completely soaked in sweat. Then he said, 'The establishment is not unknown, the *how* is inconceivable, the belief in it is obligatory, asking about it is innovation, and I do not think that you are anything but an innovator.' Then he ordered the man to be led out." See al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Asmāʾ wa al-Ṣifāt*, Al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, Cairo, n.d, p.377 and Ibn Taymiyya, *Fatāwā*, Vol.5, p.365.

³⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Difāʾ ʿan al-Shrīaʾ wa al-ʿAqīda Dīda Maṭāʿin al-Mustashriqīn*. pp.98-99.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.100-101.

⁴⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Naḥam al-Islam*, p.124 and *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, p.57.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp.101-102.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.101.

leads to the exploration of the way he understands *ta'wīl* which led to the emergence of rational schools in Islam, and how it is used in the creed. According to Abū Aḥī al-Jurjānī (816 H/1413 CE) *ta'wīl* means, "giving the text a meaning which is against the apparent meaning as long as the new meaning does not contradict the Qur'ān and *sunna*".⁴³

Al-Ghazali opines that Muslim theologians agree and disagree on the meaning of the verses that entail anthropomorphism. Some resort to *ta'wīl* while others accept the revelation *bi lā kayf* (without asking how), both motivated by the idea of distancing God from his creation and affirming his *tanzīh* (transcendence).⁴⁴ Al-Ghazali accepts both arguments, but suggests that *ta'wīl* was de-railed. According to him the surest path is to avoid *ta'wīl* completely, and accept the way of the *salaf* saying, "I personally prefer the way of the *salaf*. I reject the engaging of the Muslim's mind with metaphysical matters which exhaust him, and I am content to accept the verses and the *ahādīth* which contain the attributes of God the Almighty."⁴⁵ His attitude towards *ta'wīl* is influenced by his view on the role of reason and its limited ability to understand the unseen.⁴⁶

Al-Ghazali's opinion does not indicate a total rejection of *ta'wīl*. Rather, he was motivated by this stance to counter the "mistaken interpretation" of text by the some theologians.⁴⁷ Al-Qaraḍāwī follows the same view, but believes that in order for *ta'wīl* to be justified, it must follow the spirit of the text and fits the context.⁴⁸ Al-Qaraḍāwī says that many scholars from the *ḥadīth* camp resort to *ta'wīl*. He gives the example where Ibn Taymiyya was forced to use *ta'wīl* when commenting on the *ḥadīth* which says that "the

⁴³ Abū Aḥī al-Jurjānī, *Mu'jam al-Ta'rīfāt*, Dār al-Faḍīla, Cairo, 2004, p.46.

⁴⁴ Al-Ghazali, *'Aqīdāt al-Muslim*, pp.36.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.37-38.

⁴⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Sir Ta'khur al-Muslimīn*, pp.56-57.

⁴⁷ Al-Ghazali, *'Aqīdāt al-Muslim*, p.47.

⁴⁸ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Marjī'yya al-'Ulyā fi'l-Islam*, pp.145-146.

Black Stone is the right hand of Allah on earth".⁴⁹ According to Ibn Taymiyya, the *ḥadīth* conveys a simile or comparison which means "he who kisses the Black Stone, it is as if he shakes the Hand of God and kisses it".⁵⁰ According to al-Qaraḍāwī, Ibn Taymiyya was not the only Ḥanbalī scholar to use *ta'wīl*, and mentions Abū al-Wafā' Ibn 'Aqīl (1040-1119) and Ibn al-Jawzī (d.1116) as others who did.⁵¹

Shabbir Akhtar follows the above line of discussion when he identified two levels of theology. According to him one "relies on the exegetical use of reason in order to extract new opinions from sacred texts, and thus to understand and explicate scripture" while the other is *kalām* (dialectical theology).⁵² Akhtar, like al-Ghazali, believes that the first form of theology was supervised by *fiqh*. He adds, "Theology was a form of hermeneutics and in that sense it was systemically practiced by Abū Hanīfa and Mālik ibn Anas. The role of reason was neither ambitious nor subversive."⁵³ As for dialectical theology, Akhtar believes that for all their sincerity and religiosity the *mutakalimūn* were dealing with risky problems which led them to controversial conclusions.

Differentiating between the two types of rationalities above is one way to criticise *kalām*. Another is to rely on established scholars and founders of the main Sunnī schools of jurisprudence all of whom had different relationships with the *mutakalimūn*. Al-Ghazali presents his readers with many of their statements which demonstrate their dislike of *kalām*.⁵⁴ Another strategy al-Ghazali uses in order to highlight the negative impact of *kalām* on Muslim beliefs is repetition. He keeps repeating the same theme of the uselessness of

⁴⁹ Al-Mundhirī, *Al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb, Bāb al-Targhīb fi 'l-Ṭawāf wa Istilām al-Ḥajar al-Aswad*, No. 1718, Vol. 2, p.144.

⁵⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islam*, Vol. 6, pp.397-398.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp.296-309.

⁵² Shabbir Akhtar, *The Qur'an and the Secular Mind: A Philosophy of Islam*, Routledge, London, 2009, p.81.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.82

⁵⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Difa' 'an Al-Sharī'a wa al-'Aqīda Ḍada Maṭā'in al-Mustashriqīn*, p.104.

kalām and how the ‘*ulamā’* and "riff raff" turned it into a trivial science saying it is "just talk and dreams for a dreamy people".⁵⁵

Consequently, the science which was originally crafted by Muslim scholars to defend Islam against foreign elements itself became a foreign science that has nothing to do with Islam.⁵⁶ Al-Ghazali's argument is similar in spirit to Sa'īd Nūrī's (1878-1960) views. The latter links *kalām's* shortcomings to the inability of *kalām* scholars to understand the meaning of the Qur'ān. Nūrī believes that the knowledge of God gained through *kalām* reasoning does not "satisfy the heart".⁵⁷ According to Muḥsin ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, Nūrī tries to make *kalām* accessible to every Muslim rather than only to the specialists.⁵⁸ Although Nūrī and al-Ghazali confuse *tawḥīd* with *kalām*, they nonetheless try to present them as conflicting terms. They agree that historical *kalām* robbed the creed of its emotional aspect. They also seem to agree that there is no faith "without heart" and there is no faith that is not based on reason. Additionally, in order to bring a new outlook to *tawḥīd*, Muslims should forsake the old debate and refrain from "resurrecting wars that occurred between the dead".⁵⁹ For Muslims to envision the future, they should craft another approach suitable to the spirit of the age.

Al-Ghazali's criticism of *kalām* might be un sophisticated and unsatisfactory to the specialist in the field of the history of the ideas, but he was not preoccupied with presenting a sophisticated argument as much as he was concerned with freeing Islam from the influence of Greek and Persian elements on Islamic thought by blaming it and the doctrinal schools which came under its influence. By doing so al-Ghazali thought that he would be able to limit the role of reason in relation to revelation, and emphasise that revelation should be

⁵⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*, p.124.

⁵⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Laysa Mina al-Islam*, pp.146-147 and ‘*Aqīdāt al-Muslim*, p.7.

⁵⁷ Muḥsin ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, *Al-Nūrī: Mutakalim al-‘Aṣr al-Ḥadīth*, Cairo, 2002, p.80.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.90.

⁵⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Sir Ta‘akhur al-Muslimīn*, p.68.

interpreted by reason, a theme that runs throughout his writings and reflects the views of ‘Abduh.⁶⁰

In what follows, al-Ghazali's critique of another aspect of Islamic thought, which is Sufism, will be examined.

Sufism

Al-Ghazali wrote two books to present Sufism from a new perspective – *Al-Jānib al-‘Āṭifī Min al-Islam* (1961), and *Rakā’iz al-Imān Bayna al-‘Aql wa Qalb* (1979).⁶¹ The first book is subtitled *Baḥṭhun fī’l-Akhlāq wa al-Sulūk wa al-Taṣawwuf* (An essay on manners, behaviour and Sufism) giving the reader a more precise indication of its aim, and that is to draw Sufism out from its "seclusion in the cave and hermitage, in order for it to become a force for good".⁶² Al-Ghazali also intends for these publications to explore the many faces of mysticism in Islam, and relate them to general human experience due to his acknowledgement that the phenomenon of Sufism is a universal tendency and may be found in practically all religions.⁶³

Al-Ghazali's view of Sufism is based on traditional premises which means that the criteria he uses to critique it is based on differentiating between the accepted (*ḥalāl*) and unaccepted (*ḥarām*) forms of Sufism within the traditional Islamic framework. As will emerge later, al-Ghazali seems to have exerted much effort to expose what he considers to be deviant Sufism, and to present rules for the correct version. This leads him to later reject the popular or organised form of Sufism as well as "intellectual" Sufism as a way to return to the pre-

⁶⁰ ‘Abduh, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, pp.7-8.

⁶¹ According to the bibliography of *Islāmīyat alMa’rifah*, Dār al-‘Itiṣām's edition of *Rakā’iz al-Imān Bayn al-‘Aql wa Qalb* was published in 1979, an indication that the book was the first which al-Ghazali devoted to Sufism. However, he states in the introduction that it is in fact the second, "I did try to write similar to this in *Al-Jānib al-‘Āṭifī Min al-Islam*, but this book is longer and wider in scope." See p.9. The Library of Congress catalogue gives the date of publication of *Al-Jānib* as 1961.

⁶² Al-Ghazali, *Al-Jānib al-‘Āṭifī Min al-Islam*, p.5.

⁶³ Al-Ghazali, *Rakā’iz al-Imān*, p.128.

organised era of Sufism, when it was an individual choice. Al-Ghazali's approach to Sufism assumes that modern Sufis are different from Sufis of old, even though the latter are of different types.⁶⁴

Modern Sufism is embodied in Sufi orders which al-Ghazali believes have no relationship with the early form of Sufism. He agrees that Sufism emerged during Islam's second century, and understands this early form of Sufism in terms of its effect on human conduct. He further says that Muslims in general accept ethical practical Sufism which is related to behaviour, manners, worship, prayers and the like.⁶⁵ This is why it truly represents the spiritual side of Islam even though it has been distorted by popular Sufis of late. How and why has Sufism declined?

According to al-Ghazali, the crisis of Sufism as with the crisis of *kalām* before it, started when it came under the influence of neo-Platonism, the Hellenistic world, Gnosticism and the ancient cultures of the East.⁶⁶ Al-Ghazali states that this form of mysticism "was one type of cultural invasion that was intended to divert Muslims from their beliefs, methods and goals".⁶⁷ He argues that scholars should take note of this. They must "warn Muslims of its effects and schemes. Those who are attempting to revive it – the enemies of Islam – are aiming at creating a community of believers without loyalty or direction".⁶⁸ The mere use of "*al-ghazw al-thaqāfī*" (cultural invasion), which is a modern term, puts the foreign elements al-Ghazali just mentioned within the frame of confrontation between the Muslim World and the West. This is contrary to what Muslims in the classical age treated them – as a form of cultural interaction. The implications is that there are two forms of Sufism one is foreign,

⁶⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Min Khutab al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 2, p.137.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Vol. 2, p.137.

⁶⁶ See EI, *Taswuf*, pp.313-340 and *The Heritage of Sufism*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn, Oneworld, Oxford, 1999, among the many books on Sufism.

⁶⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, Vol. 5, p.51 and *Al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya fi'l-Qarn al-Ḥālī*, p.32.

⁶⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Aqīdat al-Muslim*, pp.64-65.

corrupted by external elements, the other is the original and pure. In order to dissociate the latter from the former it has to be given a new description and this explains his preference for the "emotional side" of Islam which according to him conveys the true nature of the mystical experience.⁶⁹

Al-Jānib al-‘Āṭifi and *Rakā’iz al-Imān* both deal with different aspects of Sufism. The former deals with concepts and definition of Sufism, while the latter tries to explore and criticise the practices of the organised form of Sufism. The issues discussed in both books sometimes overlap and are repeated, but al-Ghazali attempts to give a comprehensive picture of Sufism and its relevance to the present. For example, he looks at the experience and the teachings of the great Sufi, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (1196-1258) to represent ethical Sufism in its true form. According to al-Ghazali, al-Shādhilī was pious, wealthy, an ‘*ālim* and a preacher. Al-Shādhilī's mission was to teach and correct the lay Sufi's understanding of Sufism.⁷⁰ In *Al-Jānib al-‘Āṭifi*, he tries to present aspects of faith that Sufis have misunderstood or misrepresented from a different perspective. It is because most Sufis regard the degree of *iḥsān* as the highest level of faith which they try to attain that al-Ghazali tries to draw attention to its proper understanding.⁷¹

Thus, rather than focusing on devotional *dhikr* (litany), al-Ghazali explains that focus should be given to hard work – the process of learning and discovering the secrets of the world, which is what the word *iḥsān* actually means. The method he adopts to interpret the Sufi doctrine is to explain it through Qur’ānic verses and *aḥādīth*. His deduction is that the definition of *iḥsān* is far different from that which the Sufis adhere to. In this regard al-

⁶⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Jānib al-‘Āṭifi Min al-Islam*, p.3.

⁷⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Min Khuṭab al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 2, pp.137-138.

⁷¹ According to the famous *ḥadīth* in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the degree of *iḥsān* is where the believer worships God Almighty as if he sees Him "for if you cannot see Him verily He sees you". See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Kitāb al-Imān*, *Bāb Su’āl Jibrīl li’l-Nabī*, No. 50, and *Kitāb al-Tafsīr*, No. 4777.

Ghazali rejects the symbolic language of the Sufis that tries to detach the hidden meaning of the term from its apparent meaning.⁷²

One of the factors that contributed to the misunderstanding of Sufism is Sufi traditions themselves. An example of this is the sayings of Ibn ‘Atā’Allah al-Sikandarī.⁷³ Ibn ‘Aṭā’Allah wrote *Al-Ḥikam al-‘Aṭā’iyya*, considered to be one of the most renowned expositions on Sufism.⁷⁴ Al-Ghazali felt inclined to comment on *Al-Ḥikam* after he read Ibn ‘Ajība's (1161H/1758CE) comments on it which he found difficult to understand and digest.⁷⁵ Al-Ghazali criticises the way Ibn ‘Ajība's differentiates between the types of deeds, which he names as *sharī‘a*, *ṭarīqa* and *ḥaqīqa*, or Islam, *imān* and *iḥsān*, or the people of the beginning, the middle and the end. According to Ibn ‘Ajība, "*sharī‘a*" means "worship", "*ṭarīqa*" means "to seek Him", and "*ḥaqīqa*" means "to witness Him".⁷⁶

Al-Ghazali believes that Ibn ‘Ajība implies that some of the Qur’ānic verses mean only *sharī‘a* and others mean *ḥaqīqa* and what stand for *ḥaqīqa* cannot mean *sharī‘a* and vice-versa.⁷⁷ Although Ibn ‘Ajība seems to be playing with words, he nevertheless presents Sufi views that *ḥaqīqa* is far higher than *sharī‘a* which al-Ghazali disagrees with. Instead he tries to explain and comment on of Ibn Atā’Allah's wise sayings in what he says simple and mundane language in order to extract practical lessons. Each is given a heading, followed by

⁷² Al-Ghazali, *Al-Jānib al-‘Aṭīfī Min al-Islam*, p.11.

⁷³ Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Karīm bin ‘Abd al-Rahmān bin ‘Isā bin ‘Aṭā’Allah al-Sikandarī (1260-1309), one of the students of the founder of the Shādhilī Sufi order Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhifī. EI., Vol. II, pp.722-723. See also William Chitick, *Sufism: A Short History*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2000, p.45.

⁷⁴ There are many commentaries on *Al-Ḥikam* such as Ibn ‘Abbād al-Nafarī al-Rondā's *Sharḥ al-Ḥikam al-‘Aṭā’iyya* (Cairo, 1988) and the one by ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Sharnubī. However, the most famous commentary on *Al-Ḥikam* is *Iqāz al-Himam fī Sharḥ al-Ḥikam al-‘Aṭā’iyya* by Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn ‘Ajība. In modern times Muḥammad Saīd Ramadan al-Būṭī gave lessons on *Al-Ḥikam*. He eventually published them in four volumes under the title *Al-Ḥikam al-‘Aṭā’iyya: Sharḥ wa Taḥlīl*, Dār al-Fikr al-Mu’āṣir, Beirut, 2005. Saīd Ḥawwā also commented on al-Ḥikam in his book *Mudhakārat fī Manāzil al-Ṣiddiqīn wa al-Rabāniyyīn*, Dār ‘Ammār, Amman, 1989.

⁷⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Raka‘iz al-Imān Bayna al-‘Aql wa al-Qalb*, p.103.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.111.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.112.

a short commentary.⁷⁸ Al-Ghazali looks at Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah as an educationalist with positive message grounded in Islamic ethics.⁷⁹ Al-Ghazali then gives attention to Sufi concepts such as love, reliance, patience, fear, hope, piety, contentment and repentance. He considers these concepts as "signs of the road",⁸⁰ whose starting point is repentance, and the end point, love.⁸¹

The way al-Ghazali presents aspects of Sufism in *Al-Jānīb al-‘Āṭifi* follows the same methodology adopted by Sufi masters, especially in the great Sufi manuals written in the ninth and tenth centuries. A closer look at *Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, *Al-Luma’* and *Al-Ta’ruf bi Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf* or *Kashf al-Mahjūb* shows that al-Ghazali follows their way in arranging or presenting his perspective on Sufism. He shares their concerns with regard to the status of Sufism of their time. Al-Qushayrī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Kalabādhī and al-Hajwīrī were motivated to write their books by the crisis of Sufism faced during their time as was al-Ghazali. However, he avoided the esoteric and symbolic language which characterises their books.⁸²

Al-Ghazali continues his efforts to present an alternative approach to Sufism in *Rakā’iz al-Imān Bayna al-‘Aql wa al-Qalb*. If the *Al-Jānīb al-‘Āṭifi* is concerned with concepts and ideas, this latter book is concerned with the practical or ritualistic side of Sufism. It starts by arguing for the need for *imān*, or the truth which is based on rational knowledge. This is compared with Sufis who believe that the attainment of the truth may only be achieved by

⁷⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Jānīb al-‘Āṭifi Min al-‘Islam*, p.112.

⁷⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Rakā’iz al-Imān Bayna al-‘Aql wa al-Qalb*, p.161.

⁸⁰ The Sufis call these *maqāmāt* (stations). According to Abī Naṣr al-Ṭūsī, "*al-maqām*" means the way the Sufi or the servant maintains his presence before the Almighty by persisting in prayer, battling temptation and meditation. This is different from *aḥwāl*, (state) which he defines as the state of purity that the Sufi feels when *dhikr* enters his heart. See al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Luma’*, pp.65-66.

⁸¹ Al-Qaraḍāwī and other Islamists wrote books, and tracks each of these concepts as they tried to present them from a Qur’ānic perspective which al-Qaraḍāwī calls *fiqh al-sulūk*.

⁸² Al-Ghazali, *Al-Jānīb al-‘Āṭifi*, pp.11-12.

wandering aimlessly in the world. Instead, al-Ghazali calls upon them to wander through discovery. It is here that empirical sciences would be helpful.

Al-Ghazali looks at the experiences of some Western writers who have discovered the truth through science or criticised the materialistic West. He refers his reader to Alex Carrel and his book, *The Unknown Man* mentioned earlier. Al-Ghazali believes that scientific books, which are based on demonstration and proof, are important in establishing the human needs for faith.⁸³ In fact, the whole of *Rakā'iz* refers greatly to Carrel's ideas. Little wonder that *Rakā'iz* is punctuated with many quotations from the Arabic translation of Carrel's book with which al-Ghazali has been acquainted since the 1950s.

Al-Ghazali, is full of praise for the French scholar, and describes his book as one of the greatest human efforts to establish the truth through scientific demonstration.⁸⁴ Therefore, al-Ghazali embarked on a journey of building a world view based on harmony between the body and soul, science and faith, and this world and the hereafter. Carrel's view that human beings are an active agent in this world fits perfectly with al-Ghazali's view about the true Sufi who is the direct opposite of one who is lazy, parasitic and ignorant. According to al-Ghazali, the ideal Sufi is one who is a friend of science. If Sufism is all about devotion, then true devotion "is a total belief in Allah the Almighty; a belief that human beings are the *khalīfa* (vicegerent) of Allah on earth, with a desire to fulfil the requirements of this role, meaning an ability to dominate the universe and control its powers".⁸⁵ This is not possible without celebrating reason. Al-Ghazali suggests that true Sufism is one that is in harmony with science. Further, "being religious does not mean that one is pale faced because of

⁸³ Al-Ghazali, *Rakā'iz al-Imān*, p.12.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.13.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.22.

hunger and lack of sleep. On the contrary, true devotion is a body full of energy and the love of life".⁸⁶

Carrel's book gives al-Ghazali the opportunity to place Islam as the solution to modern maladies and afflictions.⁸⁷ From this he proceeds to discuss "the Sufism we need".⁸⁸ According to him, Sufism must be free from superstition and nurture the heart, thus enabling Muslims to feel the presence of God in their lives. It is because Islam nurtures the soul and is self-sufficient in terms of spiritual traditions that there is therefore no need for all the *wird* (continuous or repeated invocation, usually of the names of Allah), living in seclusion or borrowing from foreign rituals. The only practice al-Ghazali seems to tolerate is the celebration of the anniversary of the Prophet's birthday. However, he opines that it should be marked to celebrate the prophet's life and excellent qualities.⁸⁹

One issue worth exploring is al-Ghazali's views on "*waḥdat al-wujūd*" (the unity of being),⁹⁰ despite the fact that he considers it a superstition which made its way into Islam from Hindu traditions.⁹¹ He does not accept the concept as found in Sufi books defined by Ibn 'Arabī (1165-1240) as "the mystical union of the soul with God".⁹² According to al-Ghazali, any similarity between the Creator (or the Eternal) and the created (or the temporal) entails the negation of the first. Al-Ghazali understands the unity in terms of the presence of God in the life of the pious as a result of worship and fulfilling the obligations of religion. This is a reflection of "*waḥdat al-shuhūd*" (unity of manifestation)⁹³ as formulated earlier by Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564-1624) who believed that the unity of being constitutes a

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.23.

⁸⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Raka'iz al-Imān*, p.69.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.95.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.211-212.

⁹⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Laysa Mina al-Islam*, pp.170-172.

⁹¹ Al-Ghazali refers to this type Sufism as "philosophical Sufism". See *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*, p. 49. Contrary to this view, Ibn Taymiyya saw similarities between the doctrine of the unity of being and the notion of incarnation in Christianity. See *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā*, Vol. 2, pp.79-84.

⁹² Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, 1968, Vol. 2, p.130.

