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Poverty in al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*

A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Poverty in al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*

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This dissertation researches the meaning and function of poverty (*faqr*) in the thought of the Muslim theologian al-Ghazali (d. 1111), whose *Iḥyā'* includes an entire book of material devoted to the subject. Here, we find poverty used as a foundational stage of spiritual development in the trajectory of al-Ghazali's mystical ethics, so that a Muslim who becomes materially poor begins a journey along a path that leads to God and thus overcoming the poverty of existence inherent to all of creation. Although Jesus appears in this text as an important exemplar for both poverty and the related renunciation (*zuhd*) in al-Ghazali's work, the author chooses another figure to represent the highest manifestation of poverty in this life: the Prophet Muhammad's wife 'A'isha. Her detachment from the wealth of the world demonstrates her attainment to the level of 'one without need' (*mustaghni*), a designation that aligns her, and any other who reaches it, with the divine attribute of Needlessness (*al-Ghani*), and thus with God.

This understanding of poverty as a spiritual ideal is then contextualized at various levels: in relation to the broader thought of al-Ghazali, in reference to his historical sources and interlocutors, and inter-religiously in comparison with the writings on poverty of the thirteenth-century Franciscan tradition. Using three primary currents of thought on poverty that emerge from the Franciscan poverty disputes, this dissertation establishes a heuristic device that allows for an inter-religious comparison between al-Ghazali and Bonaventure, both of whom occupy moderate theological positions on poverty in relation to their own religious traditions. This comparison results in the recognition of both superficial similarities and deeper doctrinal and

theological differences about Jesus's role in exemplifying poverty. Such a comparison leads to a mutual understanding of the two theological traditions studied here, and to the realization that differing interpretations of the figure of Jesus can result in inter-religious enrichment.

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Dedication

To my late father, George Gleason Barber, who never allowed me to consider the alternative to finishing.

To my mother, Sandra Barber, who always made me believe this dissertation would be possible.

And finally, to my loving wife, Amelia, without whom this would not have been possible, and whose love and support have been unparalleled.

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Introduction

Poverty has plagued human civilization for millennia; even what we think of now as poverty, a profound lack of material wealth or access to needs necessary for survival, has persisted for the past thousand years, especially with the advent of large urban areas. Among the many approaches to the alleviation of poverty, religious responses have been varied and universal. Nearly every religious tradition contains within it a call to social justice, which includes providing aid or charity to those in need; some of the most visible manifestations of this come from the largest religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Furthermore, given their sizes and long histories, each of these religions contains various responses to the problem of poverty.

Poverty as a Comparative Religious Concept

Poverty has been studied in many ways: as a social problem, a political issue, an economic challenge, a moral dilemma. This dissertation devotes itself to looking at the problem of poverty through the lens of religious responses to it. Even these vary in their method, with some viewing poverty as an inherently negative social phenomenon to be avoided, others as an opportunity for the pious to exhibit charity, and still others as something to be pursued for the purpose of ascetic practice. It is this last approach that has perhaps garnered the most attention from within religious groups, as nearly every major religious tradition has developed a strain of ascetic belief and practice that involves the discipline of bodily desires for the purpose of freeing the soul or mind from the ensnarement of the world around us. A brief look at how some of the

most widely practiced religions today have dealt with poverty in their systems of thought demonstrates its importance and relevance as a comparative concept.

Hinduism holds several profound connections to poverty and wealth, both material and spiritual.¹ One of the four legitimate goals for human life, *mokṣa*, or the pursuit of liberation, frequently includes the renunciation of attachment to worldly goods, known as *sannyāsa*. The other three goals, however, consist in pursuing prosperity in this life in some way or another. *Artha* is the pursuit of wealth, *kāma* is the pursuit of sensual pleasures, and *dharma* is the pursuit of virtue, which includes among its prescriptions the moral imperative to alleviate or eliminate poverty according to one's ability.² Furthermore, India in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been mired in poverty, perhaps as a result of British imperialism, which left the former caste system disrupted and exacerbated its problems in relation to poverty. Thus, Indian scholars have continued to struggle with poverty, both its roots and remedies, to the current day.³

Growing out of a conflict with certain Hindu beliefs, Buddhism has had a complicated relationship with poverty throughout its history.⁴ On the one hand, it is something to be avoided because it causes *dukkha*, or human suffering, while on the other hand, it is a hallmark of the

¹ Gurcharan Das, *India Unbound* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 2001); C. T. Kurien, "Economic Growth and Poverty in India," *Religion and Society* 55, no. 4 (December 2010): 43-53; Arvind Sharma, "Hinduism and Poverty," in *Poverty and Morality: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, eds. William A. Galston and Peter H. Hoffenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 160-79.

² Arvind Sharma, *The Hindu Scriptural Value System and the Economic Development of India* (New Delhi: Heritage, 1980).

³ Keerti Shah, "Urban poverty in India: a strategic framework for poverty reduction," *Religion and Society* 52, no. 3-4 (S-D 2007): 149-55.

⁴ David R. Loy, "The Karma of Poverty: A Buddhist Perspective," in *Poverty and Morality: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, eds. William A. Galston and Peter H. Hoffenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 44-61; K. Anuruddha Thera, "The Buddhist Attitude to Poverty," *Dialogue* 7, no. 3 (S-D 1980): 99-103.

monastic *sangha*, the community of *bhikkhu* monks who own nothing but clothing and food bowls. Shakyamuni Buddha pursued an ascetic lifestyle in order to escape his suffering, but this did not alleviate his plight. So he came to realize the truth of the impermanence of the world and the necessity of human non-attachment to it. Buddhism defines poverty, then, as positive in the context of monasticism and negative in terms of its laypeople; however, human beings are better served by developing a detachment from material goods, whether they are rich or poor. The question of what to do about involuntary poverty has not been treated extensively in the history of Buddhism, although recently established groups of engaged Buddhists take a more active stance on issues of social justice, which do not hold prominence in traditional Buddhist teachings.⁵ Focusing on the cultivation of compassion and generosity, monks such as Thich Nhat Hanh and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu have advocated for the alleviation of poverty and other social inequalities.⁶

Among the so-called Abrahamic religions, the debate concerning poverty in Judaism originates in the Tanakh, which portrays poverty as a virtue to be sought out and wealth as a sign of injustice and haughtiness (Zeph. 3:11-13).⁷ Other verses refer to the rewards of poverty and the humility with which it is associated (Ps. 37:11; Isaiah 61:1-2 and 66:2). The *halakhah* of the Mishnah and Talmud conveys a similarly positive understanding of poverty, although it becomes

⁵ Dhammavivhari. "Poverty, Hunger, and Underdevelopment: (a little bit of relevant Buddhist thinking)," *Dialogue* ns. 32-33 (2005-2006): 147-57.

