

AL-GHAZĀLĪ IN LITERATURE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS BIOGRAPHY AND THE ISSUE OF FAITH AND GOOD DEEDS

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Abstract

This study offers a brief analysis on some biographical works on Imām al-Ghazālī and his view on the issue of faith and good deeds through examination of various relevant literature. Imām al-Ghazālī has been regarded as one of the world’s most influential thinkers as well as the greatest scholar Islam has ever produced. The life, teaching and thought of al-Ghazālī have attracted the attention of many scholars, both Western and non-Western. The influence of al-Ghazālī is not limited within his own tradition, but is felt both in the East and the West, reaching Jewish and Christian traditions. This study is theoretical in nature, and it involves bibliographic/library research. It surveys and offers a brief analysis of some literatures—mostly in English—that are relevant to al-Ghazālī’s biography and his view on the issue of faith and good deeds. This study found that although there are some critical assessments and misunderstandings of al-Ghazālī’s life and views, majority of literature consulted acknowledge his great scholarship and contributions in many aspects. Al-Ghazālī did not remain indifferent but indeed ardently refuted the various interpretations related to the issue of good deeds which he considered as heretical. The research also shows that not only al-Ghazālī always emphasised the observance of religious commandments, but he also breathed spirituality and gave deeper content and insight into the religious life.

Keywords: faith, good deeds, Sufism, Ash‘arite school

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Abstrak

Kajian ini mengemukakan analisis ringkas mengenai penulisan tentang biografi Imam al-Ghazali dan pandangan beliau mengenai isu iman dan perbuatan baik melalui kajian terhadap pelbagai literatur yang berkaitan. Imam al-Ghazali dianggap sebagai salah seorang daripada pemikir paling berpengaruh di dunia dan juga ulama yang paling besar yang Islam pernah hasilkan. Kehidupan, pengajaran dan pemikiran al-Ghazali telah menarik perhatian ramai sarjana, samaada dari Barat dan bukan Barat. Pengaruh al-Ghazali tidak terhad dalam tradisinya sendiri, tetapi turut melebar ke Timur dan Barat, merangkumi tradisi Yahudi dan Kristian. Kajian ini adalah teoritikal yang menggunakan kajian bibliografi/perpustakaan. Kajian ini membuat analisis ringkas mengenai beberapa literatur—majoritinya dalam Bahasa Inggeris—yang berkaitan dengan biografi al-Ghazali dan pandangan beliau mengenai isu iman dan perbuatan baik. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa walaupun terdapat beberapa penilaian kritikal dan salah faham tentang kehidupan dan pandangan al-Ghazali, majoriti literatur mengakui kesarjanaan dan sumbangan besar beliau dalam pelbagai aspek. Al-Ghazali tidak berdiam diri tetapi sebaliknya bersungguh-sungguh menolak pelbagai tafsiran menyeleweng yang berkaitan dengan isu perbuatan baik, yang dilihatnya sebagai bid'ah. Kajian ini turut menunjukkan bahawa bukan sahaja al-Ghazali sentiasa menekankan pematuhan perintah-perintah agama, tetapi beliau juga telah menghembuskan nafas kerohanian dan memberikan pandangan dan kandungan yang lebih mendalam kepada kehidupan beragama.

Katakunci: iman, perbuatan baik, sufi, aliran al-Ash'ariyyah

INTRODUCTION

Imām al-Ghazālī has been credited with various titles including *Islam's ha-Nesher ha-Gadol* and *Doctor Angelicus*,² *Hujjat al-Islam (Proof of Islam)*,³ *Zayn al-Dīn (the Ornament of Faith)*, and *Sharaf*

2 M. Afifi al-Akiti, "On Celebrating the 900th Anniversary of al-Ghazālī," *The Muslim World* 101, no. 4 (2011), 573.

3 Al-Qaraḍāwī. *Al-Imām al-Ghazālī bayna Madihīh wa Nāqidīh*. 4th ed. (Bayrūt: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1994), 11ff.; Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. 'Abd al-Fattāh Muḥammad al-Hilw and Maḥmud Muḥammad al-Tanāhī, vol. 6 (Cairo: Dār Ahyā'

al-A'imma (the Nobility of the Leading Scholars).⁴ Many scholars regard al-Ghazālī as the greatest scholar Islam has ever produced, and also as one of the world's most influential thinkers.⁵ For instance, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (1327-1370 CE) describes him as “Highway of Religion, whereby men may be enabled to reach the Abode of Peace.”⁶ Indeed, he regards al-Ghazālī not just as a great scholar and thinker, but as a seer.⁷ In the West, Ernest Renan—the 19th century European philologist—called him “the most original mind among Arabian philosophers.”⁸ In the same regard, Watt also acknowledges al-Ghazālī's high status and considers him as “the leader in Islam's supreme encounter with Greek philosophy,” from which Islamic theology attained its victory and in which philosophy—particularly Neo-Platonism—“received a blow from which it did not recover.”⁹

Al-Ghazālī was responsible for the renewal or revival of their respective religious traditions. He underwent a spiritual conversion and attained as well as propagated spiritual insight. He interpreted his spiritual experiences in the light of what he believed to be orthodox teachings.

The following discussion offers a brief review and analysis of some of the relevant literature which are relevant to al-Ghazālī's biography and his view on the issue of faith and good deeds.

al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1968), 191ff.; Ebrahim Moosa, “Ghazali, Al- (C. 1059-1111),” in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, ed. Richard C. Martin, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 274; W. Montgomery Watt, “Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Al-,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 3469-3472.

4 Thomas Glick, Steven J. Livesey, and Faith Wallis, eds., *Medieval Science, Technology, and Medicine: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 194.

5 Watt, introduction to *Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt (1953; repr., Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004), 13; Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 2.

6 Al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 191; Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic: A Study of the Life and Personality of Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Tūsī al-Ghazālī, Together with an Account of His Mystical Teaching and an Estimate of His Place in the History of Islamic Mysticism* (Lahore: Hijra International Publishers, 1983), 215.

7 Ibid.

8 Quoted in S. Nomanul Haq, foreword to *Decisive Criterion*, ix.

9 Watt, introduction to *Faith and Practice*, 13.

BIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES ON AL-GHAZĀLĪ

The life of al-Ghazālī has attracted the attention of many scholars, both Western and non-Western. A number of his writings have been translated into different languages since the 12th century. For instance, his *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah* was translated into Latin in the third quarter of the 12th century, and into Hebrew in 1292 CE.¹⁰ The wide influence of al-Ghazālī is known, among other ways, through his quotations by many Western scholars of the Middle Ages and early modern period.¹¹ This indicates that like Augustine, the influence of al-Ghazālī is not limited within his own tradition, but is felt both in the East and the West, reaching Jewish and Christian traditions.¹²

The widespread teachings and influence of al-Ghazālī are not without criticism. Most critics focus on the mystical teachings of al-Ghazālī, which are regarded as unusual during the time, or even as unorthodox. Al-Ghazālī was condemned by Abū 'Abdallāh M. b. Ḥamdīn—the *Qādī* (judge) of Cordova—and his books were once burned in Andalusia, before being accepted and admired with a great

10 Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazali," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, first published on Tue Aug 14, 2007 and was last modified on Aug 29, 2008, accessed 6 March 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/al-ghazali/>.

11 Among them are Albert the Great (c.1206-1280 CE), Roger Bacon (c. 1214/20–1292/94 CE), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Dante Alighieri (1265–1321 CE), and David Hume (1711-1776 CE). This indicates that the influence of al-Ghazālī is not limited within his own tradition, but is felt both in the East and the West, reaching Jewish and Christian traditions.