⁹³ Al-Ghazali, *Laysa Mina al-Islam*, pp.170-172.

denial of the oneness of God.⁹⁴ Furthermore, al-Ghazali views unity of being as *ilhād*, a form of atheism.⁹⁵ This is in line with Ibn Taymiyya who equates *wahdat al-wujūd* with atheism and heresy. However, unlike Ibn Taymiyya, he overlooks the complexity of Ibn ‘Arabī’s exposition as well as Ibn Taymiyya’s argument against Ibn ‘Arabī’s Sufism by presenting it in a very simplistic way.⁹⁶

The picture that emerges from the discussion thus far is that Muslims need an emotional element in their lives in order to fulfil their religious obligations. Al-Ghazali argues that this emotional element is as important as what is rational. This is why he criticises the *fuqahā’* for what he sees as their "dry books". Islam, he argues, needs both *ḥaqīqa* and *sharī’a*. Their presence creates harmony in the life of the Muslim.⁹⁷ Building such harmony will lead to positive and true Sufism. Tipping the balance on to either side will lead to negative and corrupted Sufism.⁹⁸ This view is reminiscent of ‘Abduh who blamed the *fuqahā’* for the decline of Sufism. It was their attacks that led Sufis to resort to symbolic language that obscured the true meaning of the texts.⁹⁹

One of the notions entrenched in popular Sufism that al-Ghazali criticises is the negative attitude towards wealth and worldly matters.¹⁰⁰ He blames Sufi scholars and some commentators for spreading this understanding which purports that "the poor person who accepts poverty with contentment is better than the wealthy person who is grateful to Allah".¹⁰¹ He argues that this negative attitude is one of the causes for the decline of the

⁹⁴ Muhammad al-Ghazali, *The Socio-Political Thought of Shah Wali Allah*, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad, 2001, p.9 and 14.

⁹⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Raka’iz al-Imān*, p.123. See also *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 3, p.101.

⁹⁶ Muṣṭafā Hilmī, *Ibn Taymiyya wa al-Taṣawwuf*, Dār Al-Da’wa, 1982, pp.322-344.

⁹⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Raka’iz al-Imān*, pp.107-111.

⁹⁸ Al-Qaraḏāwī calls for a similar form which he terms "*fiqh al-qulūb*" and "*al-ḥayā al-rabāniyya*". One of his books is called *Al-Ḥayā al-Rabāniyya wa al-‘Ilm*, Maktabat Wahba, Cairo, 1995. See also *Fatāwā Mu’āṣira*, Dār al-Wafā’, Cairo, Vol.1, p.741.

⁹⁹ Riḏā, *Tarīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām*, Vol. 1, pp.928.

¹⁰⁰ For similar critique see *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Vol.2, p.239 and Vol.7, p.19.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.148.

Muslim civilisation.¹⁰² He argues that the notion is wrong in associating piety with poverty. For him "poverty and illness are not part of religion".¹⁰³ This is because Islam has "never launched a war against the human body".¹⁰⁴

Al-Ghazali's criticism brings to mind one of the leading *salafiyya* figures in Damascus, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (1866-1914) who attacked the leaders of Sufi orders and likened them to "electric wires spreading madness everywhere". Al-Qāsimī attacked Sufi processions as well as the dancing and other spectacles that accompany them as humiliating in relation to the true teachings of Islam.¹⁰⁵ Al-Ghazali shares al-Qāsimī's dislike of popular Sufism which he considers responsible for the emergence of another form of deviant religious practices.¹⁰⁶ This is perhaps an appropriate moment to reiterate that al-Ghazali's condemnation of certain aspects of Sufism does not amount to a total rejection. Despite his harshness and sarcasm, he was nevertheless deeply at ease with matters of the heart and continued his attempts to present the true teachings of Sufism where it conforms to the teachings of the Qur'ān and *sunna*.

Al-Ghazali's treatment of Sufism is, in many ways similar to that of his contemporaries or the neo-Sufis who attempted to reform Sufism.¹⁰⁷ The term "neo-Sufis" here is accepted to mean a new direction in Sufism – the one that is reformed and moves closer to *sharī'a*. This despite the fact that the term itself is deemed questionable by virtue of inaccurately

¹⁰² Al-Ghazali, *Al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya fi 'l-Qarn al-Hāli*, p.65.

¹⁰³ Al-Ghazali, *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, p.29.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*. Vol. 3, p.256.

¹⁰⁵ Mun'im Sirry, "Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and the Salafī Approach to Sufism", *Die Welt Des Islams, International Journal of Modern Islam*, Vol. 51, NR. 1, 2011, p.95.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Ṭāqāt al-Mu'aṭala*, pp.24-32. In *'Aqīdat al-Muslim* he condemns the spectacles which occur every year at the shrine of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Badawī (d.675/1260), pp.64-66.

¹⁰⁷ "Neo-Sufi" is a loose term pertaining sometimes to the many attempts to reform Sufism from the efforts of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazali's until the eighteenth century reformers; or as Rahman shows, it presents a chaotic phase in Sufi development. In the late twentieth century, the term again carried a similar connotation to that which existed during the thirteenth century. See Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam*, Oneworld Publications, 2000, p.133; John Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in Modern World*, Syracuse University Press, 1984, p.29 and Elizabeth Sirriyeh, "Sufi Thought and its Reconstruction" in Suha Taji-Farouki & Basheer Nafi, *Islamic Thought in the 20th Century*, pp.122-123.

describing the state of affairs of Sufism and the changes that took place during that particular period.¹⁰⁸ In this sense, al-Ghazali found that the term "Sufism" is laden with many connotations, and felt that it needed to be changed and did his Indian contemporary, Abū al-Ḥasan Alī al-Nadawī who felt that the best term for Sufism is "*Tazkiya*" (to grow spiritually).¹⁰⁹ In addition, he suggested terms such as *iḥsān* and '*ilm al-bāṭin* (the inner knowledge). Similarly, al-Nadawī, felt that terms convey the essence of spirituality in Islam which is based on the Qur'ān and *sunna*.¹¹⁰

Al-Ghazali was not the only modern Muslim activist attracted to the spiritual element of Islam. 'Abduh, Riḍā and al-Bannā all started as Sufi novices before they were either freed from its influences or turned their backs on it. In fact, al-Bannā spoke of his attachment to a local Sufi order called Al-Ḥuṣāfiyya.¹¹¹ 'Imāra believes that al-Ghazali and al-Qaraḍāwī's attitude towards Sufism represents the revivalist school which combines reason, text, emotion and knowledge. He further remarks that al-Ghazali's view on Sufism is very close to 'Abduh's¹¹² while al-Qaraḍāwī's is to Riḍā's.¹¹³ It is interesting to note that although all the aforementioned Islamists turned their backs on Sufism some such as al-Qaraḍāwī and Sa'īd Ḥawā embraced what the Syrian Muḥammad al-Mubārak called "the '*salafisation*' of Sufism

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, pp.11-12.

¹⁰⁹ This suggestion is based on Verse 62:2. "*Tazkiya*" is translated as "to grow spiritually" or "to purify". See M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A new translation*, p.371.

¹¹⁰ Similarly, Ibn Taymiyya before them was not concerned with names as with whether Sufism conforms to *sharī'a*. See *Ibn Taymiyya was al-Taṣawwuf*, p.23.

¹¹¹ Al-Bannā, *Mudhakirāt al-Da'wa wa al-Dā'iyyah*. See also Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, pp.214-215 and Brynjar Lia, *The Society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement, 1928-1942*, Ithaca Press, 1998, pp.25-26.

¹¹² 'Abduh believes that the main concerns of Sufism are "the curing of hearts and purification from all that obstructs the inward eye". This is quoted by Martin Lings in *A Moslem Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaykh Ahmad al-'Alawi*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1961, p.110 (note that the title was changed to *A Sufi Saint in the Twentieth Century* in 1971 edition). See also Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt*, p.41.

¹¹³ Muḥammad 'Amāra, *Yūsuf Al-Qaraḍāwī*, Vol. 2, p.807.

and the 'Sufisation' of *salafīyya*".¹¹⁴ This brings to mind 'Abduh who according to Sirriyeh, retained a deep affection for true Sufism.

The Grand Mufti of Egypt condemned the side of Sufism which he saw as contradicting the Qur'ān, the *sunna* and the practice of the *salaf*. Beliefs such as *al-tawassul* (intercession) are a case in point.¹¹⁵ While 'Abduh provided al-Ghazali and others with the framework to attack Sufism, he also identified two factors that helped to distort the essence of the true Sufism – the first is the enemy within, the Sufis themselves who misunderstood its meanings and the second is the *fuqahā'*.¹¹⁶ It is apparent that al-Ghazali did not experience a journey in Sufism similar to 'Abduh and al-Bannā who made the journey from Sufism to *salafīyya* to *salafī*-Sufism. This is different from Riḍā who cut himself from his Sufi roots due to his affinity with Wahhābīsm. By way of comparison Al-Ghazali's only experience with Sufism is through his father who was a novice. Added to this is his experience with the Muslim Brotherhood, which explains his reluctance either to totally condemn or embrace Sufism. On the one hand, he condemned what he saw as deviations from the true path, and on the other he appreciated the many services rendered by the Sufi orders to Islam in terms of spreading its message, resisting colonial rule and enlightening Muslims the world over.¹¹⁷

Sufism in the second half of twentieth century seems to be recovering from the Wahhābī attacks which were compounded by the attacks from nationalism and the forces of modernity.¹¹⁸ This is despite the observation made by the famous A. J. Arberry who in 1950s

¹¹⁴ Muhammad al-Mubārak, *al-Nizām al-'Aqa'id fi'l-Islam*, IIIT, Cairo, 1989, p.51, Al-Qaradāwī, *fi'l-Ṭarīq ilā Allah: Al-Ḥayā al-Rabāniyya*, p.24 and Sa'id Ḥawā, *Jawālāt fi'l-Fiqhayn al-Akbar wa al-Kabīr*, Maktabat Wahba, Cairo, 1981, p.20.

¹¹⁵ 'Abduh, *Al-'Amāl al-Kāmila*, Vol. 3, pp.520-21.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, p. 86. See also Badawi's *Reformers of Egypt*, p.41.

¹¹⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Naḥam al-Islam*, pp.135-136.

¹¹⁸ For example, the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk launched a war against Sufism. Atatürk viewed Sufism as a reactionary and subversive force in the newly established state. He ordered the closure of all the *tekkes* (Sufi lodges). Kudsi Erguner gives a very moving evocation of this period in his memoir, *A Journey of Sufi Musician: One Man's Journey through East and West*, Saqi Books, 2005.

lamented the end of Sufism as a force which once dominated "the hearts and the minds of learned and earnest men".¹¹⁹ According to Arberry Sufism no longer seemed relevant to political and social forces. Nevertheless, Sufism still exerts an influence in the life of the masses, and continues to resurface and resist attacks from the state (as in Turkey) and the *salafīs*.¹²⁰

There was a revival in Shi'ī Islam of the *'irfān* of Mulla Ṣadra due to the fact that Āyat Allah Khomeini practiced it.¹²¹ The writings of Ali Shari'ati (1933-1977) the ideologue of the Islamic Revolution convey the feelings of a Sufi revolutionary. In the Arab world Sufism has enjoyed popularity in some places with the support of the state such as in Syria.¹²² In some cases such as *'Aḥbāsh* movement in Lebanon, Sufism developed an anti-Islamists dimension.¹²³ In Egypt the new Shaykh Al-Azhar, Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib a Sufi himself, is playing an active public and political role. It is worth noting that the Sufi *ṭuruq* since the last decades have been politicised, and in the first presidential election after the recent revolution, the Sufi leaders decided to lend their support to Aḥmad Shafiq, the representative of the old guard rather than Mohammad Morsi the Islamist, who went on to win the election in June, 2012. These developments prove that Arberry's earlier observation that Sufism is in decline is wrong.¹²⁴ During his life Al-Ghazali was aware of the Sufi resurgence, therefore he continued to warn against its negative impact on Muslims. Thus, his attitude towards Sufi

¹¹⁹ A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1950, p.133.

¹²⁰ Even in the cradle of Wahhābism, Sufism is making an appearance. See Mai Yamani, *Cradle of Islam: The Hejazi and the Quest of an Arabian Identity*, I. B.Tauris, 2004, pp.70-75.

¹²¹ For an account of Khomeini's *'irfān*, see Hamid Algar, *Imam Khomeini 1902-1962; the Pre-Revolution Years, in Islam, Politics and Social Movements*, edited by Edmund Burke, III and Ira M. Lapidus, I. B.Tauris, London, 1988, pp.268-271.

¹²² This due to the state's confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s.

¹²³ The movement's ideas were attacked by many in Saudi Arabia. Sa'd Ibn 'Alī al-Shahrānī, for instance did so in *Firqat al-Aḥbāsh, Nash'atuhā, 'Aqa'iduhā wa Āthāruhā*, Dār al-Fawa'id, Riyadh, 2002.

¹²⁴ Sirriyyeh discusses the decline, the continuity and the resurgence of apolitical and political Sufism. See chapter five and six in *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*.

orders and its practices did not change as he continued to criticise the Sufism as embodied in Sufi orders.¹²⁵

Finally, al-Ghazali's contribution should therefore be evaluated in the context of the history of Egypt in twentieth century, the development of Muslim societies and the emergence of the middle and educated classes who respect Sufism, but still question its relevance to the formation of society. He questioned its importance as part of the national identity, and pointed out the impact of modernity on the Sufi orders. All these factors enable al-Ghazali's contribution to be assessed either to undermine Sufism or reform it. In the following section a discussion will ensue as to how he examined at the question of free will and predestination.

Free will and predestination

Muslim modernists from al-Afghānī onwards seem to agree that Muslim misunderstanding of *al-qaḍā' wa al-qadar* (free will and predestination) is the main factor in Muslim self-defeat. Muslim intellectuals see free will as a force that empowers and encourages Muslims to work hard. Some, such as al-Afghānī, were concerned mainly with correcting Western misconceptions about *qadar* in Islam. According to him, "the *feranj* (Westerners) think that the creed of *qadar* means 'predestination', and if we were able to dissociate *qadar* belief from the Jabrite belief, then we would be able to change the perception of Muslims from being lackeys to brave ones".¹²⁶

In similar vein, Shakīb Arslān (1869-1946) defended Islam from the accusation of fatalism made by Western writers, and put the blame instead on indolent Muslims. As with

¹²⁵ As is evident from the books such as *Mushkilat al-Islam Khārij Ardīhi kayfa Nufākir Fihi, Mi'at Su'āl 'An al'l-Islam, Dustūr al-Wahda al-Thaqāfiyya* that he published in the last decade of his life.

¹²⁶ Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, *Al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar*, Cairo, n.d., p.10.

al-Afghani, he explained how Islam values human freedom and how this led to the flourishing of Muslim civilisation.¹²⁷ Conversely, Mālik Bennabi believes that Islam lost its dynamism when Muslims failed to understand the meaning of the verse "God does not change the conditions of a people [for the better] unless they change what is in themselves," (13:11). He reminds Muslims that this verse has become a symbol of a school of thought seeking to rouse Muslims from their slumber.¹²⁸ It is true that this verse is always cited by Muslim scholars as a key factor for progress, and around its meaning there emerged an intellectual current.¹²⁹ The Algerian scholar, Ibn Bādīs who was concerned with the same issue, differentiated between "two Islams" namely *al-wirāthī* (the inherited) and *al-dhātī* (literally "personal") which means "the real". It is this latter that conforms to reason.¹³⁰

Following in the footsteps of al-Afghānī and Arslān, al-Ghazali links the weakness of Muslims to the way they construe the nature of free will and predestination.¹³¹ Hence, he endeavours to explain its true meaning and implications to the Muslim *umma*. He rejects the idea that became prevalent in Sufi traditions that human beings have no say in their actions and that they are mere actors in the grand scheme of things.¹³² He believes in the total freedom of human beings in relation to their actions. For him, predestination is a rejection of revelation, a "fabrication of human acts (on earth) from Adam until the Day of Judgement, in fact it is a total rejection of Allah and His messengers".¹³³ In this respect, his attitude is contrary to the view of those who associate Jabrite thinking with Muslim orthodoxy.¹³⁴

¹²⁷ Shakīb Arslān, *Limādhā Ta'akhar al-Muslimūn wa Taqadam Ghayruhum*, Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayā, Beirut, n.d., pp.110-112.

¹²⁸ Malik Bennabi, *Wijhat al-'Ālam al-Islami*, Dār al-Fikr, Cairo, 2000, p.53.

¹²⁹ One of the representatives of this is Jawdat Sa'īd with his book, *Ḥatā Yughayirū Mā bi-Anfusihim*.

¹³⁰ See Aḥmad Maḥmūd al-Jazzār, *Al-Imām al-Mujaddid Ibn Bādīs wa al-Tasawwuf*, Alexandria, 1999, p.62.

¹³¹ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya fi'l-Qrn al-Ḥālī*, p.67.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp.67-68.

¹³³ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.170.

¹³⁴ Akhtar, *The Qur'an and the Secular Mind*, p.177.

According to al-Ghazali, "*jabr*" in Islam is confined only to God's universal knowledge (*'ilm*) which does not mean that the fate of human being is predestined, or that they are therefore denied free will.¹³⁵ Allah knows a person's destiny as His Knowledge is limitless and absolute.¹³⁶ However, God does not intervene or force human beings to act in a certain way.¹³⁷ It is humans who realize change in the world, and henceforth determine their own future. Based on this, al-Ghazali believes that the conflict between verses which entail predestination and those which mean free will has to do with interpretation. He believes that it is inconceivable that God gives human beings a choice, then determines their fate in the Hereafter regardless of their human actions.¹³⁸ Al-Ghazali recognizes that that part of the problem emanates from the argument between theological groups – the Qadarites, the Murji'a, the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites. This is a debate that has continued throughout Muslim history.

At this stage the way al-Ghazali discussed issues of free will and predestination in his writings should be pointed out; that is he tackled them differently from one book to another. The emphasis in *'Aqīdāt al-Muslim*, for example, is on the theoretical aspects of *al-qaḍā' wa al-qadar* and their implications for Muslim's life. He explains that there is no contradiction between human free will and God's knowledge.¹³⁹ Human freedom is constrained within the limits of human reason.¹⁴⁰

In later books al-Ghazali emphasizes the social effects of Jabrite belief on Muslim societies. Moreover, he goes further to argue that *jabr* is a manifestation of tyranny whether

¹³⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Humūm Dā'iyyah*, pp.90-93 and *Al-Maḥāwir al-Khamsa li'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, pp.30-44. It is worth mentioning here that the chapter on free will and predestination in *Al-Maḥāwir* is reproduced in his book, *Al-Sunna*, pp.169-188.

¹³⁶ See also Shaltūt, *Al-Islām 'Aqīda wa Sharī'a*, p.50; Al-Būṭī, *Ḥuriyat al-Insān fī Zīl 'Ubudiyyat Allah*, Dār al-Fikr, Damascus, 1992, p.43-44 and Sha'rāwī, *Al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, p.59.

¹³⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Humūm Dā'iyyah*, p.87.

¹³⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Mi'at Su'āl 'an al-Islām*, Vol. 1, p.71.

¹³⁹ Al-Ghazali, *'Aqīdāt al-Muslim*, pp.97-120.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.99.

it be the tyranny of Sufi masters or the tyranny of despot rulers, because both demand total submission from their followers.¹⁴¹ Al-Ghazali believes that this is a total denial of human free will because the freedom of human beings is not a right given by man to man, but a natural right granted to him by His Maker. This right entails that human beings should strive to fulfill the divine rights over him; that is, to be faithful servants.¹⁴² Accordingly, the more that man becomes faithful in servitude to God the more freedom he will attain. This kind of freedom is what 'Imāra calls "balanced freedom", which lies between extreme predestination and absolute freedom. It is this freedom that enables human beings to fully play their role as the *khalīfa* or vicegerent of God on earth.¹⁴³

Al-Ghazali believes that the best way to explain the misconceived idea of predestination is through careful examination of the verses of *qadar* in the Qur'ān as well as critical analysis of *aḥādīth* used by Sufis alike to justify fatalism, and deny the ability of human beings to create their own actions. Conversely, these were used by other groups to justify the total freedom of humans to create their own actions.¹⁴⁴ Al-Ghazali puts much emphasis on *sunna* where he examines *aḥādīth* he considers to be problematic, either because their meanings entail a denial of human will, or because there are weak links in their *sanad* (chain of narration).¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, they are problematic because some of these are *aḥādīth ṣaḥīḥa* (sound) and reported in the canonical books of *sunna* such as the one reported by 'Ā'isha, the mother of the believers where a child died and she said, "This is the happiness for this child who is a bird amongst the birds of paradise."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Ṭāqāt al-Mu'atāla*, pp.35-36.

¹⁴² Al-Ghazali, *Ḥuqūq al-Insān*, p.65.

¹⁴³ Muḥammad 'Amāra, *Al-Manhaj al-Islami*, IIIT, Cairo, 1991, pp.89-90.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Ghazali discusses this issue in detail in *Al-Maḥāwir al-Khamsa*, pp.30-45; *Difā' 'An al-Sharī'a wa al-'Aqīda*, pp.85-95; *'Aqīdāt al-Muslim*, pp.96-120 and *Min Hunā Na'lam*, pp.23-29.

¹⁴⁵ In *Al-Sunna*, *Humūm Dā'iyyah* and *Kayfa Naḥam al-Islam*. There are many examples on this point.

¹⁴⁶ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Kitāb al-Qadar*, No. 2662.

Al-Ghazali comments that such *aḥādīth* leave us astounded.¹⁴⁷ He adds that "there are many *aḥādīth* which are used to emphasize predestination, but they need serious study in order to help Muslims to get out of their psychological and social defeatism which has afflicted them in the past and present".¹⁴⁸ It is perhaps pertinent that there are *aḥādīth* which are problematic in terms of their *sanad*, but the meaning of the *matn* (actual text) does not contradict the Qur'ān. An example of the type of *ḥadīth* which al-Ghazali believes require serious study is one reported by 'Ubada Ibn al-Ṣāmit where he told his son that the Prophet said, "That the first thing Allah created was the pen and He told him to write."¹⁴⁹ Al-Ghazali sees no problem with such *aḥādīth* because they may be easily identified by able and capable scholars. His main problem is the *ṣaḥīḥ* ones which are taken as a basis to determine the principles of faith. What al-Ghazali means here are *aḥādīth al-āḥād* which cannot be used in the realm of *'aqīda*, as discussed in Chapter Four.

According to him, in some cases one feels surprised when reading *aḥādīth ṣaḥīḥa* that entail that human beings are predestined for paradise or hellfire regardless of their deeds. In the face of what seems to be a contradiction of the meaning of the human mission on earth and God's determining knowledge, there are two alternatives to choose from. One is to resort to a hermeneutical approach, and the other to discard these traditions as problematic. He remarks that with some effort, he is able to remove the meaning of predestination from many prophetic reports, but he is not able to reform "minds that were bent on delaying the progress of Islam by using vague *aḥādīth* which contain many flaws".¹⁵⁰

According to Al-Ghazali, a *ḥadīth* cannot be used to describe God's intervention in this world as a predetermined act because it robs God of being a Just God. It also robs man of his

¹⁴⁷ See for example, *Al-Sunna*, pp.185-188.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.184.

¹⁴⁹ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Sunna, Bāb al-Qadar*, No. 4700.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.188.

freedom to create and choose his actions.¹⁵¹ For al-Ghazali the case for predestination is groundless. It is the result of human misunderstanding of revelation, a factor which equally applies to the Sufis, Qur'anic commentators and scholars of *ḥadīth*. Thus, it is of paramount importance that they examine the texts with eyes open in order to liberate the Muslim mind from all misconceptions, and inspire Muslims to be active players in this world.¹⁵² Al-Ghazali adds that man's responsibility is essentially a matter of choice rather than something that has been predestined for him.¹⁵³

Unsurprisingly, the *salafīs* do not accept al-Ghazali's views on *al-qadar*, firstly because of his attitude to *ḥadīth al-āḥād*, and secondly because of what they see as a partial understanding of the meaning of *al-qadar*.¹⁵⁴ For them, al-Ghazali only speaks of *qadar* in terms of God's *'ilm* (knowledge), which excludes other aspects of free will in Islam such as *quddra* (will), fate written in *al-Kitāba* (in the eternal tablet) and *al-khālq* (the creation).¹⁵⁵ It is obvious that al-Ghazali tries to affirm (total) human freedom, but there is no indication that he fails to grasp the full meaning of *al-qadar* in Islam. One cannot pass judgment by selecting just a few statements from his books. In fact, al-Ghazali's understanding of free will is far removed from Ibn Taymiyya's idea, but similar to 'Abduh's, Sābiq's, Shaltūt's and Qaraḍāwī's among many others.¹⁵⁶ Besides, al-Ghazali's concern is not with theological argument. Rather, it is with the social effects of misconceived idea of free will on the fate of Muslim societies.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.188.

