also been provided at the end. Proof reading has been thoroughly done, and typographical errors are almost non-existent.

It may be suggested that some further work needs to be done in the future editions of the work to make it more student-friendly. Ishâhi has pointed out many literary styles and constructions of Qur’ânic Arabic as well as some very subtle linguistic usages. Indexing these will prove useful for serious students of the Qur’ân. Similarly, he has also referred to certain rhetorical principles of the Arabic language, which may also be indexed for the same purpose. Moreover, since the commentary of Surah al-Baqara by Farâhi himself has been published some years ago in India, references can now be easily furnished where Ishâhi, without quoting the exact source, differs or builds upon the views of his illustrious mentor. These suggestions do not detract from the value of the present work and are simply being put forth to enhance the usefulness of the work.

All in all, the translator deserves special gratitude for making the first volume of this seminal exegetical work available to the English reader.

Shehzad Saleem

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Rightly pointed out by Dr Jackson, theologians’ especially Muslim theologians’ primary concern has always been protecting the faith from errors, deviations and dilutions rather than tolerating the ‘other,’ (pp. 4–5) as liberals would have it! Thus far, however, this perpetual and crucial task of protecting the faith in an ever changing intellectual and social milieu has never been as daunting as it is today. With the advent of the modern period for Islamic societies, much has changed in their intellectual, social, cultural and religious texture. Among the numerous challenges that have surfaced is the setting in of the multicultural milieu which has made the question of pluralism more than simply a hypothetical theological puzzle for Muslim thinkers; today, it is one with real communal implications. The proposals made for pluralism reflect
intense ponderings from theoretical and theological points of view and in practical and pragmatic terms as well.¹

Equally pressing — though not unrelated to the factors that underlie pluralism — has been an internal challenge to the Islamic tradition, one that has been called extremism or fundamentalism, or by other similar titles. Yet takfīr (the practice of declaring heretic or unbeliever) is not something unique about these groups, or even to Islam, as much of scholarship and popular literature would have us believe. Jackson clarifies that takfīr, which often goes hand in hand with harsh judgment, even tragic consequences, is neither something distinctive to so-called Muslim fundamentalists, or to any religion. It is rather inherent to the task of theology itself, whereby it is destined to draw communal and doctrinal boundaries, and inevitably so, a task it has sometimes performed a bit too forcefully. One should also not forget that even “heretics are often just as strident in their judgments, just as swift in calling for sanctions against the adversaries, and even more convinced of the superiority of their own theological views” (p. 4).

What is unique about extremist groups is simply that their hermeneutics lend these boundaries to be drawn quite narrowly, and this results in sweepingly labelling heretic all those whose theological positions are simply different from theirs, even in the minutest details. This is as true today as it was during Abū Ḥāmid Muhammad al-Ghazāli’s time. Jackson’s description of the cultural milieu of al-Ghazāli and al-Ghazāli’s own words about the Ash’arite-Ḥanbalite takfīrīsm are much revealing in regards to how prevalent takfīr was in those days (Introduction, pp. 36–40). Though similar in this respect, the amount and extent of violence that accompanies takfīrīsm today certainly and enormously separates the two worlds. In sum, theological exclusivism is unavoidable on the one hand, and is replete with huge religious and political consequences on the other.

On the question of orthodoxy and heresy, the theological task would inevitably call for a rigorous criterion to determine the limits of how much could be accommodated from one’s truth vantage-point. Much to the distaste of liberal humanism, not everything could go and heresy is a category that can hardly be dispensed with. Defining the correct doctrine is excluding those who do not adhere to this doctrine, but not necessarily or not always with an intent to shuttle them to Hell. It is, of course, understandable that lay piety would equate deviation from the correct belief with heresy (kufr). But theologians’ inability to see insistence on the issue any differently is simply

¹ See, for example, Abdulaziz Sachedina, Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Reza Shah-Kazemi, The Other in the Light of the One (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 2006).
not. For al-Ghazâlî, the theologians’ enterprise must lead them to a more nuanced judgment. In any case, clearly tied to humanistic concerns; still, the task of defining the theological boundaries of tolerance qua theological cannot be simplified into finding easy and shortcut ways to heaven for all humanity.