⁶ Christopher S. Queen, Charles S. Prebish, and Damien Keown, eds., *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

⁷ Noam Zohar, "Jewish Perspectives on Poverty," in *Poverty and Morality: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, eds. William A. Galston and Peter H. Hoffenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 204-19.

clear that poverty can at times become detrimental to the individuals suffering from it, as it deprives them of their necessities and desires.⁸ Over time, a variety of Jewish traditions articulated methods of alleviating poverty, generally concentrated around the concept of *tzedakah*, the ritual duty to help the poor. This can be understood both communally and individually, and it has manifested in both ways to treat poverty. In a variety of historical and cultural contexts, Jewish communities have developed ways to address poverty.⁹

The history of Christian thought concerning poverty dates back to the time of Jesus and the beatitudes: he states in Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” while Mark 14:7 has him declare, “The poor you will always have with you.” The exploration of the meaning of and proper response to poverty continued through the history of Christianity, and Pope Francis I has since his election in March 2013 brought a new focus to worldwide poverty.¹⁰ Perhaps the greatest expositors of poverty in the Christian tradition have been members of the Order of the Friars Minor, originating in the teaching and life of St. Francis of Assisi, and coming to

⁸ See the work of Jill Jacobs, “Toward a Halakhic Definition of Poverty,” *Conservative Judaism* 57, no. 1 (2004): 3-20; and Jill Jacobs, *There shall be no needy: pursuing social justice through Jewish law and tradition* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishers, 2009).

⁹ Yaron Ben-Naeh, “Poverty, Paupers, and Poor Relief in Ottoman Jewish Society,” *Revue des études juives* 163, no. 1-2 (Ja-Je 2004): 151-92; Mark R. Cohen, *Poverty and Charity in the Jewish Community of Medieval Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); William E. Rapfogel, “Combating poverty through action and public policy from the orthodox perspective,” *Tradition* 38, no. 1 (Spr 2004): 112-22.

¹⁰ Susan R. Holman, *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); Catholic Church and Francis I, *Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons, and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World*, accessed April 17, 2014, <http://www.vatican.va/evangelii-gaudium/en/#1/z>.

scholastic expression through the systematic treatises on poverty and mendicancy by St. Bonaventure.¹¹

Islam also has a long history of debate over poverty, the poor, and the appropriate religious response to these phenomena. The Qur'an contains many references to poverty and the poor; it identifies the poor as among those worthy of charity (Q 2:177; 2:273; 17:26), it describes poverty as righteousness and as connected with the emigration from Mecca (Q 2:177; 59:8), and it contrasts God with human beings in terms of wealth and poverty (Q 47:38). Many hadith reports also address poverty and the poor, so we find Muhammad both asking God to let him live as a beggar and die as a beggar, and taking refuge in God from poverty. Other stories narrate Muhammad's treatment of the poor, who enjoy elevated status in relation to the wealthy among the *umma*.¹² It would take too much space to enumerate and explain every Islamic discussion of poverty here, but they appear most frequently within the legal, ethical, and mystical traditions of Islam. Islamic legal scholars typically addressed poverty in terms of charity and obligation, especially through the collection and distribution of *zakat*, while its mystics added to this by exploring poverty as a state of the soul and by engaging in ascetic practices.¹³

¹¹ Malcolm Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty: the Doctrine of the Absolute Poverty of Christ and the Apostles in the Franciscan Order, 1210-1323* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1998).

¹² Leah Kinberg, "Compromise of commerce: a study of early traditions concerning poverty and wealth," *Der Islam* 66 (1989): 193-212.

¹³ Al-Abdin, Al-Tayib Zein. "Zakat and the Alleviation of Poverty in the Muslim World." *Hamdard Islamicus* 20, no. 2 (April - June 1997): 65-82.

Despite these diverse approaches to poverty, scholars have undertaken relatively few comparative studies of poverty in religious contexts.¹⁴ Studies of Christian and Buddhist monastic life have been the most prominent, since these groups live with poverty regularly and their worldviews are ripe for comparison.¹⁵ Comparative studies involving other religious traditions are much less numerous, and they frequently discuss poverty in terms of modern economic systems and the alleviation of material poverty.¹⁶ Others, even when addressing poverty itself as a spiritual and theological concept, tend to focus on the idea of charity rather than poverty.¹⁷ Therefore, this dissertation seeks to contribute to a growing body of theologically comparative literature, analyzing the similarities and differences in the treatment of poverty as part of the process of spiritual purification by key figures in the Christian and Islamic traditions.

¹⁴ There are several important exceptions to this statement. Michael Bonner, Mine Ener, and Amy Singer, eds., *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003); Miriam Frenkel and Yaacov Lev, eds., *Charity and Giving in Monotheistic Religions*, Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients: Beihefte zur Zeitschrift "Der Islam" Neue Folge 22. Berlin: DeGruyter, 2009; William A. Galston and Peter H. Hoffenberg, *Poverty and Morality: Religious and Secular Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Lisa A. Keister, *Faith and Money: How Religion Contributes to Wealth and Poverty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ Lynn A. De Silva, Aloysius Pieris, eds, "The Buddhist and Christian Attitudes to the Problem of Poverty: the 3rd Congress of Asian Monks, Kandy Ag. 1980," *Dialogue* ns. 7, no. 3 (S-D 1980): 97-121; Neville Gunaratne, "An evaluation by a Buddhist of Mother Teresa's boundless compassion and voluntary poverty," *Dialogue* ns. 8 no. 1-3 (Ja-D 1981): 100-104; Sung-hye Kim and James W. Heisig, eds, *Monasticism Buddhist and Christian: the Korean Experience* (Paris: Eerdmans, 2008); John C. Maraldo, "The hermeneutics of practice in Dōgen and Francis of Assisi: an exercise in Buddhist-Christian dialogue," *Eastern Buddhist* ns. 14, no. 2 (Aut 1981): 22-46; Douglas K. Mikkelsen, "Aquinas and Dōgen on poverty and the religious life," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 13, (2006): 1-23.