¹⁵² This understanding is similar to the one presented by 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād. Al-'Aqqād believes that there is a difference between the Muslim who understands *jabr* through the Qur'ān and *sunna*, and the Muslim who believes that his destiny is written, and is therefore imposed on him against his will. See, *Al-Islam wa Abāṭil Khuṣūmih*, Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, Beirut, 1974, p.90.

¹⁵³ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya fi 'l-Qrn al-Ḥālī*, pp.67-68.

¹⁵⁴ Sulymān al-'Aūda, *Fī Ḥiwār Ḥadī'*, pp.48-58.

¹⁵⁵ *Al-qadar* as defined by Muslim theologians to mean, Allah's absolute knowledge, the belief in what is written in *al-lawḥ al-Maḥfūz*, the belief that Allah has created everything and lastly that Allah's will is absolute and only what He wills happens. See for example, *Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya*, Vol. 8, pp. 94-95, and Muḥammad N. Yāsīn *al-Imān*, p. 180-182.

¹⁵⁶ See Sayyid Sābiq, *Al-'Aqā'id al-Islamiyya*, al-Fath li'l-'Ilām al-Arabi, Cairo, 2002, pp.79-92; al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Imān bi'l-Qadar*, Al-Maktab al-Islami, Beirut, 2001, pp.19-23 and *Fatāwā Shaltūt*, p.47.

As the discussion above shows, al-Ghazali believes that the word *qadar* in the Qur'ānic context is related to the way the universe came to be, or how God designed it. Consequently, the word "*qaddara*" means "arranged" rather than "fated" or "written" upon the human being. Hence, there is no such thing as "*maktūb*" (predestined) in Islamic thought. This leads to another theme that is *salafīyya*, which will now be briefly discussed.

Salafīyya

Al-Ghazali championed a type of *salafīyya*¹⁵⁷ that is in line with reason, which he often referred to as *al-salafīyya al-wā'iya* "conscious *salafīyya*".¹⁵⁸ He means "a rational and emotional tendency that takes its roots from the early pious generations. Its loyalty is to the book of God and the example of the Prophet".¹⁵⁹ This definition of *salafīyya* is different from the *nuṣuṣīyya* "scriptural" which is usually associated with the students of Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb.¹⁶⁰ Al-Ghazali views *salafīyya* as a continuous tendency associated with *tajdīd* (reform) in Islam rather than a manifestation of a specific group or movement. He is very close to the vision of al-Afghānī and 'Abduh in this respect.¹⁶¹

Al-Ghazali's view is also in keeping with the many Islamists who view *salafīyya* as a way of thinking which seeks to emulate the example of the Prophet and the first generation of his companions as well as the generation that followed them.¹⁶² Moreover all modern Islamic

¹⁵⁷ For the many meanings of "*salafīyya*", see Ahmed Moussali, *Historical Dictionary of Islamic Fundamentalists in the Arab World, Iran and Turkey*, p.258; Itzhak Weisman, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafīyya and Arabism in Damascus*, Brill, Leiden, 2001, pp.40-42 and pp. 66-67; Carl Brown, *Religion and State: Muslim Approach to Politics*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000, p. 32 and 96; and Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action" in Roel Meijer (ed.) *Global Salafism: Islamic New Religious Movement*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2009, pp.33-50.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, Vol.2, p.201.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.202-204.

¹⁶⁰ According to 'Imārathis type of *salafīyya* prefers the text, *ḥadīth* or *fatāwas* of the companions of the Prophet which are collectively called "*akhbār*" or "*ma'thūrāt*". See *Al-Salafīyya*, Dār al-Ma'ārif, Tunisia, n.d., pp.23-24.

¹⁶¹ Al-Ghazali, *Ilal wa Adwiya*, pp.74-75.

¹⁶² For a similar understanding of al-Qaraḍāwī, see *Awlawīyyāt al-Ḥaraka al-Islamiyya fi'l-Marḥala al-Qādima*, Mu'sasat al-Risāla, Beirut, 1991, p.103.

movements (political, educational or revolutionaries) have emphasised the *salafī* aspect of their programmes. Nevertheless, some commentators such as ‘Imāra consider *salafīyya* as a historical phenomenon that emerged during the Abbasid period, and which started with Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal as a reaction to the rationalist school of the Mu’tazila.¹⁶³ However, Muḥammad Fathī ‘Uthmān believes that *salafīyya* is a permanent feature of Islam; hence it is always "modern", meaning that it is appropriate for any age or time.¹⁶⁴ ‘Uthman's views on *salafīyya* make it synonymous with *tajdīd*.

Taking these views together, al-Ghazali makes it clear that he objects to linking *salafīyya* with a certain group, land, or *madhhab*. According to him, *salafīyya* "is not a group of people who live in a part of the Arab world and follow a certain way of life. We reject this understanding and we refrain from adopting it".¹⁶⁵ Al-Būṭī agrees with al-Ghazali and believes that the term "*salaf*" is a misappropriation, adding that the early Muslim generation never referred to themselves as "*salafīs*". Also, they were not in any way literalists as the modern term implies.¹⁶⁶

Al-Būṭī adds that "*salafīyya*" is a term in Islam that has been passed down through generations, and its significance stems from being blessed by its proximity to the time of Prophet.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, any attempt to organise a group bearing the name "*salaf*" should be rejected as such an attempt in itself constitutes *bid’a* (innovation).¹⁶⁸ In similar vein, al-Qaradāwī believes that *salafīyya* is neither the stagnant past nor a heritage. He also objects to the view that the Prophet is the true *salafī* and, most importantly, he believes that

¹⁶³ ‘Amāra, *Al-Salafīyya*, pp.9-13.

¹⁶⁴ Muḥammad Fathī ‘Uthmān, *Al-Salafīyya fi ‘l-Mujtama‘āt al-Mu‘āṣira*, Dār al-Qalam, Kuwait, 1993, pp.11-15.

¹⁶⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, p.202-204.

¹⁶⁶ Muḥammad Sa‘īd R. al-Būṭī, *Al-Salafīyya Marḥala Zamaniyya Mubāraka lā Mdhhab Islami*, Dār al-Fikr, Damascus, 1990, pp.9-14.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.22-23.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.24.

salafiyya should not be a carbon copy of the past.¹⁶⁹ Al-Ghazali, al-Būṭī and al-Qaraḍāwī refer to the Wahhābīs as they are the people who have made *salafiyya* synonymous with the Ḥanbali school of *fiqh*.¹⁷⁰

Al-Ghazali acknowledges the contribution of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb to the service of Islam, but rejects the means used by his followers to spread the message of *tawḥīd*. Their methods aside, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb's *salafiyya* is no different from al-Ghazali's. According to Riḍā, al-Ghazali's teacher, ‘Abduh was also influenced by the Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb school.¹⁷¹

Contrary to what their critics say about them, the *salafīs* themselves present their school as partly rational and partly scriptural, where reason is not suppressed, but that it is not to be used at the expense of *aḥādīth*.¹⁷² Therefore they disassociate themselves from the ignorant "youngsters" whose only job is to say who is Muslim and who *kāfir*. These people are considered as *ghulā* (extremists) by all accounts. They are the ones al-Ghazali often encountered, but his criticism does not preclude what is known as "*al-salafiyya al-‘ilmiyya*" (scholastic *salafiyya*).¹⁷³ This is obvious in his books published in the last ten years of his life. The followers of Ibn ‘Abd Wahhāb are subject to criticism for many reasons and from many sides, but the matter is decidedly different when it comes to al-Ghazali.

Al-Ghazali, more than any other Muslim intellectual, uses confrontational language against the *salafīs* of Saudi Arabia. Readers of his books cannot fail but be struck by the ferocity of the debate – al-Ghazali's seemingly private war against the *salafīs*. He strips them

¹⁶⁹ Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islamiyya wa Humūm al-Waṭan al-Arabi*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, 1998, p.36.

¹⁷⁰ According to Albānī, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was a *salafī* in *‘aqīda*. However, in *fiqh* he was a follower of the Ḥanbali school. See *Al-Da’wa al-Salafiyya wa Mawqifuhā min al-Ḥarakāt al-Ukhrā*, Dār al-Imān, Alexandria, 2002, pp.27-28.

¹⁷¹ Muḥammad Fathī ‘Uthman, *Al-Salafiyya fi ‘l-Mujtama’āt al-Mu’āsira*, p.75.

¹⁷² Albānī, *Al-Da’wa al-Salafiyya*, pp.13-26.

¹⁷³ ‘Abd Raḥmān ‘Abd al-Khāliq (1939-), a leading voice in the *salafī* camp, wrote a book entitled *Al-Uṣūl al-‘Ilmiyya li’l-Da’wa al-Salafiyya* on this.

of any intellectual integrity from the outset by remarking that "they are neither *salaf* nor *khalaf*".¹⁷⁴ Al-Ghazali often depicts them as reactionary and mentally ill, adding that their brand of *salafiyya* is synonymous with madness.¹⁷⁵ He considers them to be nomads in their manners, and devoid of reason because to them "reason is guilty until proven innocent".¹⁷⁶ He goes further to describe them as "a small gang of semi illiterates who want to inflame the fire that has been extinguished,"¹⁷⁷ and consequently "their behaviour is that of highway robbers".¹⁷⁸ They in turn counter al-Ghazali's arguments in their own books, rebutting his ideas, and accusing him of being a secularist and one of Ataturk's followers.¹⁷⁹

It is worth noting that al-Ghazali's attitude to the literalist (scripturalist) *salafiyya* is mainly shaped by his time in Saudi Arabia as well as his work in Algeria where he spoke about the practices of some *salafīs* and his efforts to educate a new generation free of bigotry.¹⁸⁰ Al-Ghazali's argument against the *salafīs* is centred around four issues as follows:

1. what he perceives to be their arrogance in claiming that they are equal to the early *salaf* despite what he considers to be their lack of knowledge;
2. his view that they have diverted the attention of ordinary people from real work by laying emphasis on trivial matters such as the acceptable mode of dress;
3. their extreme form of *salafiyya* which is used by the agents of America and Russia to promote "the ugly face of Islam"¹⁸¹ while suppressing the voice of

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p.91.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p.109.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Humūm Dā'iyyah*, p.108.

¹⁷⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, pp.56-57.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁷⁹ The irony is that he is accused by the secularists of being an extremist. See Fahmī Huwaydī, *Al-Maqālāt al-Mahzūra*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, pp.114-115.

¹⁸⁰ Al-Ghazali, *al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya fi 'l-Qarn al-Hāli*, p.118.

¹⁸¹ Al-Ghazali wonders why "big" *salafīs* who spend all their lives writing books on unimportant aspects of Islam have not written a word about the modern Crusades, Zionism, Communism and the Secularists. See *Al-Fasād al-Siyasī fi 'l-Mujtam'āt al-Arabiyya wa al-Islamiyya*, p.29.

moderate Islamists who represent true Islam;¹⁸² and most importantly perhaps, their obsession with resurrecting the old divides, degrading the early generation of *salaf* and representing as acceptable what al-Ghazali calls "corrupted religion" or "a deceitful form of Islam";¹⁸³ and

4. in al-Ghazali's mind, these people are not true *salafīs* because the real ones are those who understand the moral, social and political bases of reform as stated in Islam, and as has been championed by the *salaf*.¹⁸⁴

Al-Ghazali's encounters with the *salafīs* are theological in nature. They often accuse him of being an Ash'arite, despite his *salafī* inclination,¹⁸⁵ or ask him awkward questions to expose him as such, questions about the creation of Adam and whether or not God created him in his own image,¹⁸⁶ are often rebuffed by al-Ghazali as unnecessary and that the intention of asking such questions is not for knowledge, but to divide Muslims as before into Mu'tazilites or Ash'arites. On the question of Adam, al-Ghazali's response to it is that "There is nothing like Him" (42:11).¹⁸⁷ He believes that the debates between the *salaf* and the *khalaf* on the nature of God and His attributes is literal, and therefore has no implication on *tawhīd*. Both sides are motivated by this debate to affirm the Oneness of God and His transcendence.

One of the problems that concerns al-Ghazali with regard to the understanding of the *salafīs* is their reliance on *takfīr* (excommunication) of those who disagree with them. They

¹⁸² Al-Ghazali, *Sir Ta'khur al-Arab wa al-Muslimīn*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁸³ Al-Ghazali, *Qaḍāyā al-Mar'a*, pp.29, 67 and 96.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹⁸⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Humūm Dā'iyah*, pp.9-10.

¹⁸⁶ He was commenting on a book written on this question by Ḥumūd al-Twijirī, *'Aqīdāt 'Ahl al-Imān fī Khalq Adam 'alā Surat al-Raḥmān*.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, p.56 and *'Aqīdāt al-Muslim*, pp.173-179.

do not hesitate to brand the established ‘*ulamā*’ as *kāfir*.¹⁸⁸ Al-Ghazali had a similar experience with *jihādī* groups in Egypt when the government sought his expertise in debates the latter organised with members of *Al-Jamā’a al-Islamiyya*, who permit the killing of Muslims who do not follow their creed. He chided them by remarking that Islam is not a religion of assassination.¹⁸⁹ Al-Ghazali also faced a similar situation during the famous Faraj Foda trial in 1994 when al-Ghazali was scathingly criticised.¹⁹⁰

This section has attempted to present the way in which al-Ghazali understood the term *salafiyya*, and has found that he understood it in its ideal sense to mean a rational movement in Islamic thought that has nothing to do with a scholar or a school of *fiqh*, a place or specific country.¹⁹¹ One cannot help but note that his altercation with ritual *salafiyya* is sometimes influenced by his personal feelings, and it was a response to certain incidents mentioned above. What remains is the presentation of a general assessment of al-Ghazali's contribution to the field of Muslim theology.

***Imān*, reason and science**

According to Fahmi Jad‘ān, Professor of Philosophy at Jordan University in Amman, al-Ghazali among Muslim scholars, is the one who has left the most considerable, enduring legacy in the past century.¹⁹² He also says that al-Ghazali's legacy stands on a par with pre-modern and modern scholars as well as his contemporaries. While acknowledging that al-Ghazali did not attempt to build a theoretical or epistemological project dictated by modern

¹⁸⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Sir Ta’khir al-Arab wa al-Muslimīn*, p.63 and *Al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfiyya Bayna al-Muslimīn*, p.176.

¹⁸⁹ The meeting was reported in *Al-Wā’y al-Islami*, 1989.

¹⁹⁰ See Chapter 1.

¹⁹¹ Al-Ghazali was not unique in this understanding as most Muslim scholars try to define *salafiyya* away from its *madhhab* connotations. This is true of al-Bannā, Sayyid Sābiq, al-Qaraḍāwī, Huwaydī as well as al-Būtī. Huwaydī, *Azamat al-Wā’y al-Dīnī*, pp.32-40.

¹⁹² Fahmī Jad‘ān, *Al-‘Ālam Bayna Ḥadāyn: Nazrat fi’l-Mabādi’ al-Muwajihā li’l-Tajruba al-Ghazālīyya*, in *Al-‘Aṭa’ al-Fikrī li’l-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, pp.135-136.

methodologies used by philosophers and theologians, his contribution can nevertheless stand as such. This is because his main interest was how to project Islam in its entirety, including its political, social, economic, moral and spiritual aspects. His belief that Islam is for life does not imply that al-Ghazali was estranged from the rational Islamic principles of Abū Hāmid and Ibn Rushd.¹⁹³ Thus the main principles that al-Ghazali used to convey his ideas are *imān*, reason, science and emotion or heart with *imān*, with emotion standing at one end of the spectrum, science and reason at the other.¹⁹⁴

Al-Ghazali believed that the modern world cannot exist without *imān*, and he tried to provide a rational ground for it.¹⁹⁵ He attributed to reason the role that it (*imān*) can play. According to Jad'ān, al-Ghazali's rationalism is best suited to the spirit of his time, and may be described as "realist rationalism", a brand of rationalism that takes its reference point from Islam.¹⁹⁶ This perception is similar to Ghannouchi who views the relationship between faith and reason through the concept of "religious rationality" where the *naṣṣ* is dependent on its interpretation on human reasoning.¹⁹⁷

However, al-Ghazali's views on reason are best understood in the context of 'Abduh's school. It is 'Abduh who laid the ground work for modern Muslim rationalism. It is obvious that the kinds of issues tackled by al-Ghazali are similar to that of 'Abduh and his school. Al-Ghazali himself was aware of this situation when he characterised his approach as one based solely on revelation, but believed that reason should be the basis of revelation.¹⁹⁸

There is no doubt that al-Ghazali's stand is in the same vein as 'Abduh with regard to the

¹⁹³ Fahmī Jad'ān, *Al-'Ālam Bayna Ḥadāyn: Nazrat fī 'l-Mabādi' al-Muwajjihā li 'l-Tajruba al-Ghazālīyya*, in *Al-'Aṭa' al-Fikrī li 'l-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, pp.135-136.

¹⁹⁴ See 'Imāra for a similar view in *Yūsuf Al-Qaraḍāwī*, pp.804-805.

¹⁹⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Ḥaṣād al-Ghurūr*, p.67.

¹⁹⁶ Fahmī Jad'ān, *Al-'Ālam Bayna Ḥadāyn*, p.137.

¹⁹⁷ Azzām S. Tamīmī, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat within Islamism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p.42.

¹⁹⁸ He remarks in *Dustūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfiyya* that this school is represented by al-Khudārī, Shaltūt, Muḥammad 'Abd Allah Dirāz, Muḥammad al-Bahī, Muḥammad al-Madanī and Muḥammad Abū Zahra. See p.65.

role of reason or science in explaining religion. However, he was also very close to the ideas of Islamists such as al-Bannā and Quṭb, for he believed in the totality of Islam.¹⁹⁹ Islam, according to this approach, is a comprehensive religion capable of solving all the problems afflicting the modern world. His view vacillates between these two approaches.

While ‘Abduh and Riḍā are accused by their critics of being apologists, al-Ghazali was able to stave off criticism by taking the side of the revivalists. However, al-Ghazali lacked the clarity of Quṭb when it came to issues of philosophy and knowledge. Unlike al-Ghazali, Quṭb who is no philosopher himself, provides his readers with a systematic critique of philosophy in general and Muslim philosophy in particular.²⁰⁰

Nevertheless, Quṭb and al-Ghazali both share an abhorrence of modern philosophies, whether steeped in nationalism, capitalism or communism. Until his death, Quṭb believed in the totality of Islam, that it is self-sufficient and superior to other religions. Similarly, al-Ghazali believed in the Islam that is for life is not the Islam that is only for worship and personal ethics.²⁰¹

Al-Ghazali's approach tries to placate both sides – the modernist on the one hand and the *salafī* oriented approach of Riḍā and al-Bannā on the other – even though his grasp of Western knowledge was limited and based on secondary sources, mainly translated works from foreign languages. It is true, as Badawi explains with regard to ‘Abduh and Riḍā, that both adopted the puritanical and "fundamentalistic" views of Ibn Taymiyya as well as the ethical values of al-Ghazali.²⁰² This view is also valid for al-Ghazali. The difference between

¹⁹⁹ Quṭb states that "Islam is one unit, either be taken as such or be left", *Dirāsāt Islamiyya*, p.88. Al-Ghazali's *Sīr Ta'khur al-Muslimīn*, p.49 shows the similarities between them.

²⁰⁰ Quṭb, *Khaṣa'is al-Taṣwūr al-Islāmī*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, 1982, pp.10-12. Ahmed Moussalli provides a very good insight into Quṭb's views on philosophy. See Ahmed Moussili, "Sayyid Quṭb's View of Knowledge" in *The American Journal of Islamic Sciences*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (December 1990), pp.315-335.

²⁰¹ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Maḥawir al-Khamsa li'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, p.51.

²⁰² Badawi, *Reformers of Egypt*, p.45.

the revivalist al-Ghazali and the modernist ‘Abduh is that while ‘Abduh failed to provide an adequate response to the needs of the Muslim community, al-Ghazali was able to communicate his ideas to larger audiences.

On a practical level by understanding that rational thinking is well entrenched in Islamic thought, the *nass* and the world, al-Ghazali was able to avoid the old debate which divided Muslim scholars into various camps. Al-Ghazali believed that there is only one Islam, and that is the Islam of revelation.²⁰³ He understands the division between the Sunnīs and the Shi‘as as a matter of *furū’*, subdivisions of the fundamentals not related to *imān* where what is at stake is Muslim unity.²⁰⁴ Sectarianism is rooted in the practices of those such as ruling families, parties, arrogant leaders and ignorant masses who benefit from divisions.²⁰⁵

Notwithstanding, there is a question that remains to be answered concerning the relation between religion and reason. Al-Ghazali gives the impression that science and its modern discoveries can be taken as proof of the validity of religion. In his analysis science stands as a valid proof of the certainties of religion. Al-Ghazali spoke approvingly of the conformity between science and religion. For example, he praised Cressy Morrison's book *Man Does not Stand Alone* saying that he could use the book to teach creed in addition to the Qur‘ān.²⁰⁶ There may be a claim at this point that al-Ghazali was trying to use science, which is a human exercise, to prove what is the divine and the absolute in the same way that ‘Abduh tried to understand the Qur‘ān to suit changing circumstances.²⁰⁷ Al-Ghazali's response would be that "the Greatness of God Almighty becomes clearer in the age of science and

²⁰³ See his attack on Goldzeiher in *Difā’ ‘An al-‘Aqīda wa al-Sharia Dīda Maṭā‘in al-Mustashriqīn*, p.212.

²⁰⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*, pp.127-131.

²⁰⁵ Al-Ghazali, *‘Aqīdāt al-Muslim*, p.179 and *Zalām Min al-Gharb*, p.194.

²⁰⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, Vol.3, p. 207 and *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazālī*, Vol.1.

²⁰⁷ M. Badawi, "Mulāḥazāt Ḥawla al-Fikr wa al-Aydiyulūjyā fī Miṣr al-Ḥadītha" in *Al-‘Ijtihād*, Vol. 3, No. 10/11, 1991, Beirut, pp.143-171.

technological progress. They are a friend of *imān* and an enemy of atheism".²⁰⁸ Here al-Ghazali follows the spirit of ‘Abduh who believed in the role of reason as the main source of discovering religion, but he maintained that the role of reason ends there and that human beings are obliged to follow the revelation.²⁰⁹

Conclusion

In this chapter an attempt has been made to discuss al-Ghazali's view with regard to theology. The discussion is centred round four issues which al-Ghazali kept revisiting, and which formed the basis of his reform ideas – these are *kalām*, Sufism, free will and *salafiyya*. According to him each one of these issues contributed to one degree or another to the corruption of Islam. In all four issues al-Ghazali felt that a new thinking is needed in order to affirm the true Islam of the *salaf*. His solution was to put forward a new approach which meant a rejection of what he saw as distorted aspects of the above issues.

