

Imam Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-munqidh min al-dalal* (Prof. miriam cooke)

فقد سألتني أيها الأخ في الدين ، أن أبثّ إليك غاية العلوم وأسرارها ، وغائلة المذاهب وأغوارها ، وأحكي لك ما قاسيته في استخلاص الحق من بين اضطراب الفرق ، مع تباين المسالك والطرق ، وما استجرات عليه من الارتفاع عنحضيض التقليد ، إلى يَفَاعِ الاستفسار ، وما استفدته أولاً من علم الكلام ، وما اجْتَوَيْتُهُ ثانياً من طرق أهل التعليم القاصرين لَدركِ الحق على تقليد الإمام ، وما ازدريته ثالثاً من طرق التفلسف ، وما ارتضيته آخراً من طريقة التصوف ، وما انجلي لي في تضاعيف تفتيشي عن أقاويل الخلق ، من لباب الحق ، وما صرفني عن نشر العلم ببغداد ، مع كثرة الطلبة ، وما دعاني إلى معاودته بنيسابور بعد طول المدة ، فابتدرت لإجابتك إلى مطلبك ، بعد الوقوف على صدق رغبتك ، وقلت مستعيناً بالله ومتوكلاً عليه ، ومستوثقاً منه ، وملتجئاً إليه

Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali* (1953):

You have asked me, my brother in religion, to show you the aims and inmost nature of the sciences and the perplexing depths of the religious systems. You have begged me to relate to you the difficulties I encountered in my attempt to extricate the truth from the confusion of contending sects and to distinguish the different ways and methods, and the venture I made in climbing from the plain of naive and second-hand belief (*taqlid*) to the peak of direct vision. You want me to describe, firstly what profit I derived from the science of theology (*kalam*), secondly, what I disapprove of in the methods of the party of *ta`lim* (authoritative instruction), who restrict the apprehension of truth to the blind following (*taqlid*) of the Imam, thirdly, what I rejected of the methods of philosophy, and lastly, what I approved in the Sufi way of life. You would know, too, what essential truths became clear to me in my manifold investigation into the doctrines held by men, why I gave up teaching in Baghdad although I had many students, and why I returned to it at Naysabur (Nishapur) after a long interval. I am proceeding to answer your request, for I recognise that your desire is genuine.

Richard Joseph McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment: Annotated Translation* (1980):

You have asked me, my brother in religion, to communicate to you the aim and secrets of the sciences and the dangerous and intricate depths of the different doctrines and views. You want me to give you an account of my travail in disengaging the truth from amid the welter of the sects, despite the polarity of their means and methods. You also want to hear about my daring in mounting

from the lowlands of servile confirmation¹ to the highland of independent investigation². First, what profit I derived from the science of *kalam*³. Second, what I found loathsome among the methods of the devotees of *ta`lim*⁴ who restrict the attainment of truth to uncritical acceptance of the Imam's pronouncements. Third, the methods of philosophizing⁵ which I scouted. And finally, what pleased me in the way pursued by the practice of Sufism⁶. You also wish to know the quintessential truth disclosed to me in the tortuous course of my inquiry into the views expressed by various men, and what led me to quit teaching in Baghdad though I had many students there, and what induced me to resume teaching in Nishapur much later. Convinced of the sincerity of your desire, I am losing no time in answering your request.

Muhammad Abūlaylah, *Al-Ghazali Deliverance from Error and Mystical Union with the Almighty* (2001):

In the name of God, merciful benefactor, Praised be to God --with such praise every message and address should begin -- and blessed be Muhammad, His chosen prophet and messenger: Blessings be upon his kin and companions who have guided people away from error.

My brother in faith, you have asked me to reveal to you the purpose and secrets of the sciences, and the dangerous and complex depths of the schools of thought. You would like me to tell you what I have undergone in order to distinguish the truth from error in the different sects, despite the differences in their paths and methods.

You wish to know the daring it took to rise above the plain of conformism (*Taqlid*) to the heights of observation and independent investigation. First, what profit I drew at the beginning from *Kalam* (or theology). Secondly, how I then turned away from those who defended *Ta`lim* (teaching) because they were impeded in reaching the truth by their subjection to an Imam. Thirdly, how much I mistrusted the methods of philosophers, and finally how I came to appreciate the way of Sufism.

You would like to see the "pulp of the truth" as it appeared to me after I came to doubt my efforts to analyze what different people said, and you would like to know what caused me to abandon my teaching in Baghdad despite the great number of my pupils there, and what made me take it up again, a long time

¹ Taqlid—explained as a rope put on an animal's neck; to copy or ape; conformism

² istibsar—observation

³ 'ilm al-kalam

⁴ charismatic teaching of the infallible Imam

⁵ tafalsuf

⁶ root refers to wool, cf. Schimmel

later, in Nîshapãr. I promptly fulfilled your wishes, which I recognize as sincere, and, counting on God to grant aid, confidence, success and protection I now plunge into my subject.