12 Margaret Smith has devoted a chapter on al-Ghazālī's influence. She observes that among early prominent figures from Islamic traditions who were influenced by al-Ghazālī include some founders of the Sufi orders, such as 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (1077–1166 CE), Ahmad al-Rifā'ī (1119-1182 CE), the founder of Qādirīyyah and Rifā'īyyah Sufi orders respectively. Others include Ibn Tufayl (1105-1185 CE), al-Suhrawardī (1144-1234 CE), Ibn al-'Arabī (1164/65-1240 CE), 'Aḥfīf al-Dīn Yāfī'ī (1298-1367 CE), Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (c. 1327/28-1370 CE), and 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī (or Sha'rāwī, c. 1492/93-1565 CE). Upon mediaeval Jews, al-Ghazali left a considerable influence on Maimonides (c. 1135/38-1204), Johanan Alemans, and on some theories found in the *Zohar*. As regards Mediaeval Christianity, al-Ghazālī's thoughts influenced Jacobite Christian Yuhanna Abu al-Faraj Barhebraeus—also known as Gregorius—(1226-1286 CE), Dominican Raymond Martin (or Marti, d. 1284 CE), and French mystic Blaise Pascal (1623-1662 CE), and many others. Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 198-226. However, as Smith and Nabil Nofal have established, it was Thomas Aquinas, who was clearly indebted to al-Ghazālī. Nofal states "In his *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas Aquinas draws heavily on al-Ghazali's ideas contained in *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din*, *Kimīya-yi Sa'adat* and *Ar-Risala al-Laduniya*." Whereas, Smith writes "[t]he greatest of these Christian writers who was influenced by al-Ghazali was St. Thomas Aquinas, who made a study of the Arabic writers and admitted his indebtedness to them." See Nofal, "Al-Ghazali," 13; Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 220. See also Moosa, *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination*, esp. p. 12ff.

esteem later.¹³ Among the prominent critics of al-Ghazālī are Ibn Rushd¹⁴ (Averroes, 1126-1198 CE) and Ibn al-Jawzī¹⁵ (1114-1200 CE).

Ibn Rushd bitterly criticised some mystical concepts of al-Ghazālī and his negative attitudes towards philosophy. In *al-Kashf ‘an Manāhij al-Adillah fī ‘Aqāid al-Millah* (Clarifying the Systems of Proof in the Beliefs of the Nation [of Muslims]), he claims that some of al-Ghazālī’s teachings were inconsistent,¹⁶ and some of them were dangerous to *Shari‘ah* (the Islamic Law) and philosophy.¹⁷ However, Smith observes that Ibn Rushd did not appreciate the developments of al-Ghazālī’s thought and his different approaches. Smith states “Ibn Rushd perhaps failed to distinguish between al-Ghazālī the orthodox theologian and al-Ghazālī the mystic, and between his earlier opinions and those of his later years....”¹⁸ Indeed, al-Ghazālī employed different approaches to suit different readers. He states in *Mizan* that opinions are of three kinds, namely, those which are shared with the public, those given only to those who asked, and ones which are kept secretly.¹⁹ Thus, the teachings of al-Ghazālī, especially which contain deep mystical insight, should be read in their contexts.

Ibn Rushd also published *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence) as a refutation to al-Ghazālī’s *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)—al-Ghazālī’s most celebrated

13 Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 198. See also Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination*, 21-25.

14 Abū al-Walīd Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd. He was a Muslim Spanish polymath, a prominent Muslim philosopher, and theologian, and mastered various disciplines of knowledge, such as logic, jurisprudence, politic, Arabic music, medicine, astronomy, geography, mathematic, physic, etc.

15 Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī. He was a prominent jurist, theologian, historian, celebrated preacher, and the most learned writer of his time.

16 E.g., the inconsistency of his doctrine of emanation as found in his *Mishkāt al-Anwār* [The Niche for Lights].

17 See Ibn Rushd, *Al-Kashf ‘an Manāhij al-Adillah fī ‘Aqāid al-Millah*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābirī (Bayrūt: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-‘Arabiyyah, 1998), 150-152, 207.

18 Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 199.

19 See *Mizān*, 405-409; *Timbangan Amal*, 236-239; Nakamura, “Was Ghazālī Ash‘arite?,” *Memoirs of Research Department of the Tokyo Bunkoo* 51, (1993): 1-24 20; Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination*, 141-142.

work in criticizing philosophy.²⁰ The book attempts to defend the use of Aristotelian philosophy within Islamic thought, which was bitterly attacked by, and met its downfall (from Muslim lands) through al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut*. Despite this bitter criticism, al-Ghazālī's works, teachings, and position on various issues have been widely accepted and established as among the orthodox positions in many Muslim lands.

Ibn al-Jawzī was very critical and hostile to Sufism, and was among the most vocal critics of al-Ghazālī. He rebutted al-Muḥāsibī²¹ (781-857 CE), whose mystical teachings inspired al-Ghazālī. Since al-Ghazālī adhered to Sufism and accepted al-Muḥāsibī's views, Ibn al-Jawzī refuted his mystical teachings, especially those which are contained in *Iḥyā'*—al-Ghazālī's *magnum opus*. As G. F. Haddad has observed, Ibn al-Jawzī dismisses *Iḥyā'* in four of his writings.²² He claimed that it had many errors, collecting them in his *I'lām al-Ahyā' bi Aghlāt al-Iḥyā'* (Informing the Living about the Mistakes of the *Iḥyā'*).²³ The critical views of Ibn al-Jawzī towards al-Ghazālī influenced Ibn Taymiyyah²⁴ (1263-1328 CE), who in turn influenced Dhahabī²⁵ (1274-1348 CE), and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-

20 For a parallel English-Arabic text of *Tahāfut*, see al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers: Tahāfut al-Falāsifah: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. intro. and anno. Michael E Marmura, 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2000). There are several Arabic editions, as well as English translation of *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* available online in Muslim philosophy website of Ibn Rushd. For the Arabic versions, see <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/books/taf-taf.pdf>; <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/books/tt-ir-maj.pdf>; for English translation, see <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ir/tt/index.html>; or also http://www.newbanner.com/Philosophy/IbnRushd/Tahafut_alTahafut_en.pdf.

21 Abu 'Abdullāh al-Harith ibn Asad al-'Anazī al-Muḥāsibī. He was a great Sufi master and theologian,

22 I.e., *I'lām al-Ahyā' bi Aghlāt al-Iḥyā'* [Informing the Living about the Mistakes of the *Iḥyā'*], *Talbīs Iblīs* [The Devil's Deception], *Kitāb al-Quṣṣās wa al-Mudhakkirīn* [The Book of the Story-tellers/Admonishers and Those Who Remind], and his history *Al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Muluk wa al-Umam* [The system in the History of Kings and Nations]. See G. F. Haddad, "Those Who Attack Imam Ghazālī," *Living Islam*, accessed, 10 Oct. 2011, http://www.livingislam.org/n/atgz_e.html#up-4.

23 Not printed and not known mss copies. See Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 200.

24 Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Ḥalīm ibn al-Salām ibn Taymiyyah al-Ḥarānī. He was a prominent Muslim theologian and logician. For Ibn Taymiyyah's analysis of al-Ghazālī's writings and teachings, see Yahya M. Michot, "An Important Reader of al-Ghazālī: Ibn Taymiyya," *The Muslim World* 103, no. 1 (2013), 131-160.

25 Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Qaymaz ibn 'Abdullāh Shams al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullāh al-Dhahabī.