Al-Ghazali's new thinking was always based on the call to return to the true forms of rationalism, Sufism and *salafiyya* – "true rationalism" represented by the *salaf*, not the Mu'tazilites; the early Sufism of Al-Ḥaṣan al-Baṣri and Al-Junayd al-Baghdādī, not the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabī; and the *salafiyya* represented by the early generation of Muslims, not one embodied by the Wahhābīs. In the four issues discussed above, al-Ghazali perceived the problem in the way that Muslim scholars looked at the rule of reason in relation to revelation. He found that reason is either neglected or celebrated at the expense of revelation. For him the role of reason is to interpret revelation, and revelation in turn limits reason's role in searching for the truth. In this sense al-Ghazali never did give reason precedence over revelation. Based on this analysis al-Ghazali went on to call for an

²⁰⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*, Vol. 3, pp.24, 28 and 177.

²⁰⁹ ‘Abduh, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, pp.11-113.

interpretation of Islam that rejects fatalism and urged Muslims to fully participate in this world as free human beings who are morally responsible for their acts. His belief in monotheism as revealed in the Qur'ān has no place for an argument that is pursued by Muslim rationalist groups and philosophers, and he preferred to ignore *khilāf* maintaining that the disagreement between these groups with regard to the nature of God is irrelevant and are mainly linguistic in nature which does not affect the belief in the Oneness of God.

As with most Muslim scholars from 'Abduh onwards, he blamed foreign ideas such as the Greeks' for causing the dispute among Muslims. Because of this al-Ghazali ruled out any role for philosophy to solve or guide human beings towards discovering what is out of the limitation of human intellect. For him man must depend on revelation to learn about *al-ghayb*. Furthermore human beings should not ask questions beyond their mental reach. Al-Ghazali's main aim was not to adopt the same route taken by classical Muslim philosophers who were able to reach a compromise between Hellenism and Islam due to his limited knowledge of Muslim philosophy and his lack of appreciation of Greek philosophy, all of which was reflected in his simplistic view towards them, especially his view that Hellenistic influences on Islam is a form of cultural invasion. However, it has to be appreciated that one aspect of his whole endeavour concerning his critical approach to *aḥādīth* is used as the criterion for belief.²¹⁰ In this respect al-Ghazali's grounding in traditional Islamic education gives him an edge over others such as Quṭb who was a self-taught scholar and the product of modern education.

Finally, the way al-Ghazali presents his arguments on all of the above issues sometimes follows logic of its own. For the most part, he tries to take the middle path without

²¹⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Laysa Mina al-Islam*, p.33.

appearing to be apologetic.²¹¹ Although he speaks of his "school of thought" which is based on benefiting from all trends in Islamic thought,²¹² he keeps going back and forth, producing and reproducing the same ideas. This affects the consistency of his contribution, as he was responding to events of his time. As a result, he was sometimes forced to attack or defend his idea, and even give contradictory statements in some cases.²¹³

Theology was one of the areas where al-Ghazali tried examine how the lack of proper *fiqh* of the Qur'ān and *sunna* led to the decline of the Muslim *umma*, and how that in turn led to the decline of reason and Islamic intellectual life as examined above. Something else worth exploring next is how al-Ghazali tackled women's issues. His views offer a case study of how, after criticising the prevalent practices with regard to women, a Muslim scholar continues to reassess his views as his experience widens and his ideas mature. As will be evident in the chapter that follows, the importance of his views on women is of historical value, i.e. in terms of the development of Islamist thought on women's rights and their role in public life.

²¹¹ He sometimes sounds so. For example, when Aḥmad Zakī wrote saying that the essence of Western civilisation is based in Christianity, al-Ghazali objected to this and reminded Zakī that Western civilisation is based mainly on Muslim civilisation. See *Zalām Min al-Gharb*, pp.238-245. The same may be said with regard to his view on Darwin and his theory of evolution. He says that Darwin, unlike the general view about him, was a believer. His theory might be right or wrong, but it has no implication on the issue of faith. See *Raka'iz al-Imān*, pp.50-51.

²¹² Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazālī*, p.166.

²¹³ See *Humūm Dā'iyah* and how he spoke about Bin Bāz, p.117.

CHAPTER SIX

Women's Issues: Text and public space

Introduction

Al-Ghazali's preoccupation with women's rights, especially in Muslim societies, began early in his career. Although his book, *Qaḍāyā al-Mar'a Bayna al-Taqālīd al-Rākida wa al-Taqālīd al-Wāfida* which is devoted to women's issues was published late in his life in 1991, he nevertheless analysed the subject in almost all of his other books.¹ His style of analysis, characterised by repetition, varies from book to book where he would sometimes highlight the plight of women in Muslim societies and condemn men's attitude towards women's role at other times.² Many of his followers consider him to be a leading Islamist voice, who articulated many of their concerns in Arab and Muslim societies, in defending women's rights in Islam.³ This chapter will attempt to contextualise al-Ghazali's work on women's issues and assess his main contribution, tracing his writings from the early stages of his career to show the evolution of his ideas, mainly on women's role in public life.

Al-Ghazali's views on women may be outdated, taking into account what has transpired in the two decades since his death, but his views are nonetheless important in the history of women in Islamic movements and the changing attitude towards their public role as active agents in realising the desired change in their societies. New voices have emerged in the past

¹ There is another with "women" in the title which al-Ghazali co-authored with Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī and Aḥmad 'Umar Ḥāshim, *Al-Mar'a fī 'l-Islam* (1991). The chapter al-Ghazali contributed is reproduced from his previous book *Qaḍāyā al-Mar'a*.

² See *Hadhā Dīnunā*, pp.133-174; *Ḥuqqūq al-Insān Bayna Ta'ālīm al-Islam wa 'Ilān al-'Umam al-Mutaḥida*, pp.103-131; *Turāthunā al-Fikrī*, pp. 135-137; *Qadha'if al-Ḥaqq*, p. 149; *Zalām mina al-Gharb*, p. 127-148; *Min Maqālāt al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 1 and 3, pp.113 and 153; *Al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya fī 'l-Qarn al-Ḥālī*, pp.71-74 and *Ma'rakat al-Muṣaḥaf*, p.263.

³ See Raymond Baker, *Islam Without Fear: Egypt*, p. 98 and al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Shaykh Al-Ghazālī Kamā 'Araḥtuḥu*, Laṭīfa Al-Kinderī and Badr Mālik, "Tarbiyat al-Mar'a min Manzūr al-Ghazālī", *Majallat al-'Ulūm al-Tarbawīyya*, (Cairo University), Vol. 4, 2003.

decades which are now shaping the debate on women's issues and are engaged in reading Islamic texts from a woman's perspective, thus adding a different flavour to men's interpretation, especially of Qur'ānic verses relating to women. The "Arab Spring" revolutions of 2011 have given Arab women a voice alongside men to compel political changes in their societies, even in conservative societies such the Yemen. New political realities have also opened the way for women to participate in parliamentary elections in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt.⁴

Within this context, one may understand the importance of al-Ghazali's views in terms of the continuity of tackling gender issues throughout his career from the 1940s until his death in 1996. Despite the fact that al-Ghazali's thinking on women transformed from a purely traditional stance to what one may call progressive, this chapter will argue that al-Ghazali's contributions remain within the paradigm which was set by early Muslim modernists and reformers who argued for a change in the social perception of women and their role.⁵

This chapter will also argue that al-Ghazali had the courage to take positions on then sensitive issues such as women's right to work, education and political participation. For example, in the 1950s he was against mixed schools.⁶ However, later in life he advocated a kind of mixed education at university level, as long as female students guarded their modesty.⁷

The best way to assess al-Ghazali's contribution is perhaps to compare it with the views of his contemporaries, mainly the Muslim intellectuals who wrote on these issues from within the framework of Islamic movements and Islamic activism. The reference here is to

⁴ However, as the results of the particular elections state in the states have shown women's representation does not match their role in the revolutions and their struggle for their rights is ongoing.

⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Ilal wa Adwiya*, pp.74-76.

⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Hadhā Dīnunā*, p.182.

⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr* Vol.3, p. 38.

Islamic movements in general and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular. One should point to the fact that modern Islamic discourse on women is heavily influenced by Islamic activism because the issue of women, the family, sexuality and gender are crucial to Islamic movements.⁸ It is within this context that al-Ghazali projects his views with regard to women's issues. Before assessing al-Ghazali's views on women it is perhaps worth giving in chapter a brief discussion of Muslim reformers' views on women followed by a brief discussion of women and Islamic movements.

Muslim reformers and the question of women

Muslim reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries either debated the freedom of women within their segregated confines, or they understood women's role in terms of modernity which in turn is understood to mean technological progress and women's emancipation.⁹ The debate centres on their right to education as embedded in the teachings of Islam. While the reformers agreed upon the right to education, they differed on its type and method of implication.¹⁰ Women's issues are discussed by reformers in light of Western criticism of women's treatment in Muslim societies. The reformers' response is often characterised by an apologetic tone. According to Nabia Abbot (1897-1981), Western scholars who started to link women's degradation to Islam in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have brought denial and apologetics from the Muslim world and the claim that Islam accorded women a superior status. Both views, according to Abbot, are false.¹¹

⁸ Margaret Meriwether & Judith Tucker, *A Social History of Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East*, Westview Press, Colorado, 1999, p.16.

⁹ See Ellen L. Fleischmann, *The other Awakening*, in Margaret Meriwether & Judith Tucker, pp.98-99.

¹⁰ One example of this debate is Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Qāyātī's *Al-Sunna wa al-Kitāb fī Ḥukm al-Tarbiya wa al-Ḥijāb*, Maṭba'at al-Mawsu'āt, Cairo, 1901.

¹¹ Nabia Abbot, *Aisha the Beloved of Muḥammad*, preface by Sarah Graham-Brown, Saqi Books, London, 1985.

Furthermore, reformist writings on women are often full of clichés, and characterised by repetitions. Abugideiri notes that most of these reformist writings are produced from a fixed point of view. Reformers, while acknowledging women's humanity, usually restrict their role to motherhood and housekeeping.¹² The home and child rearing (nurturing) constitute the confines where women are entitled to their rights. Women's role is often looked at from a moral point of view. In this sense the role of women is complementary to that of men. By analysing the question of women from the standpoint of established rules and norms that cannot be altered, women's role – whether public or private, is constrained.¹³

Muslim reformist works on women should be placed in their historical milieu. Their efforts started from the nineteenth century onwards during a time of social and economic transformation in Muslim countries due to either the process of modernisation, or as a result of colonial encroachment and the state's policies. All these facets of change led to the emergence of the debate on women. For the first time in the history of Islam women occupy the centre of national debate, with issues pertaining to polygamy, divorce and segregation being discussed openly.¹⁴ Countries came most under Western influence were Egypt, Turkey and Syria to certain extent. Little wonder therefore that most of the articulation on women concerns took place in these countries.

Women's feminist writings in various forms, such poetry and essays, appeared in Egypt in the 1860s and 1870s – two decades before the British occupation in 1882. Despite being disadvantaged by British policies in Egypt, especially in education, women's participation in journalism took off in the 1890s with women opening their own literary salons, publishing their own magazines and contributing to magazines published by men. Right from beginning

¹² Katherine Bullock points to the way Muslim reformers ignore the status of women in their societies while they emphasise that Islam liberates women. See *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil*, IIIT, Washington 2002, p.XXI.

¹³ Hiba Abugideri, "On Gender and Family", *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*, p.226.

¹⁴ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, Yale University press, New Haven & London, 1992, p.128.

"women's question" in Egypt was contested by the nationalist and the Islamic forces. Both were used by writers to legitimise their discourse.¹⁵

One of the most influential voices on reform with respect to women was ‘Abduh who started to comment on the status of women in the 1880s while editor of the official newspaper *al-Waqāi’ al-Miṣriyya*, and later in *Al-Manār*. ‘Abduh was the first Muslim modernist to articulate the Islamic views on women and their role in society. He argued that the degeneration of the Muslim *umma* was partly caused by the way women have been treated. He also emphasised that Islam, and not the West, was the first to recognise women as a full and equal human being. ‘Abduh and his school called for a new approach to women's issues, an approach which is based on careful reading of the Islamic sources and re-evaluating and reforming the rules and customs which the *‘ulamā’* used to justify the deprivation of women from their rights. He argued, for example, that monogamy is the rule while polygamy is the exception even though there is clear *naṣṣ* which permits it. He came to this conclusion after reading the Qur’ānic verses on marriage which he thought were being misinterpreted by Muslims.¹⁶

‘Abduh's followers did not expand his reform discourse on women. While his student Riḍā steadily identified himself with the conservative current, other students moved away and embraced more secular and more humanistic discourse. One of them was Qāsim Amīn who in 1899 published a book which caused an outcry among the religious establishment and nationalist leaders. The book, *Taḥrīr al-Mar’a* is considered a landmark and the beginning of feminism in Arab culture. The book's impact still reverberates even more than a century or so since its publication. What angered the intellectuals of the time was the way Amīn criticised Muslim societies and Egyptian culture which led Ahmed to conclude that Amīn's book is a

¹⁵ Margot Badran, *Islamic Feminism: Secular and Religious Convergence*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2009, p.18.

¹⁶ Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Vol.4. pp.248-249 and 421-422.

mere reflection of the colonial view of the inferiority of the native and Muslims, but in a native voice.¹⁷ She adds that Amīn far from being the father of Arab feminism he was more or less the son of Lord Cromer and colonialism.¹⁸ ‘Abduh's argument and Amīn's book shaped the debate on women and the veil in Egypt to a point that no intellectual or feminist activists can escape their influence.

Women and the Islamic movements

Before exploring the role of women in modern Islamic movements, one should distinguish between two strands or forms of Muslim feminism, one which is associated with Islamic activism,¹⁹ and the other with feminist academics and scholars. The root of the first strand goes back to the 1970s when Islamic groups had grown stronger in many parts of the Arab and Muslim world. The main feature of these movements was the promotion of an Islamic alternative, *al-ḥal al-Islamī*. Women's dress was the most visible feature of what came to be called *Al-Tayār Al-Islamī* (*The Islamic Current*) with great visibility of women in political mobilisation and religious movements.²⁰

Despite the fact that Islamists from al-Bannā onward had emphasised the importance of women's part in the political struggle, women continued to play a subordinate role to men. Therefore, no woman has risen to the higher echelons of the movement, not even Zainab al-Ghāzālī (1917-2005) who was an early activist in the Brotherhood and became a feminist symbol to a point that Ahmed considers her as the "unsung mother" of the Muslim

¹⁷ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp.162-164.

¹⁸ He was the British Consul-General of Egypt from 1883 until 1907, and the author of *Modern Egypt*.

¹⁹ See Fadwa ElGuindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, Oxford, Berg, 1999, pp.182-183.

²⁰ For a critical approach to Islamic or Muslim feminism, see Haideh Moghisis, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits & Postmodern Analysis*, Zed Books, New York, 1999; Ruth Roded (ed.), *Women in Islam and the Middle East: A Reader*, I. B. Tauris, London, 1999; Valentine Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 27, (2002), pp.1135-1171 and Margot Badran, "Islamic feminism: What's in a Name?", *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* Vol. 17, Issue No. 569 (23 January 2002).

Brotherhood.²¹ This situation, which has not changed from al-Bannā to the present has led al-Qaraḍāwī to remark that no female leaders emerged in the ranks of the Islamic movements because men wish to maintain the role of guiding women.²²

In this context one should point to the critics of the Islamists who noted ambiguities in their discourse about women. Writing about the Islamist stands on women in the 1990s Moghadam says that there is agreement among them apropos the women's status in *sharī'a*, but they exhibit varying views on other issues such as women's education and women in the labour market.²³ Similarly Islamists differed on the political role of women in the movement. During the early years of Islamic revivalism in the 1970s Islamists used women as "recruiters, organisers and socialisers" to borrow from Hegland who was describing women's role in Iranian politics after the revolution of 1979.²⁴ Moreover, they restricted "women's purpose in life to serving males, the family and community. Women are pressured to conform to this role by punishment inside and outside of the family and by threat of divorce and being deprived of their children and of economic support".²⁵ Some Arab critics say that Islamists always talk about women's duties while they are reluctant to give them their due rights. For example the matter of *hijāb*, segregation and other minor issues are more important to men than women's right to education, and employment in various section of the society.²⁶

According to Moghadam some female Islamists accepted their role, albeit directing a kind of criticism towards male activists. The Kuwaiti activist Kawākib al-Milḥim and the Egyptian Muhja Qaḥf complained about male dominance of all the important post at the

²¹ Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from Middle East to America*, Yale University Press, 2011, p.57.

²² Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Awlawiyyāt al-Ḥaraka al-Islamiyya*, p.64. See also Leila Ahmed, *A Quite Revolution*, Chapter 10.

²³ Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernising Women: Gender & Social Change in The Middle East*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993, p.146.

²⁴ Mary Elaine Hegland, *Gender and Religion in Middle East and South Asia*, in Margaret Meriwether & Judith Tucker, p.183.

²⁵ Ibid., p.189.

²⁶ Khalīl Ali Ḥaydar, *ʿItidāl ʿAm Taṭaruf*, Dār Qirṭās, Kuwait, 1998, p.84.

Muslim Brotherhood and said that the only positions available for them were in the women's branch.²⁷ According to Moghadam, despite voicing their concerns, they never developed this into a form of resistance to male dominance.²⁸ The most important development therefore is the emergence of feminist voices that have brought about a new perspective, especially in the interpretation of Islamic sources. This development took shape during the 1970s and 1980s post the 1967 War and the fall of Arab socialism.²⁹

Islamic feminism

The focus of Muslim feminist writers has been to give a new interpretation of Islamic sources. This is helped by male Muslim scholars, al-Ghazali and Abd al-Halīm Abū Shaqqa (d.1996) in particular, who started the process of reading and re-reading these sources. These two named scholars, as will be discovered, take the stand that the present situation of women in Muslim societies is the result of "ignorance of true Islam".³⁰ Roald who situates their works in the context of the Muslim Brotherhood believes that Abū Shaqqa, together with al-Ghazali and al-Qaraḍāwī, may be regarded as the intellectuals of the movement, and whether they are inside or outside the movement their writings influenced many members of the Muslim Brotherhood.³¹

In contrast to the scene in the Arab world, Muslim feminists in the West who are trained in Western academia are the ones who are now leading the way. The works of Amina Wadud and Riffat Hassan present a new revisionist approach, and are mainly concerned with the re-

²⁷ Kawākib al-Milḥim, *Muslima 'Alā 'Atāb al-Qrn al-Qādim*, Kuwait, 1998, p.45.

²⁸ Valentine Moghadam, *Modernising Women*, p.155.

²⁹ For the mobilization of women in Islamic movements, see Ghada Talhami, *The Mobilisation of Muslim Women in Egypt*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 1996, and Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilisation Islam*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2002.

³⁰ See al-Ghazali and al-Qaraḍāwī's introduction to Abū Shaqqa's *Tahrīr al-Mar'a fī 'Aṣr al-Risāla*, Dār al-Qalam, Kuwait, 1999, p.6-9.

³¹ Anne Sofie Roald, *Women in Islam: The Western Experience*, p.134.

evaluation of Islamic sources, criticism of the use of Islamic sources and criticism of the interpretation of Islamic sources.³² Their writings are among other factors that have paved the way for creating a rich and vibrant environment where much work has been done in terms of rethinking and re-interpreting.

Ahmed depicts an active scene in America where the children of Islamists are now playing an important role in this process. Her analysis shows the transformation that has occurred apropos of this young generation who looks at their identity from the viewpoint of being American and Muslim, and attempts to address women's issues accordingly.³³ The established and new feminists are now working hard to challenge the old certainties their parents had brought with them from their respective countries with regard to the *hijāb*, women's duties, segregation and the like.

While Ahmed agrees that all women gender activists in America are influenced at some point in their lives by Islamists either by working in Islamist organisations or by being habitués of their bases of operations, the new generation of activists are pushing forward to create a democratic space where women are able to enter and participate in all aspects of life. When Ahmed speaks of these developments that are taking place among Muslims in America, she seeks to show that the *hijāb* which travelled with the Islamists from the Middle East to America in the 1970s and has stayed with them, is now being debated by their offspring as to its religiosity, with a view to decide whether to "dehijabize".³⁴ Whether or not one agrees with her, the lively debate nevertheless shows that women are coming to the fore, and discussing religious texts in order to achieve justice and equality for themselves. One

³² Shahrazad Mojab thinks that the works of the Lebanese feminist Nazira Zain al-Din (1908-1976) preconfigure their works. See "Theorising the Politics of Islamic Feminism" in *Feminist Review*, No. 69, Winter 2001, pp.124-146.

³³ Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution*, p.305.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.284.

might argue that the new works go beyond what Wadud and Hassan had done earlier, for instance in terms of issues discussed.

Both Wadud's and Hassan's approaches are hermeneutical. Wadud studied "the Islamic tradition" (i.e. the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*), and raises some doubts about the validity of *ḥadīth* without rejecting it.³⁵ As for Hassan, she presents a critique of many *aḥādīth* that are used to suppress women in the name of religion.³⁶ Commenting on the work of Muslim feminists, Badran remarks that they often distinguish between what is universal or timeless and what is contingent. Their main focus is the holy text, the Qur'ān, as the work of Wadud and others indicate.³⁷ The methodology applied by Muslim feminists is that of classical Islamic methodology i.e. *ijtihād* and *tafsīr*; in addition to methods and tools of linguistics, history, literary criticism, sociology, anthropology and so on.³⁸

As Badran's comments indicate, the analyses in both Wadud's and Hassan's research reflect the critical theories used in Western academia to examine the sacred text. These theories are not accepted by the '*ulamā'*' who are grounded in Islamic scholarship and its way of reasoning.³⁹ Despite the differences between the two world views, there are slight similarities between Wadud and Hassan's findings, and that of some of the New Islamist writers who engage in critical study of the religious texts. Wadud and Hassan uphold the same views as al-Ghazali toward understanding the texts. In terms of emphasis, Hassan is more consistent in her analysis of *ḥadīth*. Al-Ghazali's analysis indicates that *ḥadīth* about women are forged and contradict passages in the Qur'ān. Wadud, on her part, is a little

³⁵ Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Women*, Kuala Lumpur, Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1992.

³⁶ Riffat Hassan, "An Islamic Perspective", J. Becher (ed.), *Women, Religion and Sexuality*, World Council of Churches Publication, Geneva, 1990.

³⁷ See, for example, the work of Fatemah Nassef, *Women in Islam*, New Delhi, Sterling, 1999.

³⁸ Badran, "Islamic feminism: What's in a Name?" *Ahram Weekly*, (23 Jan 2002), Vol.17, Issue No. 569.

³⁹ Those, such as Naṣir Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, who tried to apply them were rejected and driven into exile.

ambivalent towards *ḥadīth*. She does not explicitly reject the authority of *ḥadīth*, but does not fully support it as she rarely uses it in her analysis of the Qurʾān.