¹⁶ Michael Bonner, Mine Ener, and Amy Singer, eds., *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003); Lisa A. Keister, *Faith and Money: How Religion Contributes to Wealth and Poverty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Miriam Frenkel and Yaacov Lev, eds., *Charity and Giving in Monotheistic Religions*, Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients: Beihefte zur Zeitschrift "Der Islam" Neue Folge 22 (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2009).

Limiting the Scope of the Comparison

To compare the understanding of a single concept such as poverty across more than one religious tradition requires further limitations in scope. The Christian and Islamic religious traditions are too vast for a single dissertation to address their complete views on poverty in any meaningful way. Therefore, we have constrained our study to two of the most prominent strands of thought about poverty within these two larger religions. Perhaps the most representative practitioners of poverty in the history of Christianity are the Franciscans, whose founder St. Francis has been understood to have exhibited the perfection of a life of poverty in imitation of Christ's absolute poverty. His life and teachings were then further developed by St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, who serves as the intellectual touchstone in this dissertation for Franciscan poverty. His works were challenged during his own time and have been viewed as representing the moderate position on poverty in the secondary literature since.

In comparison, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali is commonly viewed as one of the greatest thinkers in Islamic history; while his connection to poverty is not as apparent as that of the Franciscan tradition, he is well-known for having abandoned a high profile teaching position in order to pursue an ascetic lifestyle. He incorporates poverty into his largest single work, the *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, as a positive character trait of the heart on its way to loving God.¹⁸ He is also, similarly to Bonaventure, seen as a moderate voice on poverty within Islam at his time, as

¹⁸ A note on my approach to Arabic transliteration throughout this dissertation: I have chosen to follow the guidelines set forth by the International Journal for Middle East Studies. They ask authors not to use diacritical marks for any Arabic names, or for any Arabic terms that are considered "common," by which they mean the word appears in Merriam-Webster Dictionary. All other Arabic words have been italicized and contain the appropriate diacritical markings.

he actively critiques more radical practitioners of poverty while at the same time disapproving of the conservative approach of the Hanbalite traditionalists. Bonaventure and al-Ghazali, as the two men who represent the most fully developed thinking on poverty in their traditions and at their times, serve as useful interlocutors for a comparison of poverty as a theological idea across the boundaries of Islam and Christianity.

Franciscan Poverty under Dispute

The medieval movement begun by St. Francis of Assisi (d. 1226), known as the Franciscans, produced some of the most comprehensive and precise thought about poverty in the Christian tradition, especially as it is enshrined in the works of St. Bonaventure. The debates surrounding poverty prompted by St. Francis' legacy and St. Bonaventure's writings provides us with a well-developed historical model with which to assess poverty as a religious concept. Furthermore, there is a long record of secondary literature devoted to analyzing the Franciscan understanding of poverty, and it continues to occupy the scholarly efforts of many today. This large body of research supports the majority of what this dissertation claims in reference to St. Francis, the Order of the Friars Minor, St. Bonaventure, and the debates over poverty in the thirteenth century.

St. Francis of Assisi became famous immediately for his emphasis on poverty as a spiritual ideal, advocating for an extreme form of poverty that made many among the contemporary Roman Catholic hierarchy uncomfortable. He left very few written works, however, so the vast majority of his teaching on poverty was elaborated through the scholars of

the Franciscan Order he founded.¹⁹ Perhaps most notable among these scholars was St. Bonaventure (d. 1274), who served as the seventh Minister General of the Order of the Friars Minor, and who wrote such works as *Apologia Pauperum (Defense of the Mendicants)*, *The Major Legend of St. Francis of Assisi*, and *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, all of which address questions concerning poverty.²⁰ Bonaventure's works provide a comprehensive treatment of poverty in thirteenth-century Christian Europe, and his thought has had a significant impact on the thinking about and practice of poverty for Franciscans throughout history.

Bonaventure's was not the only voice on poverty at that time, however, as he wrote most of his works in the midst of a grand theological debate over the meaning and practice of poverty in the Christian life.²¹ The dispute began at the University of Paris, when the secular priests there, led by William of St. Amour and Gerard of Abbeville, began to attack the monastic interpretation of Christ's absolute poverty.²² Bonaventure wrote in defense of his order, as did other mendicant scholars such as Thomas Aquinas and Michael of Cesena; they argued for the

¹⁹ To access St. Francis' works, I have relied upon Regis J. Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, eds. *The Saint*, vol. 1 of *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999).

²⁰ When referencing these, we have relied on the following works: Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, translated by Robert J. Karris (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Saint Bonaventure University, 2008); Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, introduction and notes by Robert J. Karris, translation by Jose de Vinck and Robert J. Karris (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2010); and Bonaventure, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, translated by Regis J. Armstrong, in *Francis of Assisi: The Founder*, vol. 2 (New York: City Press, 2000).

²¹ For a general reference to this dispute, see Malcolm Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty: the Doctrine of the Absolute Poverty of Christ and the Apostles in the Franciscan Order, 1210-1323* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1998).

²² D. Douie, *The Conflict between the Seculars and the Mendicants at the University of Paris in the Thirteenth Century* (Aquinas Society of London, Aquinas Paper No. 23: London, 1954); Andrew Traver, "The Forging of an Intellectual Defense of Mendicancy in the Medieval University," in *The Origin, Development and Refinement of Medieval Religious Mendicancies*, ed. Donald S. Prudlo (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 157-95.

legitimacy of living in communal poverty, owning nothing, as opposed to only the individual poverty in which the secular priests lived. Their arguments in favor of the monastics' rights to practice their unique form of poverty ultimately prevailed, but they contained the seeds of another debate that would forever alter the course of the Franciscan order.

The Spiritual Franciscans, who advocated for the practice of an extreme form of poverty that limited even the use of material goods, arose from this earlier controversy to challenge Bonaventure's interpretation of Christ's life.²³ This particular group of Franciscan brothers believed they held the true intellectual inheritance of the founder by living in such poverty as to make it necessary to beg others for sustenance and to avoid living in permanent buildings or on developed land. By adding their voices to the dispute over poverty, the Spirituals complicated the controversy by weakening the papal support of the Franciscans as a whole, even the more moderate faction represented by Bonaventure and his writings. This led to the eventual condemnation of the doctrine of the absolute poverty of Christ by Pope John XXII.²⁴

The contours of these debates over poverty shape our reading of Franciscan poverty as expressed by Bonaventure; his is a moderate voice, one calling for a solution that could allow the Franciscans to both remain spiritually in tune with their founder's wishes and function as a large institution in the medieval period. The vast secondary literature on Bonaventure, the Franciscans, and this debate generally agrees on this designation of Bonaventure as a moderate, as well as on the roles each faction played in defining and challenging different aspects of Bonaventure's

²³ David Burr, *Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2001).