Wahhāb (1703-1792 CE), the founder of the Wahhabi Movement. Ibn Taymiyyah—regarded as another important critical reader of al-Ghazālī—read extensively al-Ghazālī’s corpus and offered his critical views of certain teachings. For instance, Yahya M. Michot has analysed that Ibn Taymiyyah uttered a strong condemnation of al-Ghazālī’s *Ihyā’* in three points: that al-Ghazālī’s treatment of Sufism in the *Ihyā’* was “a travesty benefiting the enemies of Islam;” that “imāms [leaders] of the religion” have also criticised the *Ihyā’*; and that the *Ihyā’* was “the work of a sick person infected by Avicenna.”²⁶

However, all these criticisms were not influential except on some small local groups, as al-Ghazālī’s influence has been enormous.²⁷ Many scholars came forward to defend al-Ghazālī and his works, particularly *Ihyā’*.²⁸ Indeed, al-Ghazālī himself wrote his own defence of *Ihyā’* known as *al-Imlā’ fī Ishkālāt al-Ihyā’* (Dictations in the Ambiguities of *Ihyā’* or Notes on Issues of *Ihyā’*).²⁹ He was able to justify himself and succeeded in giving a place to Sufism in Islamic tradition.³⁰ His success in bridging Sufism with orthodoxy is acknowledged both by Eastern and Western scholars. Thus, al-Ghazālī established himself firmly within the Islamic tradition. His works are continuously referred to and quoted. Various scholars, from the East to the West, admire al-Ghazālī and his works, and some of them regard him as the greatest scholar Islam has ever produced.³¹

Biographies of al-Ghazālī were already written in Arabic as early as the 12th century.³² Frank Griffel has observed that there are several accounts of al-Ghazālī by his contemporaries.³³ One, for instance, was provided by his student ‘Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī (d. 1135 CE)

26 Michot, “An Important Reader of al-Ghazālī,” 137.

27 Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 202.

28 For the list of these works, see <http://www.ghazali.org/site/ihya.htm>.

29 See <http://www.ghazali.org/books/imla-gz.pdf>.

30 Duncan B. MacDonald, “The Life of Al-Ghazālī, with Especial Reference to His Religious Experience and Opinions,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 20 (1899): 71-72.

31 W. Montgomery Watt, introduction to *The Faith and Practice*, 13.

32 For the list of the original sources on al-Ghazālī’s life, see <http://www.ghazali.org/site/osm.htm>. For the secondary sources, see <http://www.ghazali.org/site/ssm.htm>.

33 Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21-23.

in 1113 CE,³⁴ later condensed by Ibrāhm al-Ṣar finī (d. 1243 CE).³⁵ Others are found in the works of Abū Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1076-1148 CE)³⁶—a student of al-Ghazālī—Ibn ‘Asākir (1106-1175/76 CE),³⁷ Ibn Tufayl (1105-1185/86 CE),³⁸ and Ibn al-Jawzī.³⁹ Other important studies from the 14th century are those of al-Dhahabī,⁴⁰ Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (1327-1370 CE),⁴¹ and Ibn Kathīr (1301-1373 CE).⁴² Al-Subkī’s study is known to be the most important biographical entry on al-Ghazālī.

34 ‘Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī, *Al-Siyāq li Tārīkh Naysābur* [Sequel to the History of Nishapur], <http://www.ghazali.org/articles/agh-frsi.htm>, (accessed, 4 Sept. 2010).

35 Ibrāhīm al-Ṣarfinī, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li Tārīkh Naysābur* [Selections from the “History of Nishapur”], ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1989).

36 Abū Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī, *Al-‘Awāṣim min al-Qawāṣim* [Defense Against Disaster], ed. ‘Ammār Ṭalībī (al-Qāhira: Maktabah al-Turāth, 1997). His full name was Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh ibn al-‘Arabī al-Ma‘afiri al-Iṣbīlī Abū Bakr. He was an Andalusian scholar, a master of Mālikī jurisprudence.

37 Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabayīn Kadhib al-Muṣṭarī fīmā Nusiba ilā al-Imām Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī* [The Exposition of the Fabricator’s Lies in What He Attributed to al-Ash‘arī] (Al-Qāhira: Maktabah al-Qudṣī, 1928), 291-306. His full name was Abū al-Qāṣim ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Hibatullāh ibn ‘Asākir. He was a Syrian scholar who wrote an important treatise on history of Damascus.

38 Ibn Tufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān: Philosophical Tale*, trans. with intro. and notes Lenn Evan Goodman (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972). His full name was Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Muḥammad ibn Tufayl al-Qaysī al-Andalusī.

39 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Muluk wa al-Umam*, vol. 8 (Ḥaydrābād: Maṭba‘ah Dā‘irah al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyyah, 1940), 168-170.

40 Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar I‘lām al-Nubalā’* [The Lives of Noble Figures], 322-346, <http://www.ghazali.org/articles/siyar.pdf>; *Tārīkh al-Islām* [History of Islam], 115-126, <http://www.ghazali.org/articles/trk-islam.pdf>.

41 Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāh Muḥammad al-Ḥilw and Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī, vol. 6 (Cairo: Dār Aḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah, 1968), 191-389. His full name was Tāj al-Dīn Abū Naṣr ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ibn ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-Kāfī al-Subkī. He belonged to al-Subkī’s family, the renowned family of the 7th and 8th centuries. Their members were well-known for their high positions as judges, preachers, professors, writers, as well as for their learning.

42 Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* [The Beginning and the End], ed. ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Turki, vol. 16 (Gizah: Dar Hījr, 1998), 213-215. His full name was Abū al-Fidā’ Imād al-Dīn Ismā‘īl bin ‘Umar bin Kathīr al-Qurashī al-Buṣrawī. He was a scholar of *ḥadīth*, jurist, historian and exegete.

The commentary of *Ihyā'* by Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (1732-1790/91 CE)⁴³ is also an important source. In addition to his voluminous commentary of *Ihyā'*, Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī devotes an early section to recounting al-Ghazālī's life and discussing the authenticity of his works.⁴⁴ His account is considered as among the primary sources of al-Ghazālī's biography. There are also a large number of secondary studies devoted to al-Ghazālī's life in Arabic and English languages.⁴⁵ However, only some of those in English will be examined below.

Perhaps the earliest monumental study on al-Ghazālī's life in English is that of Duncan B. MacDonald.⁴⁶ His influential article on al-Ghazālī, published in 1899, has shaped the traditional outlook on his life. MacDonald observed several primary contributions of al-Ghazālī, observing that he completed a systematic Islamic scholastic theology, especially of the Ash'arite school.⁴⁷ He also contends that al-Ghazālī "saved it [Islam] from the scholastic decrepitude"⁴⁸ of his time. However, among al-Ghazālī's various contributions, it is his achievement in bridging mysticism, or rather Sufism, with Islamic tradition that is generally most celebrated. To quote MacDonald's famous expression, al-Ghazālī "bridged the widening gap, took over mysticism with its intuitionism and spiritual life into the dry body of theology, and gave the Church of Islām a fresh term of life."⁴⁹

43 Al-Zabīdī, *Ithāf al-Sādah al-Muttaqīn bi Sharḥ Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* [Presents from Pious Chieftains: Commentary on al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*], 10 vols. (Bayrūt: Mu'assisah al-Tārikh al-'Arabī, 1994). His full name was Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ḥusaynī al-Zabīdī, Abū Fayḍ. He was a Ḥanafite prolific writer, a scholar of *hadīth*, genealogy, and biographies.

44 Ibid., vol. 1, 1-55.

45 For the list of the secondary sources both in Arabic and English languages, see <http://www.ghazali.org/site/ssm.htm>.

46 Duncan B. MacDonald, "The Life of Al-Ghazzālī, with Especial Reference to His Religious Experience and Opinions," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 20 (1899), 71-132.