Al-Ghazali and women's issues: The evolution

Al-Ghazali's books *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya* and *Qaḍāyā Al-Marʿa* are important in terms of the development of his views on women. They both indicate the way moderate Islamists try to synthesise a modern approach based on Islamic principles regarding the role of women in society. At the beginning of his career al-Ghazali recognised that there is a "women's problem" in Muslim societies that needed to be addressed. At the time al-Ghazali's argument was informed by the need to achieve social justice for women, but at the same time warning against Western influence on their identity. He addressed women's issues in the context of the debate within Egypt of the 1950s and the 1960s – debate which was dominated by secular and socialist forces.⁴⁰ In this situation al-Ghazali was critical of the Westernised intellectuals who promoted women's liberation at the expense of their Islamic values.⁴¹ *Sufūr* (unveiling), educational syllabus, mixed schools and moral issues figured heavily in his argument during this period.⁴² At the same time al-Ghazali was critical of the way religious scholars understood women's status in society and how they interpreted religious texts in order to restrict women's roles, deprive them of their rights and to keep male domination over the family.⁴³ Despite al-Ghazali's belief that the *sharīʿa* guaranteed full rights to women as with men, whether in the family or in the public sphere, the kind of solutions he presented to women's problems were conservative as he viewed women's issues

⁴⁰ In the 1960s al-Ghazali proposed a unified uniform for both male and female only, to change his view a decade later and admit it was wrong to impose the same uniform on both male and female. See *Maʿrakat al-Muṣḥaf fi l-ʿAlam al-Islami*, p.264.

⁴¹ Among those al-Ghazali criticised were Tahā Ḥusayn, the famous novelist, Iḥsān Abd al-Qudūs (1919-1990) and Salama Mūsa (1887-1958). See *Zalām Min al-Gharb*, pp. 151-152, 156-159 and *Al-Islam wa al-Tāqāt al-Muʿaṭala*, p.111.

⁴² Al-Ghazali, *Min Hunā Naʿlam*, pp. 141-143.

⁴³ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 3, pp.147-148.

through the principle of *sadd al-dharā'i'* (prohibition for the fear of committing sins). On the one hand he welcomes women's full participation in the public sphere but on the other he emphasised that home duties take precedence over her public participation.⁴⁴

In later years al-Ghazali started to look at women's issues from a different perspective where *maṣlaḥa* (public interest)⁴⁵ takes precedent over *sadd al-dharā'i'*. In the 1980s he is seen to allow women to fully participate in public life. Al-Ghazali did not change his view as such, but he widened his perspective in which he starts to believe that women have an equal duty towards the *umma* as they do towards their families. He understood at this stage that the Muslim *umma* need women to work in all sectors of society, but in an atmosphere of respect and without violating the teachings of Islam. It is at this stage that al-Ghazali started scrutinising religious texts and looking at them through a different light.

The seeds of this development were planted in the 1970s when he, with other scholars such Muḥammad Abū Zahra and ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, attacked the state's attempts to change family law or what is known as "Jehān's Laws" which meant putting restrictions on the number of wives [a man may have at any time] and on divorce laws.⁴⁶ In addition, his experience when he left Egypt for a spell to live abroad led him to reassess early views. It was during this time, approximately between the 1970s and late the 1980s that he started to question the *salafī* approach towards women.⁴⁷ This phase was to continue until the end of his life.

⁴⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Ḥuquq al-Insān*, pp.115-116.

⁴⁵ *Maṣlaḥa* literally means "benefit" or "welfare". It is generally used to mean the aims of the *sharī'a* or public interest. The term is today understood to embody the purposes of law i.e. "*Maqāṣid al-Shar'*". And used by modern Muslim scholars as a vehicle for change within the legal system. See Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

⁴⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Kifāh Dīn*, pp.199-203.

⁴⁷ Al-Ghazali's encounters with *salafīs* are presented in many books such *Humūm Dā'iyyah*, *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, and *Qaḍāyā al-Mar'a*.

Al-Ghazali realised that there was a need to evaluate *aḥādīth* relating to women which he noted are either weak or, infinitely worse, fabricated *aḥādīth*, such as "Do not teach them writing and allow them to the apartments, i.e. living alone in the rooms so they draw the attention of men to them"⁴⁸ and "It is best for women not to see and be seen by a man."⁴⁹ They became a criteria for women's behaviour in certain societies despite the fact that they are fabricated.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, these *aḥādīth* have been allowed to rule Muslims for centuries while other authentic traditions are blatantly ignored.⁵¹ Al-Ghazali believed that ignorance of the Prophet's *Sīra* (life and action) has led some to isolate women and force them to live on the margins of society.⁵² He is of the view that to understand women's role in society is to understand the sacred text. He therefore called for a review of the *fatāwā* and their impact on women of inherited traditions.⁵³ A review of the past is tied in with al-Ghazali's discourse on the understanding of mental, social and economic crises which dictate the role of women's in society.⁵⁴

For women to be emancipated society should be educated at all levels especially at the family level which al-Ghazali lays much emphasis on as the centre where Islamic ideal is realised.⁵⁵ Therefore, he links the collapse of family values in the Muslim world with the marginalisation of women.⁵⁶ According to him, part of depriving women of the opportunity to be educated is preventing them from visiting mosques.

⁴⁸ Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa'īfa*, Maktabat al-Ma'arif, Riyad, 1996, No. 2017, Vol. 5, pp.30-33.

⁴⁹ Al-Haythamī, Abū Bakr 'Alī, *Majma' al-Zawa'id wa Manba' al-Fawā'id*, Maktabat al-Qudsi, Cairo, 1998, Vol.4, No. 7327. See also al-Ghazālī's *Qaḍāyā al-Mar'a*, p.15.

⁵⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Rak'iz al-Imān*, p.157.

⁵¹ Al-Ghazali. *Al-Islam wa al-Istibḍāḍ al-Siyāsī*, pp.12-16.

⁵² Al-Ghazali, *Fiqh al-Sīra*, p.36.

⁵³ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt Al-Ghazali*, Vol. 1, pp.218-221.

⁵⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Da'wa al-Islāmiyya fi'l-Qarn al-Hāli*, p.71.

⁵⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Huqūq al-Insān*, pp.137-159.

⁵⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Da'wa al-Islāmiyya fi'l-Qarn al-Hāli*, p.72.

Al-Ghazali recounts his own struggle to allow women to go to the mosques and his efforts to restore women place in the house of God when he was the Director of Mosques at the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Egypt.⁵⁷ He says that women's education has nothing to do with what is lawful or unlawful,⁵⁸ and therefore all field of knowledge should be open to women unless there are some technical reasons barring women from studying this subject or that. Other than that they should study whatever they aspire to.⁵⁹ He goes further to say that women should be supported should they choose to pursue their studies,⁶⁰ and late in his life he urged them to travel, within the accepted religious rules, as a way of broadening their minds.⁶¹ He remarks, "Tourism is not only for men, but it is also for women."⁶² It is worth mentioning that al-Ghazali's interaction with women as a teacher and preacher encouraged him, towards the end of his life to do more to elevate their status and present them on the same footing as men, a recognition that the *umma's* life must be built by both men and women.⁶³

In order to highlight al-Ghazali's concerns, what follows is a detailed examination of some of the main issues he tackled during his long career. They are:

- i. women's participation in public life;
- ii. women and politics;
- iii. women's dress;
- iv. women's legal testimony;
- v. marriage to non-Muslims; and

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.57. He said in an interview that the '*ulamā'* have tried to put many hurdles before women's education, and they are trying now to ban them from the mosque (*Al-Qabas*, 14 march 1989). Al-Qaraḍāwī criticises the views of the *fuqahā'* who agree on banning women from frequenting the mosques on the pretext of averting the *fitna* they might be causing. See *Awlawiyyāt al-Ḥaraka al-Islamiyya*, p.86.

⁵⁸ Al-Ghazali, '*Ilal wa Adwiya*, p.152.

⁵⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, Vol.1. p.100.

⁶⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Min Hunā Na'lam*, p.166.

⁶¹ Al-Ghazali, *Qaḍāyā al-Mar'a*, pp.160-161.

⁶² Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Tāqāṭ al-Mu'aṭala*, p.33.

⁶³ Al-Ghazali, *Turāthunā al-Fikrī fī Mizān al-'Aql wa al-Shar'*, p.158-168.

vi. the husband's right of chastisement (*ta'dīb*).

Women's participation in public life

In 1944 al-Ghazali published an article in the Muslim Brotherhood's magazine (*Majallat al-Ikhwān*) where he states clearly that women should not study law or engineering because "it is doubtful that they can contribute to these fields".⁶⁴ Even if women manage to break through the glass ceiling, al-Ghazali believes that women's participation will not last because "it is impossible to empty the house of its owner (i.e. the woman) so that she can run an engineering or law firm".⁶⁵ Al-Ghazali emphasised that women, by nature, should assume their career at home rather than running a law or an engineering firm.⁶⁶ Similar to this view Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī thought that the study of "masculine topics" such as chemistry, law, engineering and agriculture will affect women's femininity and sensitivity. He, like al-Ghazali, proposed separate classes or universities for women.⁶⁷

Al-Ghazali continued to hold this view until the 1960s. Although he did not bar women from working outside their homes, he continued to believe that they should stay at home and that housework should be given priority.⁶⁸ After two decades, he started calling for a balance between women's role in the home and in the community. His views on this are tied to the notion that the future of Islam is linked to the re-evaluation of the status of women.⁶⁹ Al-Ghazali's early views on women's work are based on the understanding that men, by nature, are created to work outside the home whereas women, by their nature, are created to take on

⁶⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt al-Shaykh Al-Ghazālī*, Vol. 4, p.116.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.116.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.116.

⁶⁷ Quoted by Sharifa Zuhur in *Revealing Revealing: Islamist Gender in Contemporary Egypt*, State University of New York Press, 1992, p.47. See also al-Ghazali, *Min Hunā Na'lam*, p.167.

⁶⁸ For a similar but more conservative view, see Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī, *Al-Mar'a Bayna al-Fiqh wa al-Qānūn*, Al-Maktab al-Islami, Damascus, 1975, pp.165-166.

⁶⁹ Hiba Raūf Izzat, "Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr al-Shaykh al-Ghazali wa Qaḍāyā al-Mar'a", *Islāmīyat alMa'rifah*, pp.104-187.

housekeeping responsibilities.⁷⁰ This, he believes, is why the responsibility of preparing food and sustenance for the household falls on them. Al-Ghazali's understanding of Verse 4:34 is that the man is the head of the household. The verse states, "Husbands should take full care of their wives, with (the bounties) God has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their own money."⁷¹ According to al-Ghazali *al-qawāma* (stewardship), as the verse indicates, falls on men.⁷²

Scholars and exegetes have given many interpretations of this verse. They have tried to give an explanation of the term "*qawwāmūn* 'alā'" which some understand as "protectors and maintainers". Others interpreted it as "stewardship".⁷³ Most modern Muslim exegetes understand *qawāma* to mean men only have responsibilities, as opposed to authority in marital relations,⁷⁴ and have no authority over the woman other than that.⁷⁵ Al-Ghazali is of the view that the *qawāma* applies to the household only.⁷⁶ He believes that men's stewardship of the household does not deprive women of their civil liberties and right to ownership of property.⁷⁷

He further adds by saying that those who understand the verse to mean that women are subordinate to men, and that men's position in the home is one of "*isti'lā*" (absolute

⁷⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Tāqāt al-Mu'aṭala*, p.87.

⁷¹ M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A new translation*, p.55. See also *The Message of the Qur'an*, translated and explained by Muḥammad Asad, England, the Book Foundation, 2003, p.127.

⁷² Al-Ghazali, *Ilal wa Adwiya*, p. 98, and *Qaḍāyā al-Mar'a*, p.155.

⁷³ Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an, Translation and Commentary*, Brentwood, Maryland, 1989. Amina Wadud investigated various commentaries, both classical and modern, on the interpretation of this verse. She believes that the understanding of Muslim scholars is subject to time and place. See *Qur'an and Women*, pp.70-74, and Muḥammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style*, London, pp.46-54.

⁷⁴ This is the view of Muḥammad 'Izza Darwaza, Ḥasan al-Turābī, Jamal Badawi and Rachid Ghanouchi. See respectively *Al-Dustūr Al-Qur'ānī wa Al-Sunna Al-Nabawiya*, p.203; *Al-Mar'a bayna Ta'ālīm al-Dīn wa Taqālīd al-Mujtama'*, Markaz Dirāsāt al-Mar'a, Khartoum, 2000, p.11; Jamal Badwai, *Gender Equity in Islam: Basic Principles*, Indianapolis, American Trust Publication, 1995, p.13 and Rachid Ghannouchi, *Al-Mar'a Bayna al-Qur'ān wa Wāqī' al-Muslimīn*, p.119.

⁷⁵ 'Abduh, as reported by Riḍā, understood the verse to mean "*riyāsa*" (stewardship). The relationship between man and woman should not be based on aggression and suppression of the woman's rights. See *Riḍā, Nida' li'l al-jins al-Laṭīf: Ḥuqūq al-Nisā' fi'l-Islam*, Beirut, Al-Maktab al-Islami, 1984, pp.46-47.

⁷⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.47 and *Hādihā Dīnunā*, p.155

⁷⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Ḥuqūq al-Insān*, p 120 and *Qaḍāyā al-Mar'a*, pp.154-158.

authority) and domination, are wrong.⁷⁸ Wadud believes that the verse could be understood in the light of contemporary life whereby men's responsibility for women applies only to their economic support of the family. This interpretation leaves the door open for stripping men of their "authority" in the household.⁷⁹ In another reading, the Syrian scholar, Muḥammad Shahrūr comments that stewardship of women over men is possible as long as the women are pious.⁸⁰

Al-Ghazali's statements in the 1960s imply that he has no objections for women to participate in all areas of public life, but he and other Islamists look at women's employment from the perspective of *maṣlaḥa* which means that in any job women should serve the needs of the Muslim community, that is why al-Ghazali believes that women should participate in the field of medicine and pharmacy, in addition to education.⁸¹ He urges women to become midwives and nurses.⁸² According to him such jobs takes into consideration their physical nature. For example, he is against jobs that require physical effort such as working as bus conductors, or aeroplane pilots.⁸³ Al-Ghazali rejects this type of equality between male and female by saying, "When women take all the jobs like men, such as working as policewomen or mechanics, or working in factories, and as sweepers in the streets, drivers of vehicles and transport, these jobs are not suitable for them, and rarely do women rival men in these jobs."⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.121. Al-Bahī al-Khūfī says that men's responsibilities in the house should be conditioned by fairness, equality and consultation i.e. *shurā*. See *Al-Mar'a Bayna al-Bayt wa al-Mujtama'*, Maktabat al-Ma'arif, Cairo, (n.d.), pp.44-45.

⁷⁹ Wadud, *Qur'an and Women*, p.71.

⁸⁰ Muḥammad Shahrūr, *Al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān*, Dār al-'Ahāfī, Damascus, 1990, pp.619-620.

⁸¹ Al-Ghazali, *Ḥuqūq al-Insān*, pp.116-117.

⁸² This is the view of al-Sibā'ī who encourages women to work in hospitals, schools and nurseries. See *Al-Mar'a Bayna al-Fiḥ wa al-Qānūn*, p.167-169.

⁸³ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Islam wa al-Ṭāqāt al-Mu'aṭala*, p. 38. See also *Humūm Dā'iya*, p.55.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.39.

In order to accommodate women in the workforce without compromising their role at home, al-Ghazali suggests the creation of part-time jobs to cater only for women.⁸⁵ According to al-Ghazali men should be given preference when recruiting for jobs of vital interest to the nation.⁸⁶ He says, "Women are not allowed to work in one of these (vital jobs) and take the place of a qualified and unemployed youth."⁸⁷ If women are to work, he believes this is acceptable in four cases; when there is a very intelligent and gifted woman whose talent would benefit the community, when women are employed in jobs such as in education and medicine that suit their disposition, and when she helps her husband in his job such as farming or helping him run a business. The fourth is when the woman is obliged to work because there is no one else to provide for the household.⁸⁸

Throughout his career al-Ghazali maintained that women should not take up jobs that affect their dignity and integrity. This was not to change. However, from the 1980s onwards al-Ghazali's attitude to women's employment changed dramatically. He then held the view that women may work inside and outside their homes provided their dignity and chastity are protected. As a sign of changing times he writes, "I was known for not supporting the view of allowing women to work in all kinds of jobs neither did support the equality between men and women in all areas of work. I said that women are suited more to a housewife's job, but there are jobs that need the technical expertise only women have, and there are cases where girls need to work before they get married. Again economic situations affect the way people understand life's issues. Therefore, I do not want to issue partial fatwās without taking into account the wider picture of Muslim societies, in this ever changing life."⁸⁹ According to this

⁸⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Ḥuqūq al-Insān*, pp.116-117.

⁸⁶ Rachid Ghannouchi believes that gender should not be the criterion for employment, but qualification. See *Al-Mar'a Bayan Al-Qur'an wa waqi' al-Muslimin*, p.77.

⁸⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Ḥuqūq al-Insān*, p.116.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.118. Al-Qaraḍāwī put the same conditions, although he differentiates between her right to work and her *duty* to work. See *Qaḍāyā Islamiyya 'alā Biṣāṭ al-Baḥth*, Dār al-Ḍiya', Amman, 1987, p.178.

⁸⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Ma'rakat al-Muṣaḥaf*, p.266.

outlook women are no longer forbidden from competing with men in what he previously termed "vital" jobs. He goes further to say that in the job market the most qualified must be given the job regardless of their gender. He says "What has gender got to do with employment? You might find pious woman who is better at her job than a bearded irresponsible male."⁹⁰ Al-Qaraḍāwī follows al-Ghazali on this view where women are allowed to compete with men in public life as long as they have better qualifications.⁹¹

Women's employment is part of the debate about the right of women to leave their houses without their husband's permission, be it to go to the mosque, to take up employment or to shop and participate in social events.⁹² Al-Ghazali seems open to the idea of women leaving their houses. However, the evidence he presents indicates that women need to have their husbands' permission and he ought not to prevent them from going to the mosque.⁹³ That said, one of the main debates among Muslim scholars and Islamists is the role of women in political life. The debate often begins with the general premise that in principle there is nothing in Islam that prevents women from participating in political life. The exception, however, is the role of women as political leaders or the supreme commander of the *umma*. What follows is an attempt to present al-Ghazali's views on women as judges or leaders of the community.

Women and politics

In 1987, Fatima Mernissi asked, "Can a woman be a leader of Muslims?" The answer seems to be "yes". However, this reply in the affirmative does raise many problems. It was assumed, long before Mernissi posed the question, that women are exempt from leadership.

⁹⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, pp.52-53.

⁹¹ Interview with al-Qaraḍāwī on 'Anā satellite television channel, Ramadan, 2009.

⁹² Al-Khūfī, for example, details the Islamic ruling on women in social life such as going to the cinema and the park, using public transport and so on. See al-Turābī, *Al-Mar'a bayna al-Bayt wa al-Mujtama'*, pp.127-130 and Ghanoushi, *Al-Mar'a Bayna al-Qur'an wa Waqi' al-Muslimin*, pp.75-76.

⁹³ Al-Ghazali, *Min Hunā Na'lam*, pp.157-160, *al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, pp.52-57.

Islamic classical sources indicate that women cannot lead the community. The issue of women's leadership re-surfaced in the book *‘Ā’isha wa al-Siyāsa* (‘Ā’isha and Politics) written in 1947 by the Syrian scholar and linguist, Sa‘īd al-Afghānī (1909-1997). In it al-Afghānī advances the view that the participation of ‘Ā’isha, one of the Prophet's wives, in politics was a source of conflict.

Al-Afghānī was referring to her involvement in the *fitna*, or civil strife, against the fourth caliph, Alī Ibn Abī Tālib. According to this historical analysis, women should not participate in politics.⁹⁴ While Muslim scholars seem to accept a role for women in political life,⁹⁵ they vary in the degree of authority they accord to women. This will become clear later in this study.

In detailing the position of women in society and political life, al-Ghazali differentiates between interpretation (opinion) and the text. According to him, no one's opinion should be treated as a religious authority.⁹⁶ He then proceeds to detail the position of the Andalusian jurist, Ibn Ḥazm who accepts that women can occupy any position in public life, except the position of the *Al-Wilāya al-Uẓmā* (the Supreme Commander of the Faithful). Al-Ghazali criticises those who opine that according to *Al-Nisā’* (4:34) women are prohibited from having authority over men. As explained above, al-Ghazali restricts *al-qawāma* to the household.⁹⁷ According to al-Ghazali, the verse in question does not indicate that women cannot assume a high position and lead men. He refers to the time when the Caliph ‘Umar gave the position of *ḥisba* (Market Controller) to a woman named Al-Shifā bint ‘Abd Allah.

⁹⁴ For criticism of al-Afghānī's views and the role played by ‘Ā’isha in politics, see also Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987 and D.A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of Aisha Bint Abi Bakr*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994.

⁹⁵ The exception is ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aūda who opposed women voting in the elections claiming that their vote is not important because men have the right to lead. As ‘Aūda was speaking in the 1950s he did not live to change his view because Nasser put him in the gallows in 1954. See Sharifa Zuhur, *Revealing Revealing*, p.48.

⁹⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.47.

⁹⁷ See also Muḥammad ‘Amāra, *Naḥwa Wa’yy Islāmī bi’l-Taḥādiyāt al-Mu’āsira*, Jam’iyat al-Khalīj; Bahrain, and Ghanouchi, p.119.

He states that her authority governed not only women, but also men who were the majority of the workforce in the marketplace. Likewise, the husband has no authority over his physician wife in the hospital where she works.⁹⁸

Those who oppose women's leadership mainly quote the popular *ḥadīth* in Bukhārī narrated by Abū Bakra, "When the news reached the Prophet that the Persians had chosen the daughter of *kisrā* as their leader, he said, 'A people led by a woman will not succeed'.⁹⁹ Al-Ghazali does not doubt the *ṣiḥḥa* of the *ḥadīth*, nor does he doubt its chain of narrators, but he tries to contextualise the *ḥadīth* and analyse it according to its historical and social context. He believes that the *ḥadīth* was a reaction to the news that had reached Madina about a young and inexperienced princess who had inherited the throne of Persia.¹⁰⁰ Her appointment was a bad choice in the context of the historical and political upheavals that were taking place in Persia at the time during which state religion then was paganism. The royal family did not practice *shūrā* (consultation), and did not tolerate other points of view. The relationship between certain members of the royal family was hostile. A man could kill his father for no reason, and humiliate the nation for good measure.¹⁰¹ Therefore, the *ḥadīth* should be understood as an analysis of the situation in Persia at that time.

According to Ibn Ḥazm, as understood by al-Ghazali, the *ḥadīth* is applicable only to the leadership of the state. He urges those who oppose any political role for women to take a close look at the *ḥadīth* by saying, "We do not yearn to make women heads of state or government, but we yearn for one thing, that a head of the state or government should be the most efficient person in the *umma*."¹⁰² Al-Ghazali gives another perspective to the *ḥadīth* by

⁹⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.48.

⁹⁹ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, Bāb Kitāb al-Nabī* to Kisrā and Qayṣar, No. 4425.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Qaraḍāwī reaches a similar conclusion as he emphasises the historical value of the *ḥadīth*. *See Al-Anbā'*, Kuwait, 23 February 1997.