²⁴ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 221-70.

interpretation of poverty. Given this relatively comprehensive treatment in the secondary literature, we will not complete exhaustive primary research into St. Bonaventure's and others' thought on poverty, preferring instead to rely on the existing body of secondary literature covering the subjects.

The analysis of this secondary literature aids the establishment of a heuristic device, according to which Bonaventure stands in between the secular priests, who argue for less restrictive poverty in religious life, and the Spiritual Franciscans, who demand a more restrictive practice of poverty. This allows for the categorization of several currents of thought on poverty in thirteenth century Christianity, which have been well-established and thoroughly studied. These various currents of thought provide a model of how to understand poverty in a medieval religious tradition, which offers an inter-religious conversation partner for the Islamic approach to poverty taken by al-Ghazali just more than a century earlier in Baghdad.

Poverty and Asceticism in Islam

Poverty has been studied less comprehensively in the field of Islamic Studies, although much work has been performed on the related concepts of renunciation and asceticism. Leah Kinberg has attempted to mine the earliest texts of the Islamic tradition for glimpses at the origins of asceticism.²⁵ Michael Cooperson has also explored the early ascetic movements,

²⁵ Leah Kinberg, "What is meant by *zuhd*?" *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 27-44; Leah Kinberg, "Compromise of commerce: a study of early traditions concerning poverty and wealth," *Der Islam* 66 (1989): 193-212.

specifically through the life of one of the most prominent figures of that time, Bishr al-Hafi.²⁶ In the same vein as Cooperson's work, Nimrod Hurvitz's scholarship has dissected the relationship between spiritual biographies and ascetic practice.²⁷ Several scholars have performed significant research into the transition from these early ascetic movements to the more developed mystical traditions that emerged in the ninth and tenth centuries.²⁸ Despite all of this attention on asceticism, relatively little work has been done on the intimately related concept of poverty in the history of Islamic thought.²⁹ This dissertation will address this lacuna in the secondary literature by offering an analysis of poverty as a religious ideal in the work of al-Ghazali, one of the most prolific authors in Islamic history.

Although many Muslim thinkers have treated the subject of poverty and its place within the process of spiritual purification, and al-Ghazali does not emphasize poverty in the way St. Francis did, several reasons have guided this study's focus on al-Ghazali's work in the Islamic tradition. First, in many ways his thought lies at the heart of that tradition; he is often credited with bringing both Sufi and philosophical thought into line with orthodox Ash'arite theology,

²⁶ Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of Al-Ma'mun*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Especially pertinent is the chapter on Bishr al-Hafi, the renunciant, p. 154-87.

²⁷ Nimrod Hurvitz, "Biographies and Mild Asceticism: A Study of the Islamic Moral Imagination," *Studia Islamica* 85:1 (1997): 41-65.

²⁸ Jacqueline Chabbi, "Remarques sur le développement historique des mouvements ascétiques et mystiques au Khurasan," *Studia Islamica* 46 (1977): 5-72; Christopher Melchert, "Basran Origins of Classical Sufism," *Der Islam* 82 (2005): 221-40; Christopher Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E." *Studia Islamica*, 83 (1996): 51-70; Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

²⁹ One exception to this is the work of Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250-1517*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000: 17-31. In these pages, Sabra gives a very brief overview of poverty as a religious ideal in major Islamic thinkers, including al-Ghazali.

which dominated the intellectual climate of his time and continues to exert a significant influence in the Muslim world. According to this line of thought, his critiques of the practices and beliefs of certain Sufis and philosophers have echoed through the centuries, continuing to shape the thought of generations of Muslims. Although his role in establishing a “new orthodoxy” may have been exaggerated by scholars of Islam of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there can be no doubt that he left an intellectual legacy that impacted Muslim thinkers for centuries after his death, and even to this day his influence can be seen in the ubiquitous presence of his works across the Muslim world.

Second, al-Ghazali’s mastery of a variety of intellectual disciplines, including theology, philosophy, mysticism, law, and Qur’anic exegesis, among others, has contributed to the popularity and influence of his work. This diversity of method aids readers of al-Ghazali in understanding his complex and sometimes intentionally obtuse thinking on many of the significant questions of his time. His prolific production of publications works to the detriment of the modern reader, however, as it sometimes obfuscates his intended meaning on particular questions.³⁰ As with many important medieval texts, it can be quite easy to make Ghazali’s works mean various and often contradictory things, so it is imperative that we pay close attention to the interpretive context of his works.

Third, al-Ghazali devotes a significant section of his major work, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, to a discussion of poverty, giving it a treatment few other thinkers had at his time. Although earlier

³⁰ For instance, Frank Griffel has noted that even the great Islamic philosopher Ibn Rushd had difficulty identifying Ghazali’s true positions. Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali’s Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 284.

Sufi thinkers such as al-Muhasibi, al-Makki, and al-Qushayri had discussed poverty, Ghazali's placement of it in the *Iḥyā'* indicates its critical role in his understanding of spiritual purification. Furthermore, al-Ghazali's discussion of poverty serves as an excellent window into his method of weaving together theological, philosophical, and practical mystical strands of thought into a coherent whole, especially within the context of the practical spiritual guidance given in the *Iḥyā'*. In fact, our analysis of al-Ghazali's treatment of poverty in that text reveals poverty to be an important representation of broader trends in his thought about the purification of the soul and the human pursuit of nearness to God, both in this life and the hereafter.

Like St Francis in the Christian tradition, al-Ghazali has been covered extensively in the secondary literature of Islamic studies. Unlike the study of St. Francis, however, the scholarship on al-Ghazali has yet to turn towards his thinking on poverty, despite its significant placement within the *Iḥyā'* or his elevation of poverty to the status of an important stage in his mystical ethics. Therefore, this dissertation attempts to fill this gap in Ghazalian scholarship by analyzing in detail the thirty-fourth book of the *Iḥyā'* '*Ulūm al-Dīn, The Book on Poverty and Renunciation*, with the goal of establishing an interpretation of his thinking on poverty, as well as the importance of poverty's role in what we have called his mystical ethics, explained in detail in the first chapter. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to determine the method by which we will approach the thought of al-Ghazali generally.