47 However MacDonald's (as well as some other Western scholars') expression of "the Church of Muhammad" to refer to Muslim community is not appropriate. This is because there is no concept of church in Islam. The term *Muhammadism* is another misleading term. The modern term of *ummah* or *ummatic* is more accurate. Otherwise, the phrase "Muslim community" is already sufficient.

48 MacDonald, "The Life of Al-Ghazzālī," 71.

49 Ibid., 72.

MacDonald offers a clear-cut division of the life of al-Ghazālī into two parts, namely, before and after the transformation. Each division is characterised with its own opposite character of al-Ghazālī. MacDonald contends that before his transformation to Sufism, al-Ghazālī was materialistic, selfish, and even immoral, irreligious, and impious, and that it was only after transformation that he became other-worldly, pious, and a great Sufi. Nevertheless, as I will argue later, this contention can no longer be accepted as a sufficiently realistic view, and thus needs to be re-examined. Nonetheless, many scholars accept MacDonald's view, and therefore, it has been regarded as the standard stance on his life.

However, in 1985 Kojiro Nakamura challenged MacDonald's clear-cut division into two of al-Ghazālī's life, namely, "the former as this-worldly and irreligious and the latter as other-worldly and extremely pious."⁵⁰ Indeed, he questioned the traditional reading of al-Ghazālī's account of his life as found in the *Munqidh min al-Dalāl* [the Deliverance from Error].⁵¹ This is because, he argues, the *Munqidh* was written by al-Ghazālī long after his transformation, namely, when he was a "veteran Sufi." Therefore, as Nakamura observes, it is quite natural for al-Ghazālī to be "excessively critical" about his previous life.⁵²

Agreeing with Nakamura's analysis above, I argue that some parts of MacDonald's account overstate his case. In tandem with some other scholars, he fails to acknowledge the positive side of al-Ghazālī's life, character, and activities before the transformation that are quite significant, and need to be read along with his *Munqidh*. Al-Ghazālī was highly respected even before his transformation to Sufism. He was known as a brilliant person; he was the favourite student

50 Kojiro Nakamura, "Ghazali's Life and Its Difficulties," chap. 1 in *Ghazali and Prayer* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2001). See also his article "An Approach to Ghazali's Conversion," *Orient* 21 (1985): 46-47.

51 There are several English translations available on this work. See Richard Joseph McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of Al-Ghazālī's al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazali* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 61-143; Al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error and Attachment to the Lord of Might and Majesty*, book 1 in *The Faith and Practise of al-Ghazālī*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt (1953; repr., Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004).

52 Ibid.

of Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī—the greatest theologian of his time—and he captivated the attention of the great Vizier Niẓām al-Mulk.⁵³ At an early age (34 years old), he was appointed as chief professor, the highest academic position, at the Niẓāmiyyah College in Baghdad—perhaps the most prestigious college of the time. He earned the honorific titles of *Imām* Khurāsān and *Imām* al-Irāq,⁵⁴ and was well-versed in different branches of knowledge, especially in jurisprudence, Sufism, theology, and philosophy. His scholarship was recognised by both friends and foes alike.⁵⁵ Among many of his positive traits, he was widely consulted by different levels of people, from the layman up to the kings. All these are not without significance, and therefore, it is quite impossible to plainly claim that such a great personality was merely irreligious, materialistic, and “this-worldly.” Some of al-Ghazālī’s statements in the *Munqidh* cannot be taken literally. They are expressed in a radical way in order to stress his critical view and spiritual regret. There is no doubt that reading al-Ghazālī’s books attentively reveals that he is speaking not as an ordinary man, but as a sincere spiritual master who regards even enjoying the permissible things for normal pleasure as excessive acts or even sins.⁵⁶ Therefore, as Nakamura has suggested, it is no surprise to see al-Ghazālī as “excessively critical” of his former life after his transformation to Sufism. Indeed, to be critical of oneself is a common practice in Sufism, and this practice continues till his death.

Samuel M. Zwemer examines the Islamic approach to seeking God through the teaching of al-Ghazālī, which is considered as another early English study on al-Ghazālī.⁵⁷ Without denying Zwemer’s excellent account of al-Ghazālī’s life, I argue that some of his analyses reflect a bias towards Christian and Orientalist attitudes, and are therefore, inaccurate. He reads al-Ghazālī from a Christian perspective, and consequently, he does not take into account the whole dimension

53 He was the great vizier of Malik Shāh, the successor of Alp Arslān.

54 Faris, “Al-Ghazzālī’s Rules of Conduct,” 43.

55 Al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 194.

56 E.g. *Ihyā’*, III.6, 220-221; *Revival*, III.6, 169.

57 Samuel M. Zwemer, *A Moslem Seeker after God: Showing Islam at Its Best in the Life and Teaching of Al-Ghazali, Mystic and Theologian of the Eleventh Century* (New York, Chicago etc.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1920).

or other perspectives (e.g., the Islamic and mystical dimensions) of the issues highlighted. For instance, having quoted Adolf Wuttke's negative statement on Islamic ethics, and after proudly stating that it needs no proof, Zwemer is incorrect to conclude that "the ethical standard is so low" in Islam and in al-Ghazālī.⁵⁸ He also is wrong in asserting that the ideal virtue of Muslim, which is based on imitation of the Prophet, has practically abrogated the moral law. He fails to acknowledge that most of the ethics of the Prophet indeed confirm the moral law and some of them do transcend the normal moral law.

Indeed, Islam, as well as al-Ghazālī himself, is very concerned with ethics and is positive towards good deeds in ethical and religious aspects. Several books and articles have been published to analyse his theory of ethics.⁵⁹ In another part of his book, Zwemer's accusation that al-Ghazālī's theory of conduct is inconsistent and has many contradictions is misleading.⁶⁰ He fails to appreciate that al-Ghazālī employs a different approach on different contexts and people as mentioned above.⁶¹ In his excellent analysis, Hourani proves that he finds "a consistent theory" in al-Ghazālī's ethics of action.⁶²

58 Ibid., 197-198.

59 See for instance, M. 'Umaruddīn, *The Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazzālī*, rev. ed. (1962; repr., Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributers, 1996); Mohamed Ahmed Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975); Muhammad Abul Quasem, *The Ethics of al-Ghazali: A Composite Ethics in Islam*, Monographs in Islamic Religion and Theology (Delmar, N.Y.: Caravan Books, 1978); and George F. Hourani, "Ghazali on the Ethics of Action," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 96, no. 1 (1976): 69-88.

60 See Zwemer, *A Moslem Seeker*, 214.

61 See *Mīzān*, 405-409; *Timbangan Amal*, 236-239; Nakamura, "Was Ghazālī Ash'arite?," 20.

62 Hourani, "Ghazali on the Ethics of Action." Indeed, there are still some other issues which seem inaccurate and misleading in Zwemer's study. For instance, his accusation that some of the Prophetic traditions quoted by al-Ghazālī are in fact taken from the Bible is mistaken. Some other scholars (such as Frank Hugh Foster and Morris S. Seale) also repeat this mistake. But it is true that al-Ghazālī frequently referring to Jesus' saying which indicates that he is referring to the Biblical texts, although some of them are not reported by the later versions of the Bible. Among Zwemer's misleading accusations and conclusions are his statement that it is "the tragedy of Islam" that al-Ghazālī "failed to find in Mohammed [Prophet Muhammad] the ideals of his own heart" (p. 218) and his "Christian conclusion" that "the mystics in Islam are near the Kingdom of God and for them al-Ghazali may be used as a schoolmaster to lead men to Christ" (p. 294). For the former, it could be argued by the fact that al-Ghazālī always takes and reminds Muslims to take Prophet Muḥammad as their example, and he devotes a section in his *Iḥyā'* to discuss the beautiful conduct and character of the Prophet. James

Other important biographical studies on al-Ghazālī include those of W. Montgomery Watt and Margaret Smith.⁶³ Watt's analysis is important for understanding on the socio-political background of al-Ghazālī's time. Watt's in-depth examination of philosophical, theological, and intellectual issues also provides an invaluable foundation for identifying al-Ghazālī's reactions towards different groups and views in his time. Smith's analysis, on the other hand, is valuable in order to grasp the mystical dimension of al-Ghazālī's explanation of good deeds.