¹⁰¹ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.48.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.48.

analysing its contents in the light of the Qur'ān. He alerts his readers to *Al-Naml* of the Qur'ān which contains the story of Balqīs, the Queen of Sheba. The Qur'ān depicts her as a just and wise ruler. When she receives a message from the Prophet Sulayman (Solomon) inviting her to become a Muslim, she gathers all her advisors to give her an opinion on the matter.¹⁰³

Al-Ghazali comments that femininity and masculinity are not the issue. He refers to a statement by the thirteenth century scholar, Ibn Taymiyya that by virtue of being just and fair, God may grant a non-Muslim country victory over the Muslim *umma* which is unjust.¹⁰⁴ He adds by saying that a nation that has a leader such as Balqīs will never fail.¹⁰⁵ The manner in which al-Ghazali treats the matter of women's leadership indicates that he was keen to show that there is nothing in the primary sources to prevent women from assuming the leadership of the Muslim state. Yet he seems reluctant to accept that this is plausible, and his reluctance shows that female leadership is still a controversial issue, at least at the time he held his views. In fact al-Ghazali considers women leaders as a rarity as following excerpt suggests:

"Again, I would like to emphasise that I am not in the habit of supporting female leadership. Those women with perfect qualities are rare. They are usually discovered by accident. All I want to do is to interpret a *ḥadīth* which is commonly used, and try to prevent the contradiction between the Qur'ān and certain reports on the one hand, and between the *ḥadīth* and the historical context on the other."¹⁰⁶

Again, al-Ghazali's acceptance of women's role in the political arena should be understood on the basis of his view that women's involvement in politics and public life should not come

¹⁰³ Abdel Haleem, *Qur'an: A new translation*, (27:20-44), pp.240-241.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.51.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.50.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.50.

at the expense of family life which he considers to be women's primary responsibility. While al-Ghazali appears to be sceptical about such a role for women in Muslim societies, he accepts that women have ruled successfully in many countries such as Britain, India and Israel. However, he still believes that these experiences are born within their context and people's choices. He says, "If they (the above nations) have accepted women as leader, judge, minister or ambassador, it is their choice. We also have different opinions that allow this. Why then should we follow one opinion?"¹⁰⁷ It is evident from this that al-Ghazali is only concerned with the theoretical aspect of the issue.¹⁰⁸ Al-Ghazali's attitude begs many questions. If the text allows women to lead the community, why does he try to link it to people's preferences? There is no explanation other than perhaps al-Ghazali did not think of the issue as an urgent matter as since women were still fighting for their right to attend the mosque, not to become president.

Rachid al-Ghannouchi, leader of the Tunisian Islamic movement *Ḥarakat al-Nahḍa* (Renaissance Movement), is of the opinion that a woman can be head of state. He seems to understand the said role in a modern sense. In modern times leadership is either partial or collective. In this sense it is different from the concept of "*wilayya*" or "*imama al-Uḏmā*" in the Islamic context where the leader is also the defender of the faith as well as the nation.¹⁰⁹ As modern decision-making rests with many institutions such as Parliament, the High Court and the army, the head of state such as the Queen of the United Kingdom who also the head

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.52.

¹⁰⁸ Roald holds the same view when she says that al-Ghazali is interested to reveal how *aḥādīth* were misinterpreted by the literalists. See *Women in Islam*, p.189.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Māwardī, *Al-Aḥkām al-Ṣulṭāniyya wal al-Wilāyāt al-Dīniyya* (The Ordinances of Governments), trans. Wafaa H. Wahba, Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilisation, Garnet Publishing Limited, 1996, pp.114 and 72.

of the Anglican Church, no longer possesses absolute authority due to the division of power.¹¹⁰

Among the Islamists Ḥasan al-Turābī, the leader of the Sudanese Islamic movement and renowned scholar, is more vocal in his pronouncements on women's role as an activist in the Islamic movement. His emphasis on their rights and is articulated in his book, *Al-Siyāsa wa al-Ḥukum: al-Nuḥum al-Sulṭāniyya Bayna al-Uṣūl wa Sunan al-Wāqi'* in where presents his views on female leadership.¹¹¹ He caused heated debate regarding his views on women leading the prayer in mixed congregation, as well as his views on Muslim women marrying non-Muslims.¹¹²

Al-Turābī rejects the condition stipulated by Muslim scholars in order to exclude women from state leadership. He says that masculinity is not a condition for the appointment to a higher post such as "*al-wilaya al-āma*" (commander-in-chief). He reiterates the point that both men and women are equally required to fulfil their religious obligations. As for their social duties, at home for example, he believes that family responsibilities are given equally to both men and women. In politics, women and men are in partnership according to the general rule of *Al-Amr bi'l-Ma'rūf wa Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (commanding the good and prohibiting evil). They therefore share the same destiny in war and peace.¹¹³

The Qur'ānic injunctions that distinguish between the role of men and women are meant to pave the way for the transformation of Muslim society from pre-Islamic practices to a fair and just society. Al-Turābī maintains that the traditional culture of Muslims does not accept

¹¹⁰ According to al-Ghannouchi, his views on the nature of modern state are the same as the view of Shaykh al-Ghazali and other contemporary scholars including Qaraḍāwī. See *Al-Mar'a Bayna al-Qur'an wa wāqi' al-Muslimīn*, p.118.

¹¹¹ As with Ghannouchi, al-Turābī worked hard to empower women in the Islamic movement. See *Al-Ḥaraka al-Islamiyya fi'l-Sudan: Al-Taṭawwur wa al-Kasb wa al-Manhaj* (n.p.), Khartoum, 1989.

¹¹² Al-Maḥboub Abdesalam, "Ijtihādāt al-Turābī", *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* Newspaper, London (16 January 2006).

¹¹³ Ḥasan al-Turābī, *Al-Mar'a bayna Ta'ālim al-Dīn wa Taqāfid al-Mujtama'*, pp.10-13.

women's leadership to rule in war and peace. He blames what he calls "*fuqahā' al-sultān*" (Jurists of the Court) who stipulate that masculinity is a condition for the post of Caliph rather than leaving it to the consensus of the Muslims. Al-Turābī accuses the jurists of preventing women from holding public offices such as presiding over criminal cases in the court as well as those concerning financial disputes.¹¹⁴ Unlike al-Ghazali who supports female leadership in principle, al-Turābī and Ghannouchi are clear in their support for female leadership in the practical sense.¹¹⁵

It would appear that there is no unanimity among the scholars on female leadership.¹¹⁶ However, Muslim scholars seem to agree on other aspects of women's participation in other facets of political life. Most seem open to women's participation in the political process. Al-Ghazali finds no objection to the appointment of women as judges, although he had some reservations early in his career.¹¹⁷ Despite being unsure about women's leadership, al-Ghazali's is credited with the effort of moderating and systemising the debate on women's political rights. His influence on modern Islamic movements is the reason that the debate intensified in the past decade.¹¹⁸ His vision has held sway, and scholars such as al-Qaraḍāwī arrives at the same conclusion as al-Turābī that this must be understood in the context of the twenty-first century when some scholars now allow women to assume any position in political life. Al-Qaraḍāwī considers women's participation in elections as *wājib*

¹¹⁴ Ḥasan al-Turābī, *Al-Siyāsa wa al-Ḥukum: Al-Nuḥum al-Sultāniyya Bayna al-'Uṣūl wa Sunan al-Wāqī*, Saqi Publishers, London, 2003, pp. 286-288.

¹¹⁵ Similar attitudes may be found among Shi'a scholars. The Lebanese scholars Muḥammad Mahdī Shams al-Dīn and Muḥammed Ḥusayn Faḍlallah allow female leadership (see interview with Mahdī Shams ad-Dīn in *Al-Naba'* Magazine, Vol. 60, Beirut, 2000 and Faḍlallah's interview published in *Al-Hayat* newspaper on 4 August 2001).

¹¹⁶ It is worth noting that al-Māwardī in *Al-Aḥkām al-Ṣultāniyya* does not give attention to female leadership.

¹¹⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p. 61. Al-Qaraḍāwī comments on this issue in *Al-Sharī'a wa al-Ḥayā*, one of his programmes on Al Jazeera satellite television channel on 21 September 1998.

¹¹⁸ Ghannouchi praised al-Ghazali's book, *Al-Sunna* describing it as a brave attempt that challenges the camp of conservatism on its main issue; that is the issue of women. See *Al-Mar'a Bayna al-Qur'ān wa wāqī' al-Muslimīn* p.124. See also Roald, *Women in Islam*, p.199.

(obligatory).¹¹⁹ However, al-Qaraḍāwī continues to believe that women are not allowed to be caliph, though differentiating between regional or national leadership and being leader of the whole Muslim *umma*.¹²⁰

Women's dress

Al-Ghazali, in *Al-Sunna*, chooses a particular point to clarify the issue of women's headscarf or *ḥijāb* (veil).¹²¹ While he accepts that women should dress modestly and refrain from parading their physical attributes publicly, he believes that all *aḥādīth* requiring women to cover their faces are baseless.¹²² He says that there is no prohibition on women revealing their faces during prayers and while performing Ḥajj. The Prophet Muḥammad saw women's countenances in the markets, annual festivities and mosques, and he never ordered them to cover their faces. Al-Ghazali questions those who believe that the *niqāb* (face cover) is obligatory.¹²³ He cites eleven *aḥādīth* that support the majority view of the founders of the four main *Madhāhib* (Islamic schools of *fiqh* or jurisprudence) on the subject. They agree that women are not required to cover their faces. Hence, their faces are not *‘awra* (that which is shameful). He believes that those who raise the issue of the *niqāb* are behaving irresponsibly,¹²⁴ and that *niqāb* is not a fundamental issue worth debating as it does not

¹¹⁹ Al-Qaraḍāwī stated this view on different occasions such as in *Fatāwā Mu‘āṣira* and *Min Fiqh al-Dawla fi l-Islam*, Dār al-Shurūq, 1997, pp.163-164, 171-169.

¹²⁰ Interview on *‘Anā* television channel, 2009.

¹²¹ For a different meaning of "*ḥijāb*" literary and culturally, see Abū Shaqah *Taḥrīr al-Mar‘a fi ‘Aṣr al-Risāla*, Vol. 3, p.69 and Roald, *Women in Islam*, p.262.

¹²² One may classify Muslim scholars' opinions on female dress into three categories: first, the view that female dress should cover the whole body including the face and the hands; second, the view that favours the full covering of the body with the exception of the face and the hands; and third the view that rejects the *ḥijāb*. See respectively Shaykh Abd al-‘Azīz Bin Bāz, *Ḥukm al-Sufūr wa zawāj al-Shughūr*, Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, Riyad, 1995; Sayed Mutwālī al-Darsh, *Muslim Women's Dress: Hijāb or Niqāb*, Kuala Lumpur, Islamic Book Trust, 1997 and Muḥammad Saīd al-‘Ashmāwī, *Ḥaḥiqat al-hijāb wa Ḥujjiyyat al-Ḥādīth*, Cairo, Maktabat Madbūli al-Ṣaghir, Cairo, 1995, pp.13-79.

¹²³ Al-Ṣādiq al-Mahdī, the leader of the Umma party in Sudan said that the *niqāb* makes women vulnerable to crime and robs her of her personality. See *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, Vol. 23, Issue 702, (16 January 2012).

¹²⁴ ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm ‘Aways believes that al-Ghazali's views on the *ḥijāb* and *niqāb* are guided by his respect for women and their role in society, as women will be looked at as commercial products or chattels if they reject

affect the essence of religion.¹²⁵ Debating such issues and paying too much attention to them are bound to create problems and divide the Muslim *umma*.¹²⁶

Al-Ghazali's analysis of the *ḥijāb* issue is based on his criticism of the way people understand the *aḥādīth*. He holds public preachers responsible for dire ignorance, and accuses them of maintaining the siege on women by presenting Islam as a women's prison. He combines his criticism of *aḥādīth* by citing the views of the four *Madhāhib* in order to give credence to his analysis. He is aware of this when he says that what he presents is not his own opinion, but what has already been said in books of *fiqh*. He remarks, "Is what I say my own opinion? No, no. This is the view of the four great jurists and the views of the leading commentators."¹²⁷

Al-Ghazali considers all customs and traditions that regard women's faces and voices as *ḥarām* (forbidden) or *ʿawra* as baseless. Likewise he, who abhors the business of *tahrim* (forbidding that which has not been forbidden in the sources), considers any *fatwā* regarding this issue as a sign of utter ignorance. Al-Ghazali supports the view that favours the full covering of women's bodies with the exception of their faces and hands. In this he gives many pieces of evidence that show the agreement among the jurists on this issue. His way of proving his stance is through a critical study of *ḥadīth* used to justify women not only covering their bodies, but also their faces and hands.¹²⁸ As long as it is modest and

the *ḥijāb* (*sufūr*), and their activities would be restricted if they wore the *niqāb*. See *Al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazali: Tarīkhuhu, Juhūdūhu wa Arāʾuhu*, p.65.

¹²⁵ He believes that the *niqāb* is a legacy inherited by Muslims from the age of stagnation and weakness. See *Min Hunā Naʾlam*, pp.159-160.

¹²⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Daʿwa al-Islamiyya fi ʿI-Qarn al-Ḥālī*, p.60. See also al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-ʿAlawiyāt* where he defines it as "categorisation of the issue according to its importance. Judging each issue according to the principles of *sharīʿa* and reason," pp.9 and 278.

¹²⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p. 41.

¹²⁸ In criticizing al-Ghazali's argument, Naṣr Hāmid Abū Zayd likened the way he presents his views on *ḥijāb* against the *niqāb* as "salesman", *Dawāʾir al-Khawuf*, p.86.

presentable, and does not reveal a woman's "physical charms" that may encourage vice, any type of dress is permissible.¹²⁹

Al-Ghazali reminds his readers that the liberation of women should not be done at the expense of their dignity. He said "When I release women from the prison of ignorance... I do not foresee that the purpose of their release should be in order for them to be swept away by the winds of desire."¹³⁰ He goes on to say, "We do not move women from the age of the *ḥarīm* into the *ḥarām* (forbidden) era."¹³¹ This statement reveals al-Ghazali's perception of women's liberation which is seen in terms of veiling and unveiling. It would appear the more liberated women are the more they expose their bodies. As he puts it, "Before women leave their houses they stripped off their clothes,"¹³² and in this context clothes have become an emblem of change whatever may be, to the left or to the right; and both directions are extreme.¹³³

Al-Ghazali's views concerning the head cover maintain that there is no one costume that Muslim men and women should wear at all times.¹³⁴ He recognises the cultural differences and the determinate role customs play in the way women and men dress. The main issue is not the *type* of dress, rather *how* women (and men) dress. He opines that scholars should pay attention to the aims, goals and rationale behind *sharī'a* (*maqāṣid al-sharī'a*) which is to protect women from the gaze of men, and to ensure that women dress appropriately.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Al-Ghazali, *Ma'rakat al-Muṣḥaf*, p.264.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.265.

¹³¹ Ibid., p.265.

¹³² Ibid., p.269.

¹³³ See *Al-Isti'mār Aḥqād wa Aṭmā'*, pp.226-228 and *al-Islam wa al-Ṭāqāt al-Mu'aṭala*, pp.108-11.

¹³⁴ This is in contrast to Bennabi who believes that the way women and men dress signifies their cultural background. He believes that the attacks on the veil from women's liberation movements make it an important issue. How Muslim women dress is not a marginal issue. It is related to what he calls "cultural choices" of the individual or society. See *Shurūṭ al-Nahḍa*, p.117.

¹³⁵ Abū Shaqa, *Tahrīr al-Mar'a fī 'Aṣr al-Risāla*, Vol. 4, p.22.

The issue of *hijāb* in al-Ghazali's writings, as seen above, is related to the "head cover" and not "face cover".¹³⁶ It is noted that he directs his criticism at certain groups in the Gulf area in general, and in Saudi Arabia in particular. In the course of his discussion, al-Ghazali refers to a book written by a scholar from the Gulf in which he associates *zinā* (fornication) with exposing the face. Al-Ghazali rebuts this view by reminding the writer of the Ḥajj where *sharī'a* dictates that women should uncover their faces during the pilgrimage and prayers. He reminds the writer thus, "Does the uncovering of the face during acts of these five pillars of Islam arouse sexual instincts? How false is this reasoning?"¹³⁷ Al-Ghazali goes on to discuss two *aḥādīth* narrated by 'Ā'isha. The first is about Asmā' being told to expose her face and hands,¹³⁸ and the second is about 'Ā'isha saying that the wives of the Prophet used to cover their faces on their way to Ḥajj.¹³⁹ According to al-Ghazali, the second *ḥadīth* is considered *da'īf* (weak), while the *ḥadīth* concerning Asmā' is strengthened by other reports.¹⁴⁰ Al-Ghazali gives further evidence to show that women in early Islam were not obliged to cover their faces and their hands.¹⁴¹

In order to strengthen his argument, he refers the reader to the Qur'ānic injunction that men should lower their gaze: "Prophet, tell believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts," (24: 30). Al-Ghazali comments, "Should a man lower his gaze from the clothes of the woman and her back?" He relates a *ḥadīth* where a very beautiful woman went to the Prophet during the *ḥujat al-wada'* (Farewell Pilgrimage). She addressed him while Al-Faḍl Ibn 'Abbās was riding behind him. Ibn Abbās could not help but look at her because of her beauty. The Prophet tried politely to prevent him from staring at her. Al-Ghazali argues

¹³⁶ Al-Ghazali wrote an article in the Qatari newspaper *Al-Rāyah* in May in 1987 stating that those who talk about the *niqāb* are extremists. This led Aḥmad to write a rebuttal entitled *Al-Adila min Al-Sunna wa Al-Kitāb fī Ḥukm Al-Khimār wa Al-Niqāb*, Maṭābi', Qatar, 1988.

¹³⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.36.

¹³⁸ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Bāb fī mā Tubdī al-Mar'a min Zīnatihā*, No. 4114.

¹³⁹ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Bāb fī al-Muḥrimati Tughāṭī Wajhahā*, No.1833.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.40 and *Min Hunā Na'lam*, p.158.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-43.

that this incident shows that women are not obliged to cover their faces, and that what is obligatory is for men (and conversely women) to exercise restraint.¹⁴² The conclusion al-Ghazali draws from the many reports and evidence he presents, is that the issue of dress for both men and women in Islam is all about modesty. Women in this regard should dress decently according to the standards set by Qur'anic injunctions and *aḥādīth*, but not according to that of set by fashion houses in the West.

Muslim women marrying non-Muslims

Muslim jurists agree that under no circumstances may a Muslim woman marry a non-Muslim,¹⁴³ despite the permissibility of a Muslim man marrying non-Muslim women provided they are of Jewish or Christian faith, referred to as *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book).¹⁴⁴ The issue of marriage, especially with regard to Muslim women, is debated in the context of Muslims living in the West. Muslim scholars record many cases where Muslim women marry non-Muslim men, and decide to stay with them even though the men choose not to become Muslims. Some scholars point to exceptional cases where the Prophet allowed some Muslim women who migrated to Madina from Makka to stay with their non-Muslim husbands.¹⁴⁵ However, most scholars believe that those are highly exceptional cases which,

¹⁴² Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, pp.38-39.

¹⁴³ Mohammad Abū Zahra, *Aqd al-Zawāj wa Athāruhu*, Cairo, Dār al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1971, p.142; Aḥmad Shīrbāṣī, *Yasa' lūnaka fi 'l-Dīn wa al-Ḥayai*, Beirut, Dār al-Jil, 1986, Vol. 1, p.216 and Moḥammad Faṭḥī 'Uthman, *Ḥuqūq al-Insān Bayna al-Sharī'a al-Islamiyya wa al-Fikr al-Qanūnī al-Gharbī*, Cairo, Dār al-Shurūq, 1982, p.143.

¹⁴⁴ In modern times some Muslim scholars, such as the reformer Riḍā's call for the Majian, Hindus and the followers of Confucius to be classed as People of Book in order to make it easy for Muslims in India and China to marry. See *Al-Manār*, Vol. 12, p.264.

¹⁴⁵ The European Islamic Council for Fatāwā and Research issued a *fatwā* (3/8) after it concluded its deliberations on the status of a marriage where a European woman converts to Islam while her husband chooses to maintain his faith. The *fatwā* talks about three cases whereby the marriage should be commuted if she converts before the marriage is consumed. In the second case, if she converts after the marriage was consumed and her husband converted before her *'idda* ends then the marriage is valid. In the third case if she converts to Islam and her *'idda* ends then she can choose to stay with her husband until he converts even if it means a long wait. The council took into consideration circumstances of Muslims in the West, while at the same time affirming that no Muslim woman should be allowed to marry a non-Muslim. See the special issue of *Al-Majalla al-'Ilmiyya li'l-Majlis al-Urūbī li'l-Iftā' wa al-Buḥūth*, Dublin, Ireland, Vol. 2, December (2003).

despite their occurrence, do not break the scholars' consensus on the matter. They cite Verse 2:221, the Qur'ānic injunction which seems to make the prohibition clear: "Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe: A man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even though he allures you."

Al-Ghazali comments on this issue in his book, *Zalām min al-Gharb* where his contribution to the debate comes as a response to a report published in *Rose al-Yūsuf*, a liberal magazine published in Cairo. The author of this report argues that Muslim women are allowed to marry Christians or Jews as the Qur'ān only prohibits them from marrying the *mushrikīn* (polytheists). Al-Ghazali replies that this is a misrepresentation of the Qur'ānic injunction. He points out that when a Muslim man marries a non-Muslim woman (*kitābiyyāt*), this does not mean that he is allowed to marry just anyone. He must be aware of her background and her moral conduct. On another occasion al-Ghazali makes it clear that Islam condemns Muslim women who marry Christian Copts. He regards these women as nominal Muslims.¹⁴⁶

Interestingly, al-Ghazali is even reluctant to condone the marriage of a Muslim man to a non-Muslim woman.¹⁴⁷ His understanding of the term "*Ahl al-Kitāb*" does not include the men and women of Europe and America because in his view the Torah and the Gospel have lost their impact on them. He writes that religion in these societies is reduced to public holidays and Christmas celebrations.¹⁴⁸ Al-Ghazali stopped short of considering them *mushrikūn* and his view is in contrast with Shaltūt's who believes the term is not applied to a

¹⁴⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Zalām Min Al-Gharb*, p.139.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Ghazali is not the only one who is reluctant to condone such marriages. Muslim scholars agree that such marriages are *mubāḥ* (permissible) although they do not prefer mixed marriages. See Abū Zahra, *Muḥāḍarāt fī 'Aqd al-Zawāj wa Atharuhu*, Dār al-Fikr al-Arabi, Cairo, p.146.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Mar'a*, p.204 and *Al-Haqq al-Murr*, pp.133-134. Some scholars go as far as to consider this kind of marriage as a sin. See 'Abd al-Muta'al al-Jabrī, *Jarīmat al-Zawwāj Bighayr al-Muslimāt*, Maktabat Wahba, Cairo, 1983. The Lebanese scholar 'Umar Faroukh (1906-1987) warned against this kind of marriage because some Muslim men may be deceived into marrying Western women who work as spies. See Aḥmad al-'Alāwneh, *'Umar Faroukh fī Khidmat al-Islam*, Kitāb al-Umma, Qatar, 2004, p.70.

historical period or means a specific Christian community. For him Christians and Jews in the present as they were in the past are still "*ahl al-kitāb*". However, Shaltūt registered his objection to the intermarriage between Muslim men and the *kitābiyyāt* because it has lost its purpose. Also, rather than teaching Christians about Islam, Muslim men adopt Western ways which leads to the loss of an Islamic identity for them and their children.¹⁴⁹ However, al-Ghazali like Shaltūt, believes that the state has the right to restrict what is *muhbāḥ* (permissible) in order to prevent a threat to its national interests, whether it is imminent or predicted.¹⁵⁰

Al-Ghazali approaches the issue of Muslim women marrying outside their faith from a human rights point of view. He says that Islam's ban on marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men relates to the freedom of belief. As Islam allows Muslim men to marry non-Muslim women, it prohibits the reverse for fear that the non-Muslim husbands will not respect their wives' religion. Some may say that preventing Muslim women from choosing their spouses violates their basic human rights as enshrined in Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁵¹ However, al-Ghazali responds that it is inconceivable that a Muslim man will speak badly about his wife's religion because he believes in the prophets of her religion. The situation is different in the case of a Muslim woman and it is conceivable that her husband may attack her religion because he does not believe in Islam.¹⁵²

According to al-Ghazali, other religions such as Judaism and Christianity do not guarantee a wife from a different faith the freedom of belief and to practice it. If this is the

¹⁴⁹ Shaltūt, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*, pp. 231-233.