Underlying theological deliberations is a commitment to the Truth (al-Haqq), first and foremost, and with all that this commitment entails. Thus, what is needed is a rigorous account of how Muslims could draw theological boundaries protected and safe enough to not allow easy let-ins and outs. This implies warding off simultaneously what Dr Jackson calls “theological intolerance and theological laisse-faire” (p. 5). More than anything else, in this theological challenge, it is worthwhile first to investigate what theological resources Islamic intellectual tradition has to offer today to provide an insightful answer to this problem. That al-Ghazâlî’s work is “perhaps the first and by far the most thoughtful and systematic of its type in the history of Islam” (p. 5) in this regard is reason enough to celebrate this publication.

Al-Ghazâlî’s work is significant. Among the various insights it offers is that the categories of unbelief (kufr) and Crypto-Infidel (zandaqa) are not monolithic but involve a spectrum of different positions. It is worth noting why Dr Jackson translated zandaqa this way. Kufr is heresy but it can be material (holding of heretical doctrines without fault) or formal (wilful persistence in error), or can involve unsanctioned innovation in deviation from the doctrines held by the Pious Ancestors. Even more crucial is al-Ghazâlî’s methodology to determine when heresy occurs. At the least al-Ghazâlî shows that the matter is not as straightforward as is deemed by those who call fellow Muslims kuffâr left and right. Such matters take acute judgment and knowledge of the particulars of the case. Also, just as much as in al-Ghazâlî’s times, for takfîr’s of the present-day his reminder (to his disciple-friend) of God’s all-encompassing Mercy for most humanity is something all of us most often forget (pp. 124 ff.).

This study is much more than a simple translation of al-Ghazâlî’s Tafriqa. The two introductory essays constitute more than twice the length of the original Ghazalian text, and go way beyond addressing the concerns of theological tolerance alone. Professor Jackson engages scholarship on Islamic theology at many levels while raising very interesting points: the distinction between ‘aqidah and theology (the former does not presuppose the latter and could even be opposed to it altogether) (p. 10); positing ‘Tradition’ not so much as plain transmission from one generation to another but as transmission and preservation through the process of selective endorsement; critique of both Muslim and Western scholarship for not piercing through the claims of transcendent discourse employed by Muslim Traditionalists and Rationalists,
and its failure to see that “what separates the Traditionalists from the Rationalists is not so much that each assigns different levels of importance or authority to tradition per se but rather the different grounds that each recognizes as the basis upon which this process of selective endorsement can and should be carried out” (p. 25), and that rationalism cannot be equated with Aristotelianism, which, at best, is one among several rational possibilities.

Since Montgomery Watt, it has become axiomatic that in Islam there is orthopraxy, not orthodoxy. Dr Jackson challenges this view as well by clarifying the distinction between formal (Church-like) and informal authority (the kind that functions within the Islamic tradition). That authority in Islamic tradition is informal (lacks Church-like structure) does not by itself mean that there is no authority to determine what is orthodox or heretical: “Professor Watt overlooks what every member of a religious community knows by experience: the threat of stigma, malicious gossip, ostracism, or verbal attack by respected members in the community is far more imminent, far more effective, and far more determinative of religious belief and behavior than is the threat of formal excommunication. All of these are instruments of informal authority” (p. 30). Al-Ghazālī’s treatise could not be read without clarifying this matter because the subject matter of his discussion, first and foremost, is orthodoxy and heresy.

Al-Ghazālī’s analysis of Unbelief rests on a clearly laid out definition: “Unbelief (kufr) is to deem anything the Prophet brought to be a lie. And faith (imān) is to deem everything he brought to be true” (p. 92). According to him, it is really in understanding when and how the lie occurs that the legal matter of heresy could be discerned. Thus, the rest of the treatise is a systematic account of what this statement (deeming to be true or a lie) means in concrete terms. In elaboration of it, al-Ghazālī’s innovative approach presents five-level correspondence of this statement to things in existence: “...the reality of deeming to be true (as applies to assertions by the Prophet) is to acknowledge the existence of everything whose existence the Prophet informed us of. ‘Existence’ (wjūd), however, is of five levels. And it is only because of their obliviousness to this fact that all of the groups accuse their adversaries of deeming some or another aspect of what the Prophet taught to be a lie” (p. 94). The levels are ontological (dhāt), sensory (bissī), conceptual (khayālī), noetic (‘aqlī) or analogous (shabihī). A better rendering of khayālī would have been imaginal, given the prevalence of the idea within later Islamic philosophy and Sufism. Later discussion seems to imply that there is a hierarchy of these levels of existence (following the order in which they are listed above), at least insofar as the question of heretical views is concerned. We will make a comment on this in the section on figurative interpretation.
This is not the place to summarize the interesting discourse on these five levels. The reader is encouraged to explore this crucial central section of the treatise. In the end, for al-Ghazālī:

Everyone who interprets a statement of the lawgiver in accordance with one of the preceding levels (of existence) has deemed such statements to be true. Deeming a statement to be a lie is to deny its correspondence to any of these levels and to claim that it represents no reality at all, that it is a pure lie, and that the lawgiver’s aim in delivering it was simply to deceive people or to promote the putative common good. This is pure unbelief and masked-infidelity (*zandaqa*). Other than this, however, it is improper to brand as an unbeliever anyone who engages in figurative interpretation, as long as he observes the rule of figurative interpretation, which we will elaborate below (p. 101).

Figurative interpretation and its permissibility has been a contentious issue among Muslim theologians and *hadith*-folk, and a primary reason cited by different camps to label others unbelievers. No discussion of methodology to identify and isolate heretical theological views can, therefore, ignore this dimension of the debate. Al-Ghazālī argues that no one group can claim to be free of figurative interpretation, including the Ḥanbalites (he cites three *hadīths* in interpretation of which Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal employed figurative interpretation). Inevitable, al-Ghazālī accedes, yet it cannot be given free rein to distort and bend the scriptural meaning to one’s covert agenda. He lays out the Rule for Figurative Interpretation according to which one needs to begin with the possibility of ontological existence of the Prophetic statement first, and then, if and only if he is compelled by strong logical proofs, the interpreter/theologian may move from each level to the one lower. Even then, there is no guarantee that this method would lead different theologians to the same result and he lists the various reasons for it (see, pp. 106-107). Al-Ghazālī reminds the theologians that their whole enterprise is painstaking and asks them to refrain from calling others *kāfir* without going through this process diligently. The careful analysis of the master theologian deserves very close attention.

On several occasions Dr Jackson suggests that what is at the heart of al-Ghazālī’s work is highlighting the ‘historical situatedness’ of theologians which they themselves fail to recognize or often mask beneath a discourse of transcendence (see, pp. 6, 10 and 16). At times the point is made quite forcefully. Concluding his two-part introduction, Dr. Jackson states that:

In the end, it is the very invisibility of the theologian’s history that makes both him and his theology so powerful. This claim to transcendence is...shared by both Traditionalism and Rationalism. This is the ultimate beginning and root
cause of theological intolerance in Islam. The only remedy for the problem is to expose the historical situatedness of the theologians themselves. Once this is done, it becomes a short and easy step to the argument that different endowments of history yield different modalities and levels of perception ... Fayṣal does not set out to expose the historical situatedness of the theologians directly; it simply implies this through its detailed response to the inevitable conflict engendered by the failure to acknowledge that situatedness. This is the whole point behind al-Ghazali’s five levels of perception (p. 67–emphasis added)

It is obvious that al-Ghazālī is critical of theologians’ task and has clear reservations about their role for the Muslim community. Yet, there is nothing in the text itself that would buttress these claims of historical situatedness of theology. Situatedness, yes, but why it is called historical is quite unclear. That Dr Jackson’s own reading of the relationship between Islamic theology and history may render this conclusion is a different matter. We are not convinced that al-Ghazālī is suggesting this. Nor is this situatedness for al-Ghazālī the end of everything, a submission to unavoidable epistemological relativism. For him, lurking behind this situatedness is the potential to overcome these limitations, though the realistic al-Ghazālī would not believe many would take this path. In any case, it appears to us that Fayṣal al-Tafriqa is more concerned with theological boundaries than theological or philosophical epistemology. Al-Ghazālī does not provide us with a criterion for distinguishing good interpretation from bad interpretations, or superior from inferior ones. At most he provides us a method to determine when an interpretation deems Prophetic revelation or hadīth a lie. Thus, we do not think one could draw larger epistemological conclusions about the ‘situatedness’ of theology from this text.