Without denying that al-Ghazālī sometimes refers to Biblical statements that were available in his time, there are a few points that need to be re-examined in Smith's analysis of the issue. For instance, her arguments that elements of Pauline teachings were contained in some of al-Ghazālī's accounts, and that some statements quoted by al-Ghazālī are indeed words of Paul's are inaccurate. Traditionally the Muslim view of Paul has been negative, accusing him of having distorted the teachings of Jesus. As a prominent orthodox '*ulamā*' (Muslim scholar), it was quite impossible for al-Ghazālī to resort to Paul's teachings for his argument. Indeed, his quotations are genuinely from the Qur'ān or Prophetic tradition that in some cases may have a resemblance to Christian scriptures.⁶⁴

Robson for instance, affirms that al-Ghazālī stresses the importance and necessity of imitating the Prophet. For the latter, Zwemer is negligent of the fact that Muslims highly revere Jesus Christ as a prophet as they revere other prophets. Therefore, al-Ghazālī's frequent reference to Jesus cannot be totally interpreted as Zwemer does, that is, "to lead men to [Christian] Christ", for it is misleading to accuse a great Muslim scholar to lead Muslims to Christianity. Indeed, al-Ghazālī wants to show the true teachings of Jesus according to the Islamic perspective.

63 W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of al-Ghazālī* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963); Margaret Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic: A Study of the Life and Personality of Abū Hāmid Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī al-Ghazālī, Together with an Account of His Mystical Teaching and an Estimate of His Place in the History of Islamic Mysticism* (Lahore: Hijra International Publishers, 1983).

64 See Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 118-120. For instance, Smith argues that al-Ghazālī quotes Paul's words on the Beatific Vision "that God has prepared for His faithful servants 'what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and what has not entered in to the heart of man'." Compare with the traditions; Abī al-Husayn Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: Being Traditions of the Sayings and Doings of the Prophet Muhammad as Narrated by His Companions and Compiled under the Title al-Jami-us-Ṣaḥīḥ*, trans. 'Abdul Ḥamid Siddīqī with explanatory notes and brief biographical sketches of major narrators (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 2001) [henceforth referred to as *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*], XXIV:MCLXXI:6780, where the Prophet said "Allah the Exalted and Glorious, said: I have prepared for My pious servants which no eye has ever seen, and no ear has ever heard, and no human heart has ever perceived but it is

Smith is correct to argue that al-Ghazālī “speaks of the human soul as Divine in origin.”⁶⁵ Because of this, al-Ghazālī believes that man can nurture divine qualities, and therefore has the potential to attain spiritual union with God. However, Smith offers a perplexed statement in arguing that prayer is no longer required for a worshipper who, having attained “[c]ontemplation (*mushāhada*)...have entered the sanctuary.”⁶⁶ She might be correct if by “prayer” she means *du‘ā’*, namely, invocation or supplication. But it is inaccurate if she is referring to *ṣalāh*, the prescribed prayer. Since this prescribed prayer is the most important devotional act (*‘ibādah*) and also the foundation of good deeds in Islam, such a contention would indirectly imply that other good deeds are also no longer required for such a person. This opposes the fundamental teachings of Islam as well as al-Ghazālī’s own teachings, which maintain the need to observe prayer and other good deeds at all stages of life.⁶⁷ Her conclusion that al-Ghazālī’s mystical system developed into a “pantheistic system of philosophy” seems unaware of a subtle difference between the concept of pantheism and mystical union.⁶⁸ In the former, the union is more physical whereas, in the latter, the union is spiritual. As mentioned above, besides the books that are consulted here, there are many other biographical works on al-Ghazālī. For instance, Eric Ormsby’s study which was published in 2008 is among the latest biographical study on al-Ghazālī.⁶⁹ Frank Griffel’s “Al-Ghazali” is also a new work on al-Ghazālī. However it just gives a very brief account of al-Ghazālī’s life and focuses more on some philosophical and ethical issues.⁷⁰

testified by the Book of Allah”. See also no. 6781-6783. For the Qur’anic accounts, see for instance, 32:17, etc.

65 Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 143.

66 Ibid., 171.

67 *Al-Walad*, 275, 277; *O Youth*, 54, 58-60; *Letters Gh.*, 2:28, 12:64; *Alchemy*, 505; *The Niche*, 78. In addition to al-Ghazālī himself, other scholars who devoted their studies to al-Ghazālī also affirm that al-Ghazali teaches that Sufism can never oppose religion. For instance, see W. R. W. Gardener, “Al-Ghazali as Sufi,” *The Muslim World* 7, no. 2 (1917): 132-133; and Hourani, “Ghazali on the Ethics of Action.” Likewise, Robson, in “Al-Ghazālī and the Sunna,” also affirms that despite having attained the higher level of a master Sufi, al-Ghazālī has always been committed to following the *Sunnah*.

68 Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 234-236.

69 See Eric Ormsby, *Ghazali: The Revival of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008).

70 See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/al-ghazali/>.

COMPARATIVE STUDIES ON AL-GHAZĀLĪ AND WESTERN SCHOLARS

Al-Ghazālī has been compared—on different aspects—with some Western scholars such as Saint Augustine (354-430 CE), Saint Thomas Aquinas and other scholars. This section only offers an overview of one of those comparisons, namely, a comparison between al-Ghazālī and Augustine.

The first scholar to attempt to compare these two outstanding thinkers was Heinrich Frick, in a thesis submitted in 1919.⁷¹ In the late 1990s, Frick's interest was taken further by James A. Highland.⁷² Both scholars were interested in comparative analysis of conversion or spiritual transformation in Augustine and al-Ghazālī. Highland reports that Frick was interested in tracing the influence of Neo-Platonic thought on each thinker's account of their conversion, namely, the *Confessions* and *Munqidh*, arguing that Neo-Platonism played a significant role in both accounts, and this is among the reasons for their similarity.⁷³

Highland, on the other hand, focuses on the process of the transformation of the soul between Augustine and al-Ghazālī, based on their conversion narratives. His main argument is that the transformation of the soul is fundamental to both thinkers. He contends that other aspects of their thoughts were of secondary importance compared to the spiritual transformation. Highland asserts that for both, the transformation of the soul should be described as a spiritual alchemy; by doing so, readers can understand the reason why both of them regard devotion to God, including the performance of good deeds, as a continual and effortless process, and indeed, is the most important aspect in life.

71 Heinrich Frick, "Ghazali's Selbstbiographie: Ein Vergleich mit Augustins Konfessionen," (PhD thesis, Universitat Giessen, 1919), published by J. C. Hinrichs, Leipzig with the same title in the same year.

72 James A. Highland, "Alchemy: The Transformation of the Soul in the Conversion Narratives of Augustine and Ghazzali" (PhD thesis, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, 1999).

73 See James A. Highland, "Alchemy: The Transformation of the Soul, 15. As I have not been able to obtain Frick's dissertation, I am relying on Highland's report of Frick's studies.