¹⁵⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Zalām Min al-Gharb*, p.141, Shaltūt and *Al-Fatāwā*, pp.277-281.

¹⁵¹ Article 16 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. (2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. (3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. See <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>, (accessed on 10 January 2012).

¹⁵² Al-Ghazali, *Huqūq al-Insān*, pp.106-16

case, al-Ghazali believes that it is impossible for a stable relationship to develop between the husband and his wife.¹⁵³ The *'ulamā'* further believe that the man who has the upper hand in running the affairs of his house may use his authority to influence his Muslim wife by forcing her to change her faith, or bring up his children as non-Muslims. Jurists consider any contract of this kind as illegal. Some jurists equate this kind of marriage with marrying one's *maḥārim* (unmarriageable kin).¹⁵⁴ Other jurists condemn such marriages as adultery.¹⁵⁵ Most of the constitutions of Arab and Muslim countries consider such contracts as invalid.¹⁵⁶

Al-Ghazali's views on this matter did not change throughout his life. However, al-Qaraḍāwī has made the effort to give a new insight to this issue, albeit in a different context, namely when a European woman converts to Islam and decides to remain married to her non-Muslim husband. Al-Qaraḍāwī refers to an event in the 1980s when this issue was raised and caused much controversy. It was then that he participated in the Islamic Society of North America's (ISNA) annual conference along with Ḥasan al-Turābī. Al-Turābī found in favour of a woman who chose to remain with her non-Muslim husband. He ruled that her marriage would still be considered legal. His ruling caused much anger amongst the participants as it was against the viewpoint of the majority of the *'ulamā'* who consider such marriages invalid. Al-Qaraḍāwī revised his own ruling against it upon being made aware of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's opinion contained in the latter's book, *Aḥkām Ahl al-dhima*.¹⁵⁷ It is worth noting that al-Turābī recently caused a new controversy when he ruled that a Muslim woman

¹⁵³ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt*, pp.98 and 101.

¹⁵⁴ Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh Al-Sunna* Vol. 2, p.92 and al-Qaraḍāwī, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, trans. Kamal El-Helbaway, M. Moinuddin Siddiqui and Syed Shukri, London, Al-Birr Foundation, 2003, pp.168-169.

¹⁵⁵ Al-Kasānī, *Badā'ī' al-Ṣanā'ī' fī Tartīb al-Sharā'ī'* Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1997, Vol. 3, p.554.

¹⁵⁶ Ghassān 'Ashasha, *Al-Zawāj wa Ṭalāq wa Ta'dud Al-Zawjāt*, p.82. The author claims that there is no clear evidence in the Qur'ān which prohibits Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men.

¹⁵⁷ Al-Qaraḍāwī, "Islam al-Mar'a Duna Zawjihā hal Yufaraq Baynahumā," *Al-Majalla al-'Ilmiyya l'l-Majlis al-Urūbī*, Vol. 2, December 2003, p.443.

can marry a non-Muslim man.¹⁵⁸ He says that there is no evidence in the Qur'ān or *sunna* that prohibits this type of marriage. Al-Turābī also believes that the prohibition applies only in times of war and conflict.

As a final comment on the issue, it would appear from the above discussion that there is perhaps no avenue open for the law prohibiting such marriages to be changed even if other religions are obliged by a binding international decree to guarantee the freedom of belief to a Muslim wife. The reason given by some Muslim scholars is that the respect that Muslims must give to the Christian and Jewish faiths is enshrined in the Islamic belief system, but not in the case of other religions with respect to Islam. Baderin comments that the prohibition of Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men is one of the areas where Islamic law and international human rights law are incompatible for reasons stated above.¹⁵⁹

Women's testimony

Verse 2:282 equates the testimony of two women with the testimony of one man. This is generally known as *āyat al-dayn* (verse of the debt). Muslim scholars agree that the testimony of two women is equal to the testimony of one man. There is near unanimity amongst all classical jurists that the Qur'ānic mention of testimony in the context of transactions was revealed to advise Muslims on how to reduce the possibility of any misunderstanding. The verse is categorised by most jurists as being *irshād* (instructions) and not *wājib* (obligatory).¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ See *Itihām al-Turabī bi'l-Riddā 'an al-Islam* (Turābī is Accused of Apostasy), a report in the daily Arabic newspaper *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, London, (12 April 2006).

¹⁵⁹ Mashood A. Baderin, *International Humans Rights and Islamic Law: Oxford Monograph in International Law*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p.145.

¹⁶⁰ Ṭahā Jābir al-'Alwānī, *Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, Herndon, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2005, pp.159-186.

Al-Ghazali, rather than understanding the verse in the context of Arabia at the time of revelation and the nature of the commercial system in place then, he tries to explain it by pointing to women's physiology, saying that when a woman experiences her monthly menstrual cycle "it affects her body and mood altogether, so another woman is needed to remind her".¹⁶¹ He goes on to say that his own research on the matter has led him "to reflect that women, when they have their period, are considered semi-ill. The ups and downs of their mood affect their behaviour".¹⁶² Al-Ghazali's explanation stops here because to him the ratio of women to men in terms of testimony is not the issue. Rather he addresses the issue as a reaction to what he calls "a trend in religious thought" that excludes women from testifying alone on other matters of *ḥudūd* and *qiṣāṣ*. He thinks that it is irrational to exclude woman from the testimony even though she is the only witness in murder of members of her family or burglary at her house.¹⁶³

In order to prove his point, al-Ghazali presents a summary of a few pages taken from Ibn Ḥazm's book *Al-Muḥalla*. Ibn Ḥazm, accepted women's testimony in all cases rights from adultery (*zinā*) to *ḥudūd*, *qiṣāṣ*, marriage and divorce. Ibn Ḥazm based his views mostly on reports pertaining to decisions taken by the companions of the Prophet such as ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭāb, his son ‘Abd Allah and Ali Ibn Abī Ṭālib and the *tābi‘ūn*. Based on these reports al-Ghazali concludes thus, "I decided to accept women's testimony in all cases according to what is prescribed in our religion".¹⁶⁴ He adds by asking, "Is it in the interest of public security to waste women's testimony in matters that only happen in the presence of women? Is it in the interest of *fiqh* to agree on a ruling that distorts the message of Islam? If Ibn

¹⁶¹ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.58.

¹⁶² Ibid., p.58.

¹⁶³ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunna*, p.58.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p.61.

Ḥazm allowed women to preside over the courts as judges, why then cannot we accept their testimony in everything?"¹⁶⁵

Unlike al-Ghazali, Shaltūt adopted 'Abduh's view that the conditions set by the Qur'ān on women's testimony have nothing to do with moral and intellectual capabilities. It has all to do with the fact that women are less familiar with business transactions than men, and therefore their evidence carry less weight than men. Shaltūt took into consideration the context and the time of revelation when women in Arabia were not used to taking part in financial transactions. However if women are to become part of the business community, where they would take part in making financial transactions on a regular basis then their testimony should be equal to that of men.¹⁶⁶ Shaltūt believes that what is important is not the testimony itself, but that the law must ensure the validity of any statement, and take all necessary precautions to safeguard the true course of justice. The issue of women's testimony is related to legal arrangements, and is not based on inequality between men and women. This is the view of Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād who believes that the testimony debate is related to the issue of justice and the protection of public interest.¹⁶⁷

Physical punishment

The last part of Verse 4:3 deals with the physical punishment of women (*ḍarb*). The word "*nushūz*" has divided the scholars as to its exact meaning. Does it mean disloyalty, ill-conduct, rebellion or disobedience?¹⁶⁸ The Qur'ān affirms that the essence of the relationship between husband and wife is *bi'l-marūf* (kindness). However, this does not mean that either

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p.61.

¹⁶⁶ Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *Al-Islam 'Aqīda wa Shari'a*, pp. 251-253.

¹⁶⁷ 'Abbās, M al-'Aqqād, *Ḥaqa'iq al-Islam wa Abā'il Khushūmihi*, p.184.

¹⁶⁸ Asad, p.172; Ali, p.190 and Abdel Haleem, p.54.

may not encounter serious crises within the marriage.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, the verse and the injunctions it prescribes relate to the preservation of the family.¹⁷⁰ The verse is seen by some, especially those who seek to understand the position of women in Islam, as *carte blanche* that gives men unrestricted power to physically abuse women, which is not the case.¹⁷¹ Jurists have been involved in detailed discussions on the type of punishment that may be used to chastise women. Suffice to say that most Muslim scholars believe that this form of punishment must only be applied as the last resort.¹⁷²

Al-Ghazali approached this issue through criticising *ahādīth* used to justify a man beating his wife without being questioned? Accordingly, he rejects any *ḥadīth* that implicitly or explicitly condones this. Even if this *ḥadīth* proves to be *ṣahīh*, which it is not, it contradicts the idea of the equality of reward and punishment for both men and women in the Qur'ān.¹⁷³ One such *ḥadīth* is reported by Abū Dāwūd whereby "the man should not be asked why he has beaten his wife".¹⁷⁴ This *ḥadīth* condones men's aggression towards women, something which is not acceptable either by religion or reason.

Al-Ghazali draws attention to cases where punishment may be applied. He confines this to two cases. The first when the woman rebels against her husband and becomes so arrogant as to refuse him his conjugal rights, and the second when she allows a man he dislikes to

¹⁶⁹ It should be noted that "*nushūz*" in Verse 4:34 applies not only to the wife, but also to the husband.

¹⁷⁰ Al-'Aqqād believes that punishing the wife is better than destroying the whole family. See *Ḥaqa'iq al-Islam*, pp.184-186.

¹⁷¹ Abdel Halim, *Understanding the Qur'an*, pp.46-55.

¹⁷² Abū Shaqqa, *Tahrīr al-Mar'a fī 'Aṣr al-Risāla*, Vol. 4, pp.243-244. Abdel Hamid Abu Sulaiman believes that the actual meaning of "*ḍarb*" here is not 'to beat, but "to leave". "*Ḍarb al-Mar'a Wasīla li Ḥal al-Mashākil al-Zawjiyya: R'uya Manhanjiyya*", *Islāmīyat alMa'rifah*, Vol. 6, No. 24, pp.117-141. Similar to this view but in a different, context, Laleh Bakhtiar (the first woman to publish an English translation of the Qur'ān entitled *The Sublime Qur'an*) tried to find a different lexical meaning of the word. Bakhtiar opted for "go away" when she translated the word. See Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution*, pp.266-272.

¹⁷³ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Mar'a*, p.174 and *Min Maqālāt*, Vol. 3, p.104.

¹⁷⁴ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan, Kitāb Ḍarb al-Mar'a*, No. 2147.

enter the marital home.¹⁷⁵ When punishment is applied, al-Ghazali's view (of being tough) does not mean the use of extreme measures to chastise the disobedient wife. He refers to the *ḥadīth* reported in *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*: "Do not aim at the face and do not say to them, 'You are disgraceful!'; and only separate from them in the house."¹⁷⁶

Al-Ghazali refers to the ending of the Verse 4:34 of where the Qur'ān says that "if they obey, you have no right to act against them: For Allah is the Most High and great" and opines that their obedience hinges on men's behaviour towards them.¹⁷⁷ The whole question of physical chastisement is not about the mighty acting against the weak with impunity. Rather, it is about the manner in which problems are solved between husband and wife, being best achieved through mediation.¹⁷⁸ At any rate, the verse has become a central point of debate among Muslim activists in America where many, who are concerned with justice and liberty, feel that it contradicts the concept of egalitarianism set out in the Qur'ān between men and women. This debate is important in the American context, and many activists have produced an explanation of this verse.¹⁷⁹

Finally, the physical chastisement of women as well as family disputes, have always provided al-Ghazali with the opportunity to criticise Muslim attitudes and abhorrent acts against women. While emphasising the integrity of the family in Islam, he condemns those who destroy their families due to trivialities. He adds that women's problems are related to mental, moral, social and economic crises. In order to solve them, an attempt must be made

¹⁷⁵ Al-Ghazali states the same when he was interviewed in the 1990s by Akbar Ahmed for the television programme *Living Islam* on the BBC (1993). See also Roald, *Women in Islam*, p.171.

¹⁷⁶ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan, Kitāb Ḥaqq al-Mar'a alā Zawjihā*, No. 2142

¹⁷⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Mar'a*, p.175.

¹⁷⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Mar'a*, pp.174-175.

¹⁷⁹ See Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Women*, p.76.

to revise all the past traditions responsible for negative practices prevalent in Muslim societies.¹⁸⁰

Conclusion

The discussion above shows that al-Ghazali speaks about the plight of women in Muslim societies systematically. In comparing al-Ghazali's views with that of his contemporaries and his teachers (most of them influenced by the Al-Manār school of ‘Abduh and Riḍā) one can see that apart from some exceptions he does not deviate from the approach and rulings in which they were made on certain issues. In the spirit of his time, he was somewhat conservative on certain issues such as women in politics, but robust on the testimony of women and the issue of physical chastisement. What is certain is al-Ghazali's concern for women's rights, whether motivated by moral responsibility, defending Islam against its enemies, or the desire to intellectually revisit and rediscover women's status in the primary sources of Islam. Unsurprisingly, he was met with criticism from both secularists and *salafīs*, which raises many questions about his contribution to the debate regarding women. He and his fellow Islamists were accused by the secularists of failing to re-interpret the sacred texts, and for maintaining an apologetic stance which emphasises the biological differences between men and women.¹⁸¹ In this regard al-Ghazali's mission was not to liberate women, but to liberate the Muslim mind from centuries of misconception and manipulation of religious texts to justify the suppression of women. This is very clear from the many quotes given in this chapter.

Judging al-Ghazali's contribution from the Western feminist's view point, he is considered an apologist at worst and a conservative at best. When judged from within

¹⁸⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Min Maqālāt*, Vol. 3, p.104.

¹⁸¹ Nasr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Dawa'ir al-Khawuf*, p.102.

Islamist circles, he appears to be unlike many of the Islamists in that he was able to systemise and continue a trend started by ‘Abduh that sought to purify the *sunna* from fabrication and adulteration. He was undoubtedly not the only one to do so, for liberal and conservative students of ‘Abduh continued to exert a certain influence. Al-Ghazali's contribution may well be that he challenged those who misunderstand Islam by appropriating *sunna* to serve their aims. One problem with al-Ghazali's method is his continued repetition of his views even in the book he devotes solely to women's issues.

Buthainah Sha’bān finds similarities between al-Ghazali, Abū Shaqqa and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallah on the one hand, and the early Lebanese feminist Naẓīra Zain al-Dīn (1908-1976) on the other. Zain al-Dīn, who published *Al-Sufūr wa al-Hijāb* in 1930, was ahead of her time. She argued for the sifting of Islamic legal traditions from fabrication and misunderstanding.¹⁸² An important element that formed al-Ghazali's thinking on women is his understanding of *maṣlaḥa*. This is clear when he established that Islam, in principle, does not object to women's presidency. However, he maintained a cautious approach based on what he thought was best for the *umma*.¹⁸³

This chapter started with an assumption that al-Ghazali continued to review his stance and views with regard to women's status in society. There are many pieces of evidence that prove the validity of this assumption. At the beginning of his career his views were informed by the political and social circumstances of the time. What informed his approach then was the nature of the perceived threats to women. His analysis is conditioned by the intellectual debate of the time. He condemned what he saw as the moral threat emanating from the West and the forces supporting the westernisation of Muslim women in Egypt. This is evident

¹⁸² Buthiana Shaaban, "The Muted Voices of Women Interpreters" in Mahnaz Afkhami, *Faith and Freedom*, pp.61-78.

¹⁸³ Felicitas Opwis examines the usage of this concept in the light of the writings of modern Muslim intellectuals such as Riḍā, al-Qāsimī, al-Būṭi, Khallaf and ‘Alāl al-Fāsī in "MAṢLAḤA In Contemporary Islamic Legal Theory", *Journal of Islamic Law and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2005, pp.182-223.

from his debate with Khālīd Muḥammad Khālīd. In the 1980s the intellectual environment was conditioned by the debate between the Islamists and the Secularists. The difference between this period and the 1950s is that the secular forces were no longer dominant.

Secular elements that emerged during Nasser's period were forced to retreat or were marginalised in the face of the process of Islamisation supported by Anwar Sadat. During the first of period of the rule of Ḥosnī Mubarak, who assumed power in 1981, until al-Ghazali's death in 1990s, Al-Ghazali's approach was informed much more by what was happening in the Islamic camp itself. During this period Egypt witnessed a bloody confrontation between the state and the *Jihādī* movement. Finally, it may be said that al-Ghazali was not able to disseminate his ideas without the platform that was given to him by the Islamists.

CONCLUSION

It is said that conflict is a catalyst for change, and this is perhaps true of Egypt and the Arab world in the twentieth century when old certainties gave way to turbulent periods of war, peace and the displacement of huge populations thus provoking many radical, important changes. This was the century when the Middle East became the battlefield of Cold War ideologies, and the Arab world experienced the effects of the divide between East and West. However, the most important aspect of Arab twentieth century is the continuous military defeats, so too on the political and cultural fronts. Arab humiliation increased when Britain pledged to help establish a Jewish homeland in Arab Palestine. This humiliation and the Palestinian plight would shape Arab-Muslim thought, and continues to influence the Arab intellectual's vision of the world to this day.

Egypt, which was occupied by the British from 1882, had undergone many changes both on the socio-political and intellectual levels. After the 1919 revolution which earned Egypt partial independence, the country's constitution was drawn up. It was during these early decades of the twentieth century that daring ideas from the likes of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Alī ‘Abd al-Rāziq and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal emerged; these were the years of women's liberation (*sufūr*) and of new trends in modern Arabic literature. Furthermore, this period saw the emergence of the first Islamic movement which would have a huge impact on Islamic activism in the Arab and Muslim world as Cairo was, by then, the cultural capital of the Arab world, and would continue to play this role for the next hundred years or so.

Al-Ghazali was born two years before the Egyptian Revolution which would shape the development of Egyptian society. He was too young to remember or participate in that important historical event, but he would continually refer to it in maturity, and consider it as

a reference point and cornerstone of events which unfolded before him, and which he actively observed and, to a certain degree, participated in. Al-Ghazali was a man of his time in that his thought was the product of the challenges he faced.

Al-Ghazali put the idea of Islamic revivalism at the heart of his mission. His thinking here was to use revivalism in order to respond to the challenges of his time; but what "brand" of Islam was he referring to? Was it the Islam of the Sufis, the Azharites, the *salafis* or that of the Islamists? The idea of Islam envisioned by al-Ghazali is the one which is based on, and embodied in, the Qur'ān and the *sunna*. He says, "I am still urging (Muslims) to revise our religious thought and to revise the way we judge things and judge people."¹ This quotation accurately captures al-Ghazali's mission for all – that he persisted on calling Muslims to revise and rethink their history, their various military and intellectual defeats, their lack of progress in science and technology, and their lack of influence on the international stage.

In brief, as set out in the introductory chapter, this thesis sought to:

- i. examine al-Ghazali's views on problematic issues such as women's role in public life;
- ii. highlight the way in which he presented his critique of the Muslim mind;
- iii. explore and analyse his life, the forces that shaped him and his contribution in the field of thematic commentary of the Qur'an;
- iv. understand his achievements and failures in the light of the social and political forces that shaped him;
- v. analyse his loyalty to Al-Azhar, despite him being very critical of his alma mater, and how he continued the tradition of reforms initiated by other great Azharite scholars;

¹ Al-Ghazali, *Illal wa Adwiya*, p.187.

- vi. show how he was a *dā'iya* caught between traditionalism and modernity; and
- vii. examine his independence as a scholar who followed his "own school".

It is our submission that the discussions presented throughout this thesis have fulfilled these aims. Evidence has been presented to show his loyalty to Al-Azhar and his adherence to traditions whilst mainly propositioning a progressive form of thinking and interpretation of Islamic sources.

Al-Ghazali also kept reminding his readers of his independent mind, for he maintained that he was not following a specific school of *fiqh* or thought. He remarks, "I do not belong to any sect, nor I am bigoted towards any school. I look at all schools, the exegetes, the *muḥaddithūn*, the philosophers, the *mutakalimūn* and the Sufis. I look for the truth independently."² He tried to exercise this kind of independence as a way to guide the young generation and to stem the tide of fanaticism. This begs a question apropos the authority of his views.

In terms of religious authority, al-Ghazali's views were not universally welcomed by the religious establishment. Unlike 'Abduh, who exercised his authority by virtue of being the Grand Mufti of Egypt, al-Ghazali's authority stems not from being a *faqīh* or *muḥaddith*, but from the fact that he tried to assess and direct the attention of Muslim scholars to the urgent needs of the Muslim *umma*. This is the reason behind his call for a *fiqh* which would take into consideration the priorities of the community – *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* and a *fiqh* which takes into consideration the needs of Muslim minorities in the West – *fiqh al-aqaliyyāt*.³ In terms of *ijtihād* he called for one based on the agreement of the majority of the '*ulamā'*' or *al-*

² Al-Ghazali, *Turāthunā al- 'krī*, p.83.

³ His book *Mustaqbal al-Islam Khārij Arḍihi: Kayfa Nufakir Fīhi* is an example of his preoccupation with Muslims in the West.

ijtihād al-jamā'ī.⁴ He was concerned with these issues as well as emphasising the importance of perceiving Muslim heritage through the prism of the Qur'ān.

Unfortunately or otherwise, al-Ghazali did not please many. For example, at times he would find himself on the side of the government fighting a common cause, while at other times he would find himself against it when it came to civil rights and liberty. Ironically, he was liberal in the eyes of the Islamists, but conservative in the eyes of the secularists – something which was confirmed after the Faraj Foda affair. A man of many faces, al-Ghazali managed to navigate his way through the façade of his society which meant that he kept himself informed of the needs of Muslims.

This study has sought to examine al-Ghazali's views on some problematic issues which recur not only in his writings, but were a hallmark of twentieth century Muslim thought. The difference between al-Ghazali and his contemporaries lies in emphasis, scope and reference point. Al-Ghazali's point of reference was his activism and daily engagement with the problems of his time. In his case one cannot help but notice that his focus was on practical issues with less appetite for theoretical debate. This is because, to him, the unity of the community comes first. Therefore, his attitude and solutions were all about bridging gaps between the different warring factions within the *umma*. The call for moderation and reformation of Muslim education is for affirming the spirit of the community over individual desires. In all the issues examined in this thesis, the unity of the community is seen to prevail. This is quite obvious in the way that he tackled Muslims' understanding of their belief (meaning theology) for which he tried to provide a critique of the ideas prevalent in Muslim thought.

⁴ Al-Ghazali called for an end to making *ijtihād* in matters relating to *'ibādāt* because Muslims do not need more than what is reported about prayers, fasting, etc. See *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma' al-Qur'ān*.