The Autobiographical Interpretation of al-Ghazali's Thought

Although scholars have devoted significant time and energy to studying the legacy and thought of al-Ghazali, the specific details of his life and the dates of his works have been debated for more than a century. Even more difficult than this has been the struggle to determine what his works mean. The earliest attempts to understand al-Ghazali involved placing his works into their proper chronological order and piecing together the events of his life.³¹ Most scholars at that time, particularly Duncan Black MacDonald and William Montgomery Watt, relied primarily on al-Ghazali's autobiographical *Munqidh min al-Dalāl* as the lens through which to understand both the events of his life and the meaning of his works.³² In that text al-Ghazali narrates an account of his exploration, mastery, and subsequent rejection of three major intellectual disciplines of his time, namely apologetic theology (*kalām*), philosophy (*falsafa*), and Isma'ili Shi'ism (*ta'īm*).³³ He engaged most seriously with philosophy, and around this time he

³¹ For the earliest attempts see Duncan Black MacDonald, "The Life of al-Ghazzali, with especial reference to his religious experiences and opinions." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 20, 1899, 71-132; Miguel Asín-Palacios, *La Espiritualidad de Algazel y su sentido Cristiano* (Madrid, Granada: Publicaciones de las Escuelas de Estudios árabes de Madrid y Granada, 1934-35); Margaret Smith, *al-Ghazali the Mystic: A Study of the Life and Personality of Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Tusi al-Ghazali, together with an account of his mystical teaching and an estimate of his place in the history of Islamic mysticism*. London: Luzac & Co., 1944; William Montgomery Watt, "The Authenticity of the Works Attributed to al-Ghazali." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1949, pp. 5-22; Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazzali*. London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1953; Watt, "The Study of al-Gazali." *Oriens* 13-14, 1960-1, 121-31; Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of al-Ghazali*. Edinburgh: University Press, 1963; M. Bouyges, *Essai de chronologie des oeuvres de al-Ghazali (Algazel)*. Edited by Michel Allard (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1959).

³² For the use of *Munqidh* as the foundational text of interpreting al-Ghazali's life, see Duncan B. MacDonald, "The Life of al-Ghazzali," 73-4; Watt, *Muslim Intellectual*, 47-57. The works of these two scholars in particular shaped the reading of al-Ghazali for two generations.

³³ Besides the Arabic text, I have also consulted for this account of al-Ghazali's life the translation by Richard J. McCarthy, S.J., printed as *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl, and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazali*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980.

published the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, which came to be known as his major refutation of earlier philosophical thinkers, especially Ibn Sina.

He then began to study Sufism (*tasawwuf*), which led him to his famous crisis of 1095, during which he lost the abilities to eat and speak, resulting in the temporary suspension of his teaching at the *Nizāmiyya* school in Baghdad. He overcame this crisis by realizing the necessity of studying Sufism not only as an intellectual pursuit but also as a practical spiritual discipline. Therefore, he left his post permanently, under pretext of going on pilgrimage, but he went instead to Damascus and then Jerusalem to live in seclusion and teach a few select students. There he began to compose and teach portions of his major work, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, which came to be viewed in conjunction with his *Tahāfut* as the completion of his refutation of philosophy and turn towards the more mystically oriented branch of Islamic sciences called Sufism.

This summary of the *Munqidh* provides only a brief sketch of one small portion of al-Ghazali's life, but many early scholars of Islam, taking al-Ghazali at his word, used his description of the crisis of 1095 as the primary lens through which to date and interpret his entire body of work. According to this method, those works written before his crisis exhibited elements of theological, philosophical, and legal thought, while his later works (after his "conversion" to Sufism in 1095) shifted towards an emphasis on mystical and esoteric themes.³⁴ In particular, al-Ghazali has been viewed as the orthodox Muslim thinker who contributed most immediately to

³⁴ MacDonald, "Life of al-Ghazzali," 86-88; Watt, "The Study of al-Gazali," 121-31.

the decline of philosophy in Islam, due to his publication of the *Tahāfut* and the subsequent events of his life.³⁵

Therefore, al-Ghazali's thought was seen until the middle of the twentieth century as consisting of two fundamentally different periods, pre- and post-crisis, which helped to explain the many ways in which he seems to contradict himself in various works. According to this way of thinking, al-Ghazali's body of work contains inconsistencies that can only be explained by such a profound conversion or by eliminating certain works or portions of works seemingly out of touch with the rest of his thought.³⁶ Thus, al-Ghazali's corpus came to be read through this lens, and the *Ihyā'* *'Ulūm al-Dīn*, one of his first post-crisis writings and his most important and influential volume over time, came to be seen as the result of his conversion to Sufism and his focus on spiritual practice.³⁷

This reading of al-Ghazali as Sufi mystic was not unanimous, even from the earliest stages of European scholarship on his life. Farid Jabre, in a pair of works completed around the middle of the twentieth century, questioned al-Ghazali's mystical inclinations through examinations of his lexicon, especially the terms *ma'rifa* (knowledge) and *yaqīn* (certainty).³⁸

³⁵ See, for example, the Introduction to Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazzali*, p. 11-15.

³⁶ In particular, see Watt, "The Authenticity of the Works Attributed to al-Ghazali," 24-45; Watt, "A Forgery in al-Ghazali's *Mishkat*?" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1949): 5-22, and Lazarus-Yafeh, H. *Studies in al-Ghazzali*, Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975, especially pp. 249-63. See Hermann Landolt, "al-Ghazali and 'Religionswissenschaft'" in *Recherches en spiritualité iranienne: recueil d'articles*, Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 2005, pp. 25-81, for a refutation of Watt's thesis regarding the inauthenticity of the *Mishkat*.

³⁷ See MacDonald, "Life of al-Ghazzali." Also see Ignaz Goldziher, *Le dogme et la loi de l'Islam: Histoire du développement dogmatique et juridique de la religion musulmane*, Felix Arin (trans.), Paris: P. Geuthner, 1920, pp. 147-55.

³⁸ Farid Jabre, *La notion de la Ma'rifa chez al-Ghazali* Beirut: Les Lettres Orientales, 1958; idem, *La notion de certitude selon al-Ghazali: Dans ses origines psychologiques et historiques* Paris: J Vrin, 1958.