Daniel G. Shaw is interested in comparative eschatology in their understanding of the final estate of the blessed in the life to come based on Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* (Book 22, chapters 29 and 30) and al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'* (Book 40, part 2, sections 13 through 19). He analyses the hermeneutic approaches of Augustine and al-Ghazālī in interpreting eschatological beliefs of "the future." He argues that although eschatology has been long neglected by scholarship, it is far more valuable than previously thought. He suggests three assumptions; 1) that eschatological texts can offer valuable information on the central values and aspirations of certain cultures; 2) that knowledge and various contexts surrounding particular authors and their writings are important to the understanding of the texts; 3) that the most authentic texts for such an assessment are those which have been widely celebrated throughout the ages by various generations of their traditions.⁷⁴ He found that although there are some differences on issues of detail, both Augustine and al-Ghazālī maintain the reality of eternal reward in the Hereafter for the blessed soul. Both agree that there are different grades of eternal happiness attained, depending on spiritual attainment and the degrees of personal relationship with God. In addition, they both emphasise the enlightenment of the inner self, the blessed soul, through personal relationship with God. Certainly, this relates to the spiritual aspect of religious life, and among the ways to attain this is by observing the inner dimension of religious observances.

Another comparative study on Augustine and al-Ghazālī is a Master thesis by Helmi Afizal Zainal, submitted in 2010.⁷⁵ Helmi Afizal compares their concept of sin, maintaining that although both approach the concept of sin in their own ways and thus differ in their interpretations, they both insist that sin is the primary factor which separates man from God and His love. Sin is therefore regarded as the barrier and the detrimental factor to the spiritual relationship between man and God. Thus, in order to attain God's love, both urge purification from sin. Helmi Afizal's study is thus useful in

74 See Daniel G. Shaw, preface to "City or Garden: St. Augustine and al-Ghazālī on the Final Estate of the Blessed" (PhD thesis, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois 1987), vii.

75 Helmi Afizal Zainal, "The Concept of Sin According to St. Augustine (430 A.D) and al-Ghazali (1111 A.D): A Comparative Analysis" (Master's thesis, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 2010)."

understanding the views of Augustine and al-Ghazālī on factors that are harmful to good deeds and thus to the soul.

Perhaps the most recent comparative study on al-Ghazālī and other scholar is a PhD thesis by Mohd Rosmizi Abd Rahman, submitted in 2014, entitled “Good Deeds in Christianity and Islam: Comparing the Perspectives of Augustine and Al-Ghazālī.” This thesis examines and compares the attitudes towards good deeds taken by two great thinkers of Latin Christianity and Sunni Islam, namely, Saint Augustine and Imām al-Ghazālī. It focuses on their thoughts about the nature, significance, and inner dimension of good deeds, employing descriptive, analytic, and comparative methods. The thesis found that Augustine and al-Ghazālī were each formulating their reflections on the subject within the framework of their religious traditions at a time of great controversy and debate on the subject within each of their traditions. While neither offers the last word on the subject within their religious traditions, they both focus on an inner dimension of good deeds in a way that deserves attention from Muslims and Christians alike. Indeed, both offer a sophisticated way of understanding and performing good deeds. They address their inner meaning and either directly or indirectly *reveal* some inner preconditions that need to be observed in performing good deeds. They believe that an appropriate balance between their outward and inward observance is an essential requirement in transforming good deeds from *dry* understanding and mere outward practices—as exhibited in pure ritualism and legalism—to spiritually fruitful ones.

AL-GHAZĀLĪ AND GOOD DEEDS

Several books and articles that either directly or indirectly discuss al-Ghazālī’s concept of good deeds are worth mentioning. It should be noted in this context, however, that “good deeds” is a general term that covers both moral or ethical and religious deeds. Mohamed Ahmed Sherif argues that al-Ghazālī puts forward his theory of virtue into three main categories, namely, the philosophic, religious-legal, and mystical virtues.⁷⁶ He examines different individual virtues and claims that al-Ghazālī accepted the philosophic virtues but made

⁷⁶ Sherif, *Ghazali’s Theory of Virtue*.

some modifications to them. For instance, al-Ghazālī's account of philosophic virtues correspond directly with the accounts of other Muslim philosopher (e.g., Avicenna, Miskawayh, and al-Fārābī) as well as Greek philosophic tradition (i.e., Plato and Aristotle.⁷⁷ However, al-Ghazālī does not accept those philosophic virtues plainly, but he sets his own condition, adding some elements, and offering certain changes to them.⁷⁸

The philosophic virtues refers to virtues that have relation with, and are discussed in relation to, the philosophic tradition, such as the Greek philosophy tradition, especially Plato and Aristotle. The mystical virtues refers to virtues as understood and practised by the Sufi, the truly learned men who want establish a close spiritual relationship with God and to seek the ultimate happiness in the hereafter. The religious-legal virtues are associated with the fulfilment of religious commandments and these virtues were harmonised with the mystical ones. All of these are the means to attain ultimate happiness, but it was the mystical virtues which al-Ghazālī regarded as the ideal and higher in level.

Muhammad Abul Quasem covers the background of al-Ghazālī's ethics as well as his view of man's nature and aims, underpinning his theory of ethics.⁷⁹ In addition, he also examines briefly other aspects of good deeds, namely, devotional acts and different kind of duties, as proposed by al-Ghazālī. Like Quasem, 'Umaruddin's treatment is comprehensive, perhaps, more so than Quasem's with respect to his examination of the foundation and philosophy of al-Ghazālī's theory of ethics.⁸⁰ In examining virtues according to al-Ghazālī, M. 'Umaruddin proceeds to discuss other general virtues, such as social virtues and religious duties. All of these are important in order to understand al-Ghazālī's attitude towards good deeds.⁸¹

77 Ibid., 73.

78 Ibid., 74.

79 Quasem, *The Ethics of al-Ghazzali*.

80 M. 'Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazzālī*, rev. ed. (1962; repr., Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributers, 1996).

81 For an Arabic book on al-Ghazālī's ethics, see Zakī Mubārak, *Al-Akhlāq 'ind al-Ghazālī* (Sayda: Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-'Aşriyyah, 1924). This book offers an extensive account of al-Ghazālī's ethics. Because of its broad scope, however, many of its discussions are rather brief.

The above studies focus more on al-Ghazālī's ethics than on his views of good deeds in religious aspects. 'Umaruddin and Sherif just give a very brief account of religious duties or acts of worship according to al-Ghazālī, and generally they omit the analysis of their mystical aspect. Nevertheless, Quasem's examination of al-Ghazālī's view of devotional acts is of paramount importance to this research. Although Quasem is interested to analyse the functions of devotional acts in moral life, his method offers a good model to analyse al-Ghazālī's view of the inner dimension of good deeds.

In addition to the above books, there are several articles that either directly or indirectly analyse al-Ghazālī's views of good deeds, such as Hava Lazarus-Yafeh's "Place of the Religious Commandments in the Philosophy of al-Ghazālī."⁸² She argues that al-Ghazālī always emphasised the observance of religious commandments, but gave "a deeper content to the religious life."⁸³ She unfolds the meaning and spiritual dimension of religious deeds. In doing this, al-Ghazālī successfully extirpated the two extreme attitudes towards good deeds—especially those good deeds in the form of religious commandments—namely, those who observe religious good deeds punctiliously and literally, and those Sufis who were indifferent towards them.

An extensive analysis of al-Ghazālī's view of the ethics of action is offered by George F. Hourani.⁸⁴ His analysis is based on, and confined to, the three major works of al-Ghazālī, namely, *Iḥyā'*, *al-Iqtiṣād*, and *Mustaṣfā*. Hourani claims to find a consistent theory in his treatment of the subject.⁸⁵ Knowledge of ethics is the central concern of al-Ghazālī, *'ilm al-akhlāq* (the science of character) superior to *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence).⁸⁶ Hourani also explains al-Ghazālī's view of the axiological concepts (such as *wājib* [compulsory], *ḥasan* [good], *qabīh* [evil], and others). He observes

82 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Place of the Religious Commandments in the Philosophy of al-Ghazālī," *The Muslim World* 51, no. 3 (1961): 173-184.