Of his efforts pertaining to the Qur'ān, al-Ghazali's work on thematic interpretation was selected for analysis which reveals that he had an interest in this field of exegetes from early on in his career. He started using this type of *tafsīr* in the mid-1970s in his public sermons in Egypt, and later in Algeria. The last piece of work that al-Ghazali completed and published was his *tafsīr*, *Naḥwa Tafsīr Mawdū'ī li'l-Qur'ān*. It represents one of the most important and mature works he produced in the last years of his life. The analysis of his *tafsīr* attempted in this thesis concentrates firstly on his views on thematic interpretation and secondly, on the way he executed his work. The study on thematic interpretation shows that thematic commentary is now well established and popular in the field of Qur'ānic studies. As discussed, the concept itself is not modern. It existed in classical works on the Qur'ān, and interest in it gathered force in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is worth noting that 'Abduh was central to the development of this field. It was he who ushered a new era on how Muslims look at the Qur'ān. The analysis shows that modern Muslim scholars prefer it as it helps in formulating a comprehensive view of the Qur'ān and its themes.

Al-Ghazali's works reveal that he preferred thematic to *musalsal* (verse by verse) commentary because he believed that it serves his objectives as a public speaker, and enabled him to speak to a wider audience. His early engagement in thematic commentary was motivated by a desire to present a complete commentary of the Qur'ān, a dream he later fulfilled. It is believed that *Naḥwa* was a culmination of a long and arduous effort, therefore the development of al-Ghazali's idea from a chronological point of view was followed. In order to understand the genesis of his *tafsīr*, attention was drawn to his sermons as an important part of the maturity of his views on *tafsīr*. These were used as a source of comparison to his books, and to draw a parallel between them and his *tafsīr*.

In trying to place his *tafsīr* in the context of twentieth century *tafāsīr* one finds that *Naḥwa* bears certain similarities with that of his teacher Maḥmūd Shaltūt. However, it differs in terms of focus and detail. *Naḥwa* looks, on the surface, like a book of reflection although on closer examination it shows that he tried to tackle many issues which had a resonance on the present. Al-Ghazali used his *tafsīr* to comment on certain current issues pertaining to politics, and social and moral problems. One of his main aims was to write his commentary to serve the objectives of *da'wa*. One may even refer to this as the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. The thought behind this and his other books is always either to help the cause of *da'wa*, or to dispel some misconceptions about Islam. This is clear from his work on Sufism, *Al-Jānib al-‘Āṭifī Min al-Islam* and his book on creed, ‘*Aqīdāt al-Muslim* (among many others) where he tried to present these issues from a Qur’ānic perspective. It is interesting to note that his *tafsīr* and works on the Qur’ān never raised any criticism.

It was his publications on *sunna* that caught wider attention, and made him the target of groups claiming to champion the Prophet's *sunna*. The analysis of his work on *sunna* in this thesis concentrates on issues such as the status of *sunna*, its authority, its status with regard to the Qur’ān and his views on weak and solitary *aḥādīth*. One finds that al-Ghazali's works on *sunna* were influenced by two factors: the anti-*sunna* figures in Egypt who called for basing the *sharī‘a* only on the Qur’ān, and the defenders of *sunna* who themselves stood accused by al-Ghazali of appropriating *sunna* to suit their aims. Al-Ghazali called for a proper understanding of the Qur’ān before any engagement with *sunna*. This means that there is no automatic acceptance of a *ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ* if it contradicts what is in the Qur’ān.

Nevertheless, al-Ghazali's attitude to *sunna* was responsive to practices of certain groups, and motivated by supporting or protecting *Shabāb al-Ṣaḥwa* – the young activists. He did not invent, as al-Qaraḍāwī noted, ideas with regard to the status of *sunna*. Accordingly it is

believed that the importance of al-Ghazali to the debate about *sunna* stems from the way he tackled its issues and the way he tried to provide a justification for his argument. He was concerned more with the way the *salafī* understood *sunna* than he was concerned with "*al-Qur'āniyūn*" (i.e. the Qur'ān-only groups) in Egypt. He held the view that this latter group does not pose a grave danger to *sunna* as do some from the *salafī* camp.

Another important point concerns al-Ghazali's views on nineteenth century reformers. While he followed their views, he nonetheless questioned some of their judgments, and called for a modern understanding focused mainly on what is beneficial to the Muslim community. Despite all his efforts to balance his views according to the Qur'ān, his approach suffered many setbacks, one of which was the fact that he opened himself to criticism from many quarters. His critics were quick to point out his lack of knowledge of both *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. They were critical of the tolerance he displayed towards weak *aḥādīth* while ready to reject *aḥādīth* proven to be *ṣaḥīḥ* just because they are *āḥād* (solitary).

The analysis of his views on *sunna* as well as the reaction to them reveal al-Ghazali's limitation in assuming that his opponents could be dealt with by attacking them. Moreover, al-Ghazali's writings on *sunna* provide a case study of how the modern Muslim scholar may understand modern problems through a prism of *aḥādīth*, but he has first to have the courage and then the ability to re-read and re-evaluate his stance whenever needed. Al-Ghazali's works on the Qur'ān and *sunna* form the cornerstone for understanding the way he looked at other issues, chief among which is his analysis of how Muslims understand their faith. His writings on Muslim theology are part of his work on Muslim social and political reform. According to him the decline of Muslims is rooted in their ignorance of the basics of their religion. It is linked to the absence of intellectual curiosity and negligence in rational

thinking. All in all, the decline is part of what he and others term as "the crisis of the Muslim mind".

Based on this belief, al-Ghazali understood that any reform must be preceded by reforming the Muslim mind, meaning that Muslims will have to reclaim the rationalist strand that they have neglected for many centuries. Hence, his rejection of *kalām*, Sufism and *salafīyya* is a rejection of their methods, not their essence. In principle, al-Ghazali had no issues with any of the previous themes. However, he faulted the way they were taught in religious schools. He blamed Muslim scholars for turning the debate on issues related to God and His attributes into a linguistic exercise where the scholar would display his mastery in debate and exposition, but little else. The same attitude existed with regard to Sufis who robbed Sufism of its spiritual essence by opening it to foreign influences, and turning it into meaningless rituals. Despite employing very strong language against Sufi practices and beliefs, al-Ghazali nevertheless displayed an ambiguous attitude towards Sufism per se. This may perhaps have something to do with his upbringing and the tolerance of Sufism shown by many leaders of Islamic movements.

Reason, according to al-Ghazali, is bound by revelation and in this case his view is no different from that of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. In the same way, he disagreed with the traditionalists who gave *naṣṣ* (text) the final say. It is clear that Muslim scholars do not conceive of any dualism existing between reason and revelation, unlike the manner in which some Western scholars have viewed reason as different from revelation, if not definitely at odds with it.

What al-Ghazali tried to do was to remind Muslims of the importance of reason and that *imān* without reason is *imān* without consequence. Therefore, reason and revelation are in total conformity. Al-Ghazali's approach to Muslim theology was influenced in part by his

education at Al-Azhar where he felt that the scholastic approaches (not to theology, but to all branches of Islamic sciences) blind the student to the real meaning of religion. Methods used by teachers of Al-Azhar were obsolete, and there was a need to reinvigorate the way 'aqīdah was taught. Al-Ghazali worked in this direction and produced many books on the basics of religion where he gave preference to the Qur'ān, and avoided the old language of *kalām*.

It is noted in this current assessment of al-Ghazali's works in theology that his emphasis on reason was his way of establishing its centrality to Muslim beliefs. Once this aim was achieved, al-Ghazali was able to criticise many social and moral aspects of Islamic practices, such as the belief in intercession and innovation, as well as warning against labels such as "*takfīr*" which is often used by some as a weapon against their opponents, or against groups who disagree with them. It should be mentioned here that al-Ghazali was not calling for a new theology as 'Abduh and Khan were, but that he was calling for a proper approach to creedal teaching as he followed the reformers' approach. At whatever level of analysis, al-Ghazali remained conservative apropos issues such as the attributes of God. In this case he preferred to be on the side of caution, and accepted the ambiguous verses as they stand without resorting to *ta'wīl*.

Al-Ghazali's thoughts on theology shifted in interest during his life from battling foreign ideologies from early on in his life as a writer, to battling militant forces (such as the *takfīr* movements) within Islam. He attacked and criticised Arab nationalism, socialism and secularism in the 1950s, and after Nasser's 1967 defeat, his emphasis weighed more in favour of Islamic revivalism and the tendency among some Islamists to embrace extremist ideas. This shift should not be taken as clear and complete, but it is worth noting that there was a

change in emphasis. Generally, on matters of theology, he maintained a stance that lies between the reformers and the revivalists.

On women's rights, al-Ghazali's views are connected to the above issues, namely the Qur'ān and *sunna*. He propounded the idea that women's issues in Muslim societies are linked to the way Muslims understand the religious text or manipulate it according to their self-interest. His analysis of women's issues (or the lack of rights for women) demonstrates his awareness of the male mentality and their tendency to justify their repression of women on religious grounds. He went further to say that women's issues in Arab societies are psychological which, in turn, resulted in the way that Arab men view women. In dealing with this matter he put into practice the views he adopted and partly reached on *sunna*.

Looking at what he wrote on women on different occasions and in various contexts, it is found that al-Ghazali continued to review his stance and views on women's status in society. There are many pieces of evidence that prove the validity of this assumption. At the beginning of his career his views were informed by the political and social circumstances of the time as well as the nature of the threats women faced. His analysis in the 1950s differs slightly from that of the 1970s, which was the decade that witnessed Islamic revivalism and the Islamisation of society. In the 1980s his views on women were informed by the debate within the Islamic camp. Al-Ghazali was, by then, considered a leading voice in the Islamist centrist camp or among the "moderate Islamists".

No doubt the social and political environment was important in shaping his views, but what matters more is the way al-Ghazali read the texts and arrived at some legal stand which empowered women and expanded their role in society. Al-Ghazali's stand on women together with his daring views informed a generation of activists after him. His role as a pioneer in this is well acknowledged by scholars such as al-Qaraḍāwī. Judged from within Islamist

circles, the discussion has shown that he was able to systemise and continue a trend started by ‘Abduh that sought to purify the *sunna* from fabrication and adulteration. Al-Ghazali managed to do so by reiterating his ideas repeatedly which, to a certain extent, affected his originality.

Whatever support or opposition he gained, what is undeniable is the legacy he left in the form of books, lectures and *khuṭab*. These, to all intents and purposes, are the fruits of his own *jihād*. Being a *dā‘iyah*, his main concern was how the Muslim character (*shakhṣiyya*) should be developed in order to live in the modern world while practicing Islam in its pure form as it was practiced by the Prophet and the early generation of Muslims. To this end he was in touch with the problems of his society, and was in constant contact with the younger generation of Muslim movements who found his "liberal" views, though unsettling to many, refreshing. His are views that have opened up new ways for them to understand their religion. Many who belong to the *wasāṭiyya* current within the Islamic movement (i.e. the Muslim Brotherhood), credit al-Ghazali with inspiring and encouraging them. They look upon him as one who speaks to them in the language of the modern world despite donning his Azharite cloak. This study has tried to show that al-Ghazali's system of ideas (as with all systems) derives its strength from the avenues that it has been able to open, rather than its ability to provide specific answers.

In discussing the majority of issues in this thesis, one notes that al-Ghazali laid much emphasis on teaching Muslims how best to approach religious texts. His goal was to liberate the Muslim mind from centuries of paralysis. Al-Ghazali wanted Muslims to broaden their thinking and cleanse the religion of corrupt interpretation and, by that analogy, of corrupt practices. He was, in effect, simultaneously urging them to open their hearts and minds and accept modern civilisation as long as it does not contradict Islam. He further called upon

religious zealots to stop their wholesale attack of Muslims who accept elements from other cultures. Al-Ghazali maintained that a return to pure Islam does not preclude embracing modernity. This explains his use of Western terms such as "socialism" (*ishtirakiyya*), "parliament" and "democracy" at one stage of his life or another as he felt that they pointed to one truth.

Al-Ghazali saw no harm in using the word "democracy" to explain the concept of *shūrā*, or "socialism" to elucidate on the concept of social justice. As previously mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, he was obliged to clarify his position as to why he utilised these foreign terms rather than Islamic ones, but his readiness to utilize mechanisms and institutions used by the West in order to achieve fair representation and ensure the freedom of choice indicates his openness and willingness to borrow from other cultures.

Al-Ghazali's logic is that freedom, the sanctity of human blood, wealth and honour are universal values which any culture or nation on earth would indubitably find ways to protect. If others have found ways of protecting them, why then are Muslims prevented from using or copying Western methodology not at odds with Islam to do the same? Furthermore, al-Ghazali believed that the principles embodied in Islam are understood and applied by other nations or cultures much better than Muslims themselves. His pessimistic view of Muslims was tinged with anger and bitterness. He would sometimes despair at what he felt was a breach between them and their religion. That said, he never doubted the future of Islam. Rather, he doubted Muslims and wondered if they still deserve to carry God's *amāna* (trust) on earth. In this sense, his optimism in the future of Islam and its eventual triumph is in stark contrast with his pessimism towards Muslims and their state of affairs. Therefore, in following these nations Muslims would, in a way, be reclaiming their religion and returning to the purity of Islam – a return which he considered to be the cure for all maladies.

The Islamists were not yet able to realize their ideal by the time of al-Ghazali's death in 1996. Algeria, where he had taught, was bleeding as the confrontation between the Islamists and the government raged on. In the Sudan, the Islamic regime was already showing signs of tension which would later spell the end of al-Turabi's venture. Conversely, the Arab-Afghans who fought against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s were looking for a new frontier. Al-Ghazali would not live to see the Taliban rule and practice in Afghanistan, to be joined later by Osama Bin Laden who had been forced to relocate to that country from the Sudan.

The Taliban-Bin Laden cooperation was to lead to a new chapter in the history of global *jihād* prior to which social and political scientists were grappling with the changing nature of Islamism, with some planning to write its obituary. However, key events in the 1990s have led them to posit new terms to understand the new trends within Islamism. Many "old" Islamists chose to renounce their radical views, while others tried to position themselves between the conservative Muslim Brotherhood and the militant *jihād* movements. The emergence of the Al-Wasat Party in Egypt embraced centrist ideas within the Islamic current there.

Al-Wasat would not gain legitimacy from the state and the Muslim Brotherhood, but its emergence signaled the rise of post-Islamism. Although "post-Islamism" and other terms such as "neo-fundamentalism" employed by scholars in the field of social and political science do not alter the nature of Islamism, they nevertheless point to the nature of the debate that was taking place among the Islamists themselves. This in turn precipitated a change of emphasis and priorities within these movements. Al-Ghazali, and later al-Qaraḍāwī, would write extensively on the issues of militancy and the stagnation of the Islamic movement.

In his four or so books, al-Qaraḍāwī draws a road map on how the Islamist discourse could possibly be moderated. It is worth noting here that the efforts of al-Ghazali and the centrist group neither gained precedence over the Muslim Brotherhood nor with the global *jihādī* movement. The former continued its traditional line of education and politics while the latter de-territorialized Islam, and found new frontiers for *jihād*, primarily in the West. However, self-redefinition and the efforts of *wasāṭiyya* as part of the development within Islamic movements should be looked at as Islamic movements are not monolithic by nature, and have evolved over time.

It may be said that the efforts made by al-Ghazali, his contemporaries and his followers were mainly concerned with concepts and the abstract – in short, theory. This is true when one looks at the kinds of the issues they tackle – issues such as citizenship, democracy, the preference of a parliamentary system over a presidential system, the possibility and impossibility of the Islamic state, *tāʿa* (obedience to the ruler), civil society, and women's role and rights. These are discussed from within the legal concept of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa* or the objective of Islamic law which emerged as a basis for the development of law and policy.

Now, in this post-Arab Spring period, Islamic political actors are trying to put decades of theoretical political discussion on the compatibility of Islam and democracy into practice. This is clear from the statements made, programmes conducted and aims set out by Islamic parties. Herein lays al-Ghazali's legacy, for it is he who was the leading advocate of this process. That notwithstanding, al-Ghazali could not have anticipated the change within some of the *salafī* groups who have accepted to participate in electoral democracy. After decades of marginalization and oppression, Islamists now have the opportunity to put their ideology into practice. However, the battle of ideas in the post-revolution countries has just begun. The conflict in Tunisia and Egypt between the Islamists and the liberal-secularists will

determine the future of these societies emerging from decades of authoritarian regimes. It is in this battle of ideas that al-Ghazali's views are most needed, perhaps more than ever before.

APPENDIX (1)

LIST OF AL-GHAZALI'S BOOKS ARRANGED IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

This list, although inconclusive, is an attempt to put al-Ghazali's books in chronological order. It is based mainly on early lists posted by his various publishers. This researcher compared various editions of al-Ghazali's books he has access to with others published in different parts of the Arab world. An attempt was made to discover from his writings about which book was first published. This researcher benefitted from the *Islāmīyat alMa'rifah* list, the different copies of al-Ghazali's books at the Congress and British Libraries. What follows is al-Ghazali's books arranged in a chronological order:

- *Al-Islām wa al-'Awḍā' al-Iqtisādiyya*. 1947.
- *Al-Islam al-Mufrā 'Alayh Bayan al-Shuyu'iy'in wa al-Ra'samaliyyin*. 1950.
- *Min Hunā Na'lam*. 1950.
- *Al-Islam wa al-'Istibdād al-Siyāsī*. 1951.
- *Ta'mulāt fī al-Dīn wa al-Ḥayā*. 1951.
- *Al-Ta'ṣub wa al-Tasāmuḥ*. 1951.
- *Aqīdat al-Muslim*. 1952.
- *Khuluq al-Muslim*. 1953.
- *Fiq al-Sīra*. 1954.
- *Min Ma'ālim al-Ḥaqq*. 1954.

- *Laysa Min al-Islam*. 1954.
- *Kayfa Nafham al-Islam*. 1954.
- *Zalām Min al-Gharb*. 1955.
- *Jadid Hayātak*. 1956.
- *Fī Mawkib al-Da'wa*. 1957.
- *Al-'Isti'mār 'Aḥqād wa 'Aṭmā'*. 1957.
- *Nazarāt fī'l-Qur'ān*. 1958.
- *Ma' Allah, Dirāsāt fī'l-D'awa wa al-Du'ā*. 1959.
- *Al-Jānib al-'Āṭifi Min al-Islam*. 1961.
- *Haqīqat al-Qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya wa 'Uṣṭurat al-Ba'th al-Arabī*. 1962.
- *Huqūq al-Insān Byan Ta'ālim al-Islam wa 'I'lān al-Umam al-Mutaḥida*. 1963.
- *Al-Islam wa al-Ṭāqāt al-Mu'tala*. 1964.
- *Ma'rakat al-Muṣhaf fī'l-'Ālam al-Islami*. 1964.
- *Kifāh Dīn*. 1965.
- *Hadhā Dīnunā*. 1965.
- *Al-Islam fī wajh al-Zaḥf al-'Aḥmar*. 1966.
- *Ḥaṣād al-Ghurūr*. 1967.
- *Qadhāif al-Ḥaqq*. 1967.

- *Min Ma'ālim, al-Ḥaqq fī Kifāhinā al-Islami al-Ḥadīth*, 1973/4.
- *Difā 'an al-'Aqīda wa al-Sharī'a Dīda Maṭā'in al-Mustashriqīn*. 1975.
- *Jihād al-Da'wa Bayan 'Ajz al-Dākhil wa al-Kharīj*. 1978?
- *Rakā'iz al-Imān Bayna al-'Aql wa al-Qalb*. 1979.
- *Al-Fasād al-Siyāsī fī'l-Mujtamā'at al-Islamiyya*. 1979.
- *Fan al-Dhkir wa al-Du'ā'*. 1980.
- *Min Khutab al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī* (5 Volumes). 1980.
- *'Alamiyat al-Da'wa Bayna al-Nazarīh wa al-Ṭabīq*. Islamic University at Madina (lecture). 1980.
- *Mushkilāt Fī Ṭarīq al-Ḥayā al-Islamiyya*. 1981.
- *Humūm Dā'iya*. 1982.
- *Mi'at Su'āl 'an al-Islam* (2 volumes). 1983-1984.
- *Mustaqbal al-Islam Khārija 'Ardihī Kayfa Nufakir Fīhi*. 1984.
- *Al-Ṭarīq Min Hunā*. 1985.
- *Al-Ghazw al-Thaqāfī Yamtadu ilā Mujtamā'ātinā*. 1985.
- *Sir Ta'khur al-Muslimīn*. 1985.
- *Dustūr al-Waḥda al-Thaqāfiyya Bayna al-Muslimīn*. 1987.
- *Namādhij min al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī Ili al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. 1987.
- *'Illal wa Adwiya*. 1988.

- *Al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya Bayna ‘Ahl al-Fiqh wa ‘Ahl al-Hadīth*. 1989.
- *Al-Maḥāwir al-Khamsa fi’l-Qur’ān*. 1989.
- *Muḥāḍarāt al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*. 1989.
- *Azmat al-Shūrā fi’l-Mujtama’āt al-Islamiyya*. 1990.
- *Qaḍāyā al-Mar’a Bayn al–Taḳālīd al-Rākida wa al-Wāfida*. 1990.
- *Ṣayḥat Taḥdhīr Min Du’āt al-Tanṣīr*. 1991.
- *Kayfa Nata’āmal Ma’ al-Qurān*. 1991.
- *Al-Mar’a fi’l-Islam* with Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī and Aḥmad ‘Umar Hāshim. 1991.
- *Turāthunā al-Fikrī fi Mizān al-Shar’ wa al-‘Aql*. 1991.
- *Ramadān wa al-Ṣiyām* with Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī and Aḥmad ‘Umar Hāshim. 1991.
- *Naḥwa Tafsīr Mawḍū’i l’l-Qur’ān al-Karīm* (1st volume). 1992.
- *Al-Ḥaqq al-Murr* (6 volumes). 1993.
- *Naḥwa Tafsīr Mawḍū’ī li’l-Qur’ān al-Karīm*. 1992-1995.
- *Jur’āt Jadida min al-Ḥaqq al-Murr*. 1996-1997.
- *Kunūz min al-Suna al-Nabawiyya*. 1998.
- *Al-Yahūd al-Mu’tadūn wa Dawlatuhum Israel*. 1999.
- *Diwān al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*. 1999.
- *Al-‘Aḥādīth al-Jazā’iriyya l’l-Imām Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*. 2004.

- Al-Ghazali (ed) *Ṣayyid al-Khāṭir*, by Ibn al-Jawzī. 1960.
- Al-Ghazali (ed) *Dham al-Hawā* by Ibn al-Jawzī. 1961.

APPENDIX (2)

BOOKS ON AL-GHAZALI

- Abāthri, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm. *Al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, al-Majma’ al-‘Ālamī li’l-Taqrīb Bayn al-Madhāhib*. 2007.
- ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, Aḥmad Zakariyā. *Ishāmāt al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī fi’l-Tafsīr fi Daww’ Kitābihi ‘Naḥwa Tafsīr Mawḍū’ī li Suwar al-Qur’ān*. Egypt: MA degree at the University of Banhā. 2011.
- ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd, Ashraf. *Jināyat al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī ‘alā al-Ḥadīth wa Ahlih*. Egypt (Al-Ismā’iliyya): Maktbat al-Imām al-Bukhārī. 1989.
- Al-‘Adawī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. *Al-Imām Muḥammad*. Cairo: Dār Naḍat Miṣr, Al-Ghīza. 1997.
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Al-Manār, Egypt.

Al-Quds al-Arabi, London.

New York Times, USA.

Al-Qabas, Kuwait.

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- *Bawaṣlat al-Ḥuriyya* (film). Broadcast by Al Jazeera documentary channel. 2010.
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- Interview with Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazali on Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) satellite television channel, available at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWUKUIhw_pw

Websites:

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