More recently, scholars have continued to question this connection by rethinking the method of interpreting al-Ghazali's life and works through the *Munqidh*. Inconsistencies between that text's account and statements made in other writings, as well as closer studies of more works in al-Ghazali's corpus, have led some scholars to doubt certain details provided by al-Ghazali in his *Munqidh*. The dating of the *Munqidh* towards the end of al-Ghazali's life, during which time he faced a number of political and intellectual challenges to his ideas, has even led some scholars to interpret it as a work written in defense of his teachings, so that it may be interpreted as having an apologetic tone, rather than as a work of pure autobiography.³⁹

As a result of the shifting approach to this text, many scholars have produced studies of al-Ghazali's works challenging the long-standing narrative of crisis, conversion, and variation in his life and thought. Most of these scholars advocate for reading al-Ghazali's body of work as a whole, not as one split at its middle and drastically different on either side; although they admit to the presence of a gradual shift in thematic emphasis in al-Ghazali's thought (e.g., towards a focus on the hereafter and spiritual practice), they deny any major inconsistencies and argue for interpreting his works in terms of their philosophical influences *throughout* his career, even during and after the writing of the *Tahāfut*.⁴⁰

³⁹ Eric Ormsby, "The Taste of Truth: the Structure of Experience in al-Ghazali's *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*," in *Islamic Studies presented to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden: Brill, 1991): 133-52; Josef van Ess, "Quelques remarques sur le *Munqid min ad-dalal*," *al-Ghazali: La raison et le miracle* (Paris: Editions Maisonneuve et Larose, 1987): 57-68; Kenneth Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and his Revival of Religious Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-3; 158-61.

⁴⁰ Among many others, see Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: al-Ghazali and Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1992); Frank, *al-Ghazali and the Ash'arite School* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994); Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: al-Ghazali's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation* (London: Routledge, 2012); Frank Griffel, *al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Beginning in the late 1980s scholars began to question the extent to which al-Ghazali rejected the philosophical ideas of his predecessors, and Richard M. Frank, in two landmark works of the early 1990s, *Creation and the Cosmic System* and *Al-Ghazali and the Ash‘arite School*, argues that despite his open critique of Ibn Sina’s works, al-Ghazali relies heavily on Ibn Sina’s ideas, going so far as to say that in doing so al-Ghazali violates several key tenets of his professed Ash‘arite theological affiliation.⁴¹ Using many of the same texts, Michael E. Marmura argued in response to Frank that while the philosophical influence on al-Ghazali was clear, he did in fact remain consistent with his Ash‘arite training.⁴² Both of these scholars, and many who have come since, disagree with earlier Islamicists’ opinions regarding al-Ghazali’s body of work, contending for a more consistent reading that recognizes a slow development in his thought, rather than an abrupt shift.

Frank Griffel and Alexander Treiger have made even more recent significant contributions to the debate surrounding al-Ghazali; both scholars believe he relies heavily on philosophical sources and should be interpreted accordingly. In his *Al-Ghazali’s Philosophical*

⁴¹ Binyamin Abrahamov, “al-Ghazali’s Supreme Way to Know God.” *Studia Islamica* 77 1993, 141-68, provides a Straussian reading of al-Ghazali’s works, claiming al-Ghazali hides his true, philosophical agenda behind more acceptable theological and mystical terminology. In contrast, Frank’s *Creation and the Cosmic System* and *Al-Ghazali and the Ash‘arite School* offer more straightforward approaches to his use of philosophical sources. In his *Al-Ghazali’s Philosophical Theology*, Griffel accepts Ibn Sina’s influence on al-Ghazali but disagrees with Frank’s assertion that al-Ghazali forsook his Ash‘arite theological grounding. For a refutation of Frank on the basis of his selective use of texts, see Ahmad Dallal, “al-Ghazali and the Perils of Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122 no 4 (Fall 2002): 773-787.

⁴² Michael E. Marmura, “al-Ghazali and Demonstrative Science,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 3 (1965): 183-204; idem., “al-Ghazali’s Attitude to the Secular Sciences and Logic,” In *Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science*, edited by George F. Hourani, (Abany: State University of New York Press, 1975): 100-11.; idem., “al-Ghazalian Causes and Intermediaries,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115 (1995): 89-100; idem., “al-Ghazali and Ash‘arism Revisited,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 12 (2002): 91-110.

Theology Griffel offers a revised account of the thinker's life, having included new Persian letters and accounts of students and contemporaries in his analysis.⁴³ Griffel then investigates al-Ghazali's cosmological thought in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of al-Ghazali's connection to *kalām* and *falsafa*.⁴⁴ He ultimately concludes that while al-Ghazali assimilates many of Ibn Sina's metaphysical doctrines, he alters them in such a way as to remain consistent with Ash'arite occasionalism.⁴⁵ Griffel's work maintains the traditional reading of al-Ghazali as offering a firm challenge to philosophy, while at the same time presenting a more nuanced understanding of his implementation of Ash'arism. He leaves open the question of mystical sources' influences on al-Ghazali, however, which constitutes a major gap in the current approach to al-Ghazali's thought.

Treiger's work helps to fill this gap; in his *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, a monograph adapted from his dissertation, he argues that al-Ghazali not only relied upon philosophy for many of his ideas but also played perhaps the most significant role in popularizing philosophical ideas during the Islamic medieval period.⁴⁶ He boldly argues in this book and elsewhere that even al-Ghazali's mysticism is rooted in Ibn Sina's thought, and that by weaving together philosophy and mysticism al-Ghazali can be seen as "the key figure *in the transition* from 'practical Sufism,' which was not yet oriented towards such [esoteric]

⁴³ Griffel, *al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, 19-95.

⁴⁴ Griffel, *al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, 123-274, especially 215-274.

⁴⁵ Griffel, *al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, 275-86.

⁴⁶ Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: al-Ghazali's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation*. London: Routledge, 2012. See especially 64-101 on al-Ghazali's Avicennian influence and Treiger's re-evaluation of al-Ghazali's *Tahāfut*.

knowledge, to ‘theosophical Sufism,’ which was oriented towards it.”⁴⁷ Treiger thus wishes to show al-Ghazali’s importance not as the scholar who sounded the death knell of philosophy, but who in fact purified it by distilling it with the best elements of Sufism and *kalām*, thereby tempering its most radical claims. At the same time, this combination of components led to the transformation of Sufism into a discipline more concerned than ever before with metaphysical elements and the refinement of *kalām* in the face of significant exterior challenges.