Furthermore, al-Ghazālī’s well-known view of Sufism, of which Section II of the translation is a clear reflection, clearly suggests that not everyone is eternally bound to the historical situatedness of their theological and human limitations. Notice the long criterion for discerning “the reality and true definition of what constitutes kufr” listed there: “These things are revealed only to those whose hearts have been cleansed...refined through perfected spiritual exercises and enlightened through pure remembrance ... then nourished by right thinking...then drenched in the light that arcs from the niche of prophethood ...” (p. 87). That theological project is doomed from the word go, a suggestion not explicitly made but quite clearly alluded to by Dr Jackson, is in the end Dr Jackson’s own and need not be read into al-Ghazālī’s text. Similar reservations can be made about Dr Jackson’s calling theology (be it Rational or Traditionalist) merely human thought which can be nothing more than mere human construct (see, for example, pp. 9 and 24), and even
unnecessary for a religion (pp. 10–11). The origins and the early development of Islamic theology clearly reveal some historical and political situatedness. But because theology is inevitably tied to history (what is not!) does this necessarily mean that it is bound by it as well? We think that for the purpose of defining the relationship between theology and history a distinction needs be drawn between Islamic Kalām (especially its classical version discussed in this work which shows historical situatedness) and Theology in the sense Christians employ it (that we may call Theology-as-such), and which is mirrored in Islamic Gnostic writings and in Islamic philosophy, especially in its post-Rushdian developments in Persia and the larger Persianate zone. Much of what has been suggested about this relationship applies to Islamic kalām as it developed early on, but cannot be applied, mutatis mutandis, to the Gnostic and philosophical works which are, unlike those of the early mutakallimūn, more interested in the nature of things than in defending a theological position. Al-Ghazālī’s critique of Kalām and Mutakallimūn, well-known from al-Munqidh and replicated in this text as well (see Section XII, pp. 120 ff.) rests largely on his contemporaneous Islamic theology’s dogmatic, hairsplitting and apologetic character. In light of this distinction, some of the claims made about theology and its relationship with history, in general, and that of Kalām and history can be revisited. That the historical experience of Muslims provided the real impetus for Kalām (as Dr. Jackson has pointed out via Fazlur Rahman (p. 10)) is well documented in the scholarship. But that does not mean that historical experience provides a more real impetus for Theology-as-such than human natural inclination to think and understand. Why Theology-as-such is more of a historical accident, and not as many Christian theologians and historians have suggested, a faith seeking understanding? In any case, whether Professor Jackson is right about all this, our point is simply to ask if al-Ghazālī really suggests anything to this effect. Is historical situatedness really ‘the whole point’ of Fāṣal al-Tafiqa? If it is all situatedness anyway, why care what al-Ghazālī has to say about theological tolerance? We believe that a clearer understanding on these issues would require a more thorough analysis of the major works of mature al-Ghazālī.

That al-Ghazālī was faced with and much disturbed by overly charged takfīrī milieu created by all theological groups is of special relevance for Muslims today, because they are confronted by a similar situation. Beyond the controversy related to this politically charged issue today, for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike, there is real confusion that prevails over Islamic teachings on heresy, the way to determine it, and to deal with it. Unlike the case of religious pluralism, where much has been suggested on what prescriptions Islamic scriptural and intellectual sources have to offer, when
one posits the question of the limits and boundaries of theological tolerance and accommodation, Muslim intellectuals have not yet tapped much into their intellectual heritage to elicit possible responses. The present work breaks this silence, and if read widely, can also set the tone of the debate around orthodoxy and heresy, a crucial matter today. It is in view of this, especially, that we welcome Dr Jackson’s painstaking work who has not only taken the first step but also shown how to engage these old texts and make them of much contemporary import.

Dr Jackson tells us that “in Fāyṣal al-Ghazali is not at all concerned about running foul of any state-sponsored creed. He is deeply troubled, however, by the atmosphere of intolerance, mutual suspicion, and psychological intimidation engendered by narrow and underinclusive definitions of orthodoxy manufactured and brandished with reckless abandon” (p. 32). What could be more pertinent for us today! We must thank Dr Jackson for this huge service to scholarship and to the Muslim community. Besides being read and disseminated, as much as possible, the publication should be made available to readership in various Islamic languages.

Syed Rizwan Zamir

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Syed Rizwan Zamir