83 Lazarus-Yafeh, "Place of the Religious Commandments," 173.

84 George F. Hourani, "Ghazali on the Ethics of Action," 69-88.

85 *Ibid.*, 69.

86 Or also defined by al-Ghazālī as "the science of scriptural rules established for the acts of people under obligation (*al-mukallafin*)."

that in discussing these concepts, al-Ghazālī did not hesitate to refute the Mu'tazilite view concerning them. For example is on the concept of *wājib*. The Mu'tazilite define *wājib* as one will deserve blame for its omission. Al-Ghazālī, however, offer a more dynamic concept of *wājib*. Al-Ghazālī argues that *wājib* has two generic meanings, namely logically necessary and prudential necessary which is further subdivided into several contexts. Besides that, al-Ghazālī's concept of *wājib* is also related to human/servant interest. Al-Ghazālī rebuts the Mu'tazilite attitude who claim that certain acts are *wājib* for God just because they bring benefit to creatures. Al-Ghazālī regards those view as limiting God's power, as He is free to do or not to do anything irrespective of whether it brings benefit or not.⁸⁷

Indeed, al-Ghazālī did not remain indifferent towards the various interpretations of different groups (the Khārijites, the Murji'ites, the Mu'tazilites, and the Bāṭinites) which he considered as heretical. He ardently refuted them in many of his works. He also relentlessly rebutted the prevalent misconceptions among the Muslim society in his time.⁸⁸ Because the Mu'tazilites and the Bāṭinites still existed in his time, he did not hesitate to refute their errors—especially the latter—in a bolder way. And because the Bāṭinites posed a threat not only to theology but also to politics, administration, and religion as whole, al-Ghazālī—with the support of the current ruler—devoted special books to refuting their errors.⁸⁹

Quasem also contributes several articles on al-Ghazālī.⁹⁰ He maintains that al-Ghazālī was always optimistic towards good deeds. Indeed, al-Ghazālī considered '*amal* (action or deed) as the primary requirement and the mean—along with '*ilm* (knowledge, or faith)—in realising different objectives (e.g., piety, happiness, nearness to God, etc.).

87 George F. Hourani, "Ghazali on the Ethics of Action," 71-72.

88 For a brief analysis of various groups together with their conflicting attitude and beliefs, see W. N. Arafat, "Al-Ghazālī on Moral Misconceptions," *Islam Quarterly* 14 (1970): 57-62.

89 For al-Ghazālī's works in refuting the Bāṭinite doctrines, see his *Faḍā'ih* (for the English translation see *al-Mustazhirī*); *Just Balance; Decisive Criterion*.

90 See Quasem, "Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Devotional Acts," *Islamic Quarterly* 18, no. 3-4 (1974): 48-61; "Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Good Character," *Islamic Culture* 51 (1977), 229-239; "Aspects of al-Ghazālī's Conception of Islamic Piety," *Islamic Culture* 56 (1982), 135-148.

Nabih Amin Faris's article which briefly examines al-Ghazālī's ten rules based on *al-Qawā'id al-'Asharah* (The Ten Rules [of Conduct]) is also significant.⁹¹ Faris states that al-Ghazālī set up these rules for himself, some of which are helpful in understanding his stance on good deeds.⁹² For instance, al-Ghazālī's first and second rules, namely, having the right intention and serving God alone, serve as the foundation of his attitude towards good deeds. However, al-Ghazālī's seventh rule, which Faris argues implies the doctrine of salvation by faith, is to be analysed and compared with his tenth rule, which signifies the need for good deeds. Faris gives a brief explanation of these rules but further analysis is still helpful in order to relate them to al-Ghazālī's view of good deeds.

R. A. Blasdell's article entitled "Religious Values in al-Ghazālī's Works" is another attempt to analyse religious deeds in al-Ghazālī's writings.⁹³ However, it is unfortunate that Blasdell employs the term "religious values" to refer only to views that correspond with Christian teachings. He argues that al-Ghazālī recognised Christian values and truth, and therefore, al-Ghazālī can be used to present Christian truth to Muslims. For instance, Blasdell refers to al-Ghazālī's advice to practice the presence of God in our daily life which he claims is similar with Christian teachings.⁹⁴ Without giving further evidence, Blasdell also argues that many of al-Ghazālī's ideas in his writings are close to the spirit of Christianity. Indeed, the few instances he uses to support his argument are misleading. For instance, he wrongly interprets al-Ghazālī's statement that the way to overcome vices is vague, to mean that Islamic method is obscure and that Islamic practices are tedious.⁹⁵ This misreading of certain

91 Nabih Amin Faris, "Al-Ghazālī's Rules of Conduct," *The Muslim World* 32, no. 1 (1942): 43-50.

92 This Ten Rules of Conduct are 1) good intention; 2) unity of purpose; 3) to conform throughout to truth; 4) to conform in life to the established practice (of Islam) and avoid all innovations; 5) beware of the evil of procrastination; 6) acknowledge inability "ajz"; 7) true fear and hope (*taqwā*); 8) a life of devotion and prayer; 9) the continuous state of observation and watchfulness of our own conduct (*murāqabah*); and 10) consecration to a knowledge where one would see God. These rules of conduct are relevant to the issue of good deed.

93 R. A. Blmdell [sic], "Religious Values in al-Ghazālī's Works," *The Muslim World* 36, no. 2 (1946): 115-120.

94 Ibid., 118.

95 Ibid., 120.

ideas has affected his analysis and conclusion. It is unfortunate for Blasdell that in spite of his noble intention to help Muslims to better appreciate Christianity and to eliminate *foreign* attitudes, he falls prey to the biased approach of reading al-Ghazālī in a Christian context, neglecting the other and real context of the ideas examined.

In his attempt to analyse outer and inner religious expression in one of al-Ghazālī's writing, *the Child* or *O Youth (Ayyuha al-Walad)*, Frank Hugh Foster observes that al-Ghazālī anticipates that faith should be accompanied with good deeds.⁹⁶ Foster agrees that faith which does not lead to good deeds is in fact no faith. Foster also examines al-Ghazālī's mystical outlook of man's deeds, his view that good deeds should be always oriented towards God, for this is the purpose of man's creation. Al-Ghazālī argues that even the faithful who would be indifferent towards the rewards of good deeds will still perform them. The importance of intention and knowledge behind good deeds is also stressed by al-Ghazālī. In his own words, "[k]nowledge without good works is madness, while good works without knowledge is useless."⁹⁷ However, as in the case of some scholars mentioned above, Foster fails to escape misattributing some of al-Ghazālī's arguments or quotations which come from genuine Islamic tradition to Biblical verses. For instance, Foster mistakenly claims that al-Ghazālī's quotation which is from a genuine Prophetic tradition—that "the faith of the servant towards God is not perfect until he loves other men as he loves himself"—as repeating Matthew, xxii: 39 (p. 396). The fact is that, perhaps they are coincidentally quite similar. For comparison, there is a tradition which states that the Prophet said "None of you will have faith till he likes for his (Muslim) brother what he likes for himself."⁹⁸ However, this small inaccuracy does not really affect his analysis.

96 Frank Hugh Foster, "Ghazali on the Inner Secret and Outward Expression of Religion, in His 'Child,'" *The Muslim World* 23, no. 4 (1933): 378-396.