This dissertation enters into the conversation concerning al-Ghazali’s philosophical roots only tangentially, as a diachronic analysis of al-Ghazali’s treatment of poverty in *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* cannot contribute substantially to a discussion about the nature of his entire body of work, although many works outside of the *Ihyā’* have been considered in this study. We do wish to evaluate the claims of the scholars mentioned above, however, since their arguments seem to understate the importance of al-Ghazali’s Sufi influences in favor of his philosophical ones. While Frank, Griffel, and Treiger in particular make excellent points regarding the overlooked aspect of al-Ghazali’s positive assessment of Ibn Sina, they have very little to say about his reliance on earlier mystical scholars such as Abu Talib al-Makki, al-Harith al-Muhasibi, and al-Qushayri, among many others he quotes extensively in the *Ihyā’*. Chapter four of this dissertation is in part an attempt to rectify this elision, so that we may better understand al-Ghazali’s connection to these earlier thinkers, at least on the subject of poverty.

⁴⁷ Treiger, “al-Ghazali’s Classifications of the Sciences and Descriptions of the Highest Theoretical Science.” *Divan: Disiplinlerarasi Calismalar Dergisi* 16:30 (2011): 31, italics Treiger’s.

There are notable exceptions to the dearth of mystical interpretations of al-Ghazali's work; many scholars have chosen to focus on questions outside the scope of the false dichotomy between philosophy and Sufism set up by the earliest European readers of al-Ghazali, and several of these alternative approaches relate more directly to the goals of the present dissertation. For example, Mohamed Sherif's work on the meaning of virtue in al-Ghazali's thought provides important context for our reading of al-Ghazali's ethics.⁴⁸ Timothy J. Gianotti has written a definitive treatment of al-Ghazali's understanding of the soul, in which the author asserts a position similar to Treiger's in relation to al-Ghazali's stance vis-à-vis philosophy and Sufism.⁴⁹ Richard Gramlich has provided comprehensive German translations of important texts written by al-Ghazali, al-Makki, and al-Qushayri, all with cross-references demonstrating the connections between the theological approaches of these three thinkers.⁵⁰ Finally, David Burrell has offered interpretations of and introductions to some of al-Ghazali's works, taking an approach more consistent with our own, especially in relation to his emphasis on theological comparison.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Mohamed Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).

⁴⁹ T.J. Gianotti, *al-Ghazali's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul: Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology of the Ihyā'* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

⁵⁰ Richard Gramlich, *Muhammad al-Ġazzālīs Lehre von den Stufen zur Gottesliebe: die Bücher 31-36 seines Hauptwerkes* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1984); Gramlich, *Das Sendschreiben al-Qusayris Über Das Sufitum*, Freiburger Islamstudien (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1989); Gramlich, *Die Nahrung der Herzen: Abu Talib al-Makki's Qut al-Qulub* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1992).

⁵¹ He has two contributions to the translations of al-Ghazali's works: David Burrell, *Al-Ghazali on the Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993); Burrell, *Al-Ghazali on Faith in Divine Unity and Trust in Divine Providence* [Book 35 of his *Ihyā' 'Ulum al-Din*] (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2001). He has also written or contributed to several books in which al-Ghazali features prominently as one part of an inter-religious comparison: Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth* (Notre Dame, Ind: Notre Dame University Press, 2000); Burrell,

Poverty constitutes an especially rich subject of inquiry through which to explore the connections between al-Ghazali and earlier Sufi thinkers, due to its roots in ascetic practice and its importance in earlier Sufi writings. Our analysis of poverty in the *Ihyā'* will demonstrate not only al-Ghazali's reliance upon these Sufi figures but also the worth of Treiger's thesis, as the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation* clearly shows al-Ghazali's method of integrating philosophy, *kalām*, and mysticism. Such an analysis of the *Ihyā'*'s contents only makes sense, however, in the context of prior scholarship; the approach to this text in particular among al-Ghazali's works has shifted over time, and this dissertation would like to align itself with the more recent scholarly contributions.

So, like St Francis in the Christian tradition, al-Ghazali has been covered extensively in the secondary literature of Islamic studies. Unlike the study of St. Francis, however, the scholarship on al-Ghazali has yet to turn to his thinking on poverty, despite its significant placement within the *Ihyā'* and his elevation of poverty to the status of an important stage in his mystical ethics. Therefore, this dissertation attempts to fill this gap in Ghazalian scholarship by analyzing in detail the thirty-fourth book of the *Ihyā'* '*Ulūm al-Dīn, The Book on Poverty and Renunciation*, with the goal of establishing an interpretation of his thinking on poverty as part of his broader mystical ethics.

Faith and Freedom: an Interfaith Perspective (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

Summary of Dissertation Chapters

Chapter one begins by presenting a brief summary of the historical trajectory of the study of al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. While early approaches to the study of al-Ghazali focus on his abrupt transition from theological legalist to Sufi mystic, recent scholarship offers a more nuanced perspective, asserting a gradual development of sophistication in al-Ghazali's works, which contain elements of mystical, theological, legal, and philosophical thought from the beginning to the end of his intellectual career. This is especially true of the *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, which has received some of the most recent attention by scholars wishing to understand al-Ghazali's intentions in writing it. The chapter then proceeds by describing the general thrust of al-Ghazali's ethical thought, particularly as he articulated it within the *Iḥyā'*; certain of al-Ghazali's unique concepts, such as his *'ilm tarīqa al-ākḥira*, his emphasis on the division between *al-dunyā* and *al-ākḥira*, and his teleology of *sa'āda* (felicity in the hereafter) and *mukāshafa* (direct witnessing of God), provide needed context within which to comprehend the reading of the thirty-fourth book of the *Iḥyā'*. All of these concepts contribute to what we call al-Ghazali's mystical ethics, which is explained in the closing pages of chapter one.

Chapter Two offers a close reading of the *kitāb al-faqr wa'l-zuhd*, *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation*, in which al-Ghazali discusses poverty and renunciation as states of the heart that lie on the path of his mystical ethics. Although he examines poverty and wealth primarily in material terms, the most revealing aspects of this book come when he discusses poverty in terms more closely related to the theological and mystical elements of his thought. In these sections, al-Ghazali talks about the absolute poverty of existence, which is inherent to all created beings, who can only counteract its effects through the acceptance of poverty, the pursuit of

renunciation, and the assimilation of the self to the divine attribute of Needlessness (*al-Ghanī*). Our interpretation of al-Ghazali's depiction of poverty reveals this ideal's importance not only on an individual basis but also within the scope of the author's mystical ethics.