97 *Al-Walad*, 277; *O Youth*, 58.

98 See Abī 'Abdillāh ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī: The Translation of the Meanings of Summarized Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Arabic-English*, compiled by Zayn al-Dīn Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Zubaydī, trans. Muḥammad Muḥsin Khān (Riyadh: Maktabah Dār al-Salām, 1996) [henceforth referred to as *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*], 2:6:13. See also no. 14 and 15. For *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, see chapter XVII:70-71; XVIII:72-73.

As good deeds are always considered as a requirement to attain salvation, it is also useful to understand at the outset al-Ghazālī's view of salvation. This is because al-Ghazālī's conception of salvation is not as is generally understood, and this will affect his view on good deeds. Agreeing with other Sufis, such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī⁹⁹ (d. 996 CE) and al-Muḥāsibī, al-Ghazālī developed the concept of a happiness that is higher than salvation. Al-Ghazālī's conception of happiness was analysed by Quasem.¹⁰⁰ Salvation (*al-najāh*), according to al-Ghazālī, is only related to safety, namely being saved from suffering in hell. The higher degree of salvation is success (*fawz*) or happiness (*sa'ādah*) where he or she is not only saved from the hell but also achieves rewards in paradise.¹⁰¹ An understanding of this issue will reveal al-Ghazālī's view of different stages of the performance of good deeds that will help men to attain different grades of happiness.

Since al-Ghazālī is regarded as among the greatest figures in Sufism and in the Sunnite school of law, with particular inclination to the Shāfi'ite school in jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and to the Ash'arite school in theology (*'ilm al-kalām*), it is helpful to understand the context and stance of al-Ghazālī towards these schools. For instance, W. R. W. Gardener offers an analysis of al-Ghazālī in the context of his status as a Sufi, but some of his claims should be read carefully and critically.¹⁰² Gardener's claims, such as there is no "hope of salvation" in orthodox Islam and therefore Islam can never be "a religion of joy and confidence," and Islam does not show the way to overcome sin and evil, are erroneous (p. 132). Gardener appears to be simply unaware of the abundance of the Qur'ānic verses and Prophetic traditions on these matters. For instance, on the possibility of attaining salvation even with faith equal to a grain of mustard, barley, wheat or even an atom, can be compared with Prophetic tradition in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 2:12:21, etc.; on Prophetic traditions that whoever bear witness sincerely that Allah is God and

99 He was a scholar of *ḥadīth*, Shāfi'ite jurist and a Sufi.

100 Muhammad Abul Quasem, "Al-Ghazālī's Conception of Happiness," *Arabica* 22, no. 2 (1975): 153-61.

101 See *Al-Arba'īn*, 38; *Jalan Pintar*, 19; Quasem, *The Ethics of al-Ghazālī*, 57; Quasem, "Al-Ghazālī's Conception of Happiness," 159.

102 W. R. W. Gardener, "Al-Ghazālī as Sufi".

Muhammad is His messenger will enter paradise can be compared with Prophetic tradition in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, I:XI:39-42, 50; on faith and deeds that draw to Paradise can be compared with Prophetic tradition in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, I:V:11-17; on repentance which cleans or expiates sin can be compared with the Qur'ān chapter 4 verses 16, 17, 25, 27; chapter 5 verse 39; chapter 9 verses 15, 27, 104; chapter 11 verse 3, 90; chapter 25 verse 71; chapter 40 verse 3; chapter 42 verse 25, etc.; on religion or religious way is easy can be compared with Prophetic tradition in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 2:26:37 and the Qur'ān chapter 2 verses 185, 286, etc.; on to do good deeds just according to one's capacity can be compared with Prophetic tradition in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 2:29:41, etc.. In addition, his contention that "becomes like the Deity" is "a partial understanding of spiritual attainments," and his claim that this is among al-Ghazālī's doctrine of happiness are ambiguous (p. 134). Without a proper explanation, this contention will amount to an accusation of pantheism. But, these few issues do not deny Gardener's contribution in analysing many other mystical concepts of al-Ghazālī which are helpful to this research.

W. Montgomery Watt on the other hand analyses al-Ghazālī's stance on the Sunnite tradition.¹⁰³ He argues that even after his transformation, al-Ghazālī still remained faithful to the Sunnite tradition, and despite being a great mystic, he still played the role as jurist and theologian. However, unlike Jabre who maintains "an essential unity" in the thought and writing of al-Ghazālī, Watt contends that there were modifications, at least in gradual stages, in al-Ghazālī's intellectual position. He also disagrees with Jabre on al-Ghazālī's central concerns. While Jabre asserts that it was the problem of certitude, namely that problem of attaining certainty, Watt argues convincingly that they were the problems of attaining everlasting happiness, avoiding hell, and most importantly, getting near to God. This central concern would ultimately affect his outlook on good deeds.¹⁰⁴ This stance is affirmed by James Robson who offers a good examination of al-Ghazālī's attitude towards the

103 W. Montgomery Watt, "The Study of al-Ghazālī," *Oriens* 13/14, no. 1 (1960/61): 121-131.

104 See Watt, "The Study of al-Ghazālī," 124.

Sunnah (the Prophet's examples and his way of life).¹⁰⁵ He observes that al-Ghazālī maintains that the best way of performing good deeds is through imitating the way of the Prophet, and consequently believes that the *Sunnah* of the Prophet should always be observed at all stages of life.

CONCLUSION

The life and views of al-Ghazālī have always attracted the attention of many scholars, both Western and non-Western. This study has analysed some biographical works on Imām al-Ghazālī and his view on the issue of faith and good deeds through examination of various relevant literature. This study found that majority of literature consulted acknowledge the great scholarship and contributions al-Ghazālī in many aspects. Even though some studies are critical, the majority of them admire al-Ghazālī and are able to appreciate his thought and contexts, thus placing him in the position that he really deserves.

Among al-Ghazālī's various contributions, it is his achievement in bridging mysticism, or rather Sufism, with Islamic tradition that is generally most celebrated. Thus, some scholars argue that al-Ghazālī saved Islam from the scholastic decrepitude of his time.

With regard to the various interpretations related to the issue of good deeds, al-Ghazālī did not remain indifferent towards them but indeed ardently refuted those views which he considered as heretical. Al-Ghazālī still remained faithful to the Sunnite tradition and Ash'arite school even after his transformation. He was always optimistic towards good deeds. He considered '*amal* (action or deed) as the primary requirement and the mean—along with '*ilm* (knowledge, or faith)—in realising different objectives (e.g., piety, happiness, nearness to God, etc.). Not only al-Ghazālī always emphasised the observance of religious commandments, but he also breathed spirituality and gave deeper content and insight to the religious life. Indeed, al-Ghazālī is very concerned with ethics and is positive towards good deeds in ethical and religious aspects. His attitude and treatment of the subject are consistent.

105 Robson, "Al-Ghazālī and the Sunna."

Al-Ghazālī has attained a great abiding success that no other Muslim scholar before or after him has ever achieved in different sciences.¹⁰⁶ He was an extraordinary thinker and exceptional scholar of various disciplines of knowledge. Perhaps it can be claimed that he was not only successful in rediscovering the spiritual dimension of Islam and synthesising Sufism with the traditional Islam, but he is indeed the shining pearl of Islamic spirituality, the spirit or heart of Islam.

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106 For al-Ghazālī's great status and achievements, see for instance Watt, introduction to *Faith and Practice*, 13; al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, 191; Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, 215, etc.

- _____, *Deliverance from Error and Attachment to the Lord of Might & Majesty*, in *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī*, 15-92. Translated by W. Montgomery Watt. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004. First published in 1953, [*Deliverance*].
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