Chapter Three's first part places *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation* into the context of the *Ihyā*'s other three quarters. Al-Ghazali treats poverty and wealth not only in the thirty-fourth book of the *Ihyā*' but also in its fifth (*kitāb asrār al-zakāh*), thirteenth (*kitāb adab al-kasb wa'l-ma'āsh*), and twenty-seventh (*kitāb dhamm al-bukhl wa dhamm ḥubb al-māl*) books. Each of these books offers a different and progressively sophisticated conceptualization of the role of poverty in self-purification. The fifth book deals with the ritual obligation of every Muslim to give alms, the thirteenth with the appropriate behavior of earning a living and utilizing the income earned, and the twenty-seventh with the negative consequences of loving wealth. An analysis of al-Ghazali's treatment of poverty in each of these provides a richer context within which to understand his progressive perspective on poverty, which becomes more damaging to the soul as one moves toward the fourth and final quarter of the *Ihyā*'.

The second part of Chapter Three places *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation* into its proper context within this fourth quarter, which contains the heart of al-Ghazali's mystical ethics. Here he tracks the stages by which one purifies the soul and achieves the love of God, a process in which poverty plays an important role. Furthermore, the findings from Chapter Two regarding poverty as both material and absolute, viewed in the context of the more general process of self-purification, may be extrapolated to characterize al-Ghazali's mystical ethics as a whole. Thus, the pursuit of material poverty as a way to embody the divine attribute *al-Ghanī* is not unique but representative of the process by which one attempts to attain to the love of God in

this life (*maḥabba*), and the accompanying felicity (*sa'āda*) in the hereafter. Every positive character trait presented in the fourth quarter of the *Iḥyā'* offers an avenue through which to embody one of God's divine attributes, and poverty serves as the turning point in the process of achieving proximity to God.

Chapter Four moves beyond al-Ghazali's own works to locate his thought on poverty in its historical context by analyzing its relationship to the thought of earlier scholars al-Harith al-Muhasibi, Abu Talib al-Makki, and al-Qushayri. Each of these men contributed significantly to the body of Muslim thought concerning poverty, and *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation* displays clear connections with works by each of them. Such an analysis sheds light on precisely which portions of al-Ghazali's text can be viewed as unique to him; while he drew much of the material in the thirty-fourth book of the *Iḥyā'* from these earlier thinkers' writings, he singularly conceives of poverty within the context of his mystical ethics, by which one pursues the embodiment of the divine attributes such as *al-Ghanī*. Chapter Four also seeks to trace the general lines of al-Ghazali's contemporary intellectual milieu in order to establish the most immediate context into which his writings entered the Islamic world. We find that al-Ghazali stands as a moderate voice relative to his contemporaries, who either pursue poverty to an overly radical extreme or reject the usefulness of poverty entirely.

Chapter Five establishes a heuristic device about the Franciscan approach to poverty through an assessment of both the most prominent primary sources on the subject and a substantial body of secondary literature. Such a comparative matrix provides the main principles according to which poverty has been defined, practiced, and considered theologically significant within the long-standing Franciscan tradition of Christianity. Among the debates over poverty in

thirteenth-century Christianity, we have identified three primary currents of thought, the development of which chapter five sketches with a view to establishing the relative position of Bonaventure's works. Ultimately, the mendicant-scholastic strand of thought, represented most fully by St. Bonaventure but also by St. Thomas Aquinas, emerges as the moderate interpretive framework in which poverty comes to be understood for most Christians. This current of thought, therefore, offers the best point from which to compare medieval Christian poverty with the ideas discovered in al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'*.

Chapter Six performs just such a comparison, bringing into conversation the principles identified in *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation* and those found in the mendicant-scholastic stream of thought and practice. Both al-Ghazali and Bonaventure represent moderate voices on poverty within their own unique contexts, challenged on one side by extreme ascetics, pursuing poverty for its own sake, and on the other side by scholars afraid of poverty and its threat to their power and prestige. Although these two strains of thought share many superficial similarities, they reflect vastly different theological beliefs and frameworks. The works of al-Ghazali and the Franciscan brethren demonstrate fully the doctrinal differences existing between Muslims and Christians, particularly those centering on the person of Jesus Christ. Even still, when poverty is viewed in both traditions as contributing in important ways to the ultimate eschatology of an individual human being, in that he may achieve intimacy with the divine through the sacrifice of material wealth, poverty serves as an effective lens through which to achieve some significant Muslim-Christian understanding.

Chapter One: Approaching the *Ihyā'* and al-Ghazali's thought

While this dissertation aims specifically to analyze al-Ghazali's thought on poverty, it also intends to discover something about his thought more broadly. Poverty as a concept can only be understood with reference to the context in which it has been presented to the reader. The first layer of this is the *Ihyā'*, in the final quarter of which al-Ghazali presents his primary treatment of poverty. The thirty-fourth book of the *Ihyā'*, *The Book on Poverty and Renunciation* (*kitāb al-faqr wa'l-zuhd*) appears as one stage in a sequenced progression towards the human ends of knowing and loving God; in fact, poverty seems to represent a turning point in that process, holding a pride of place in al-Ghazali's thought that it does not in the thought of earlier scholars. Therefore, the general structure and thrust of al-Ghazali's thought in the *Ihyā'* make up a framework critical to any accurate interpretation of poverty's meaning.

This chapter, then, identifies and characterizes what I have called al-Ghazali's "mystical ethics." With this term I wish to show that in contrast to the philosophical metaphysics upon which al-Ghazali draws to construct his thought, his ethical system relies primarily on earlier mystical thinkers. According to this mystical ethics, a person progresses through an advancing system of religious practices, characterized by the elimination of negative character traits and the cultivation of positive ones. Al-Ghazali expresses his thought about this process in terms of the human identification with the Divine Names of God, which constitute the sources of the human attributes worthy of pursuit. One of these divine names is *al-Ghanī*, translated as the Needless or the Self-Subsistent, which al-Ghazali relates to poverty in the *Ihyā'*'s thirty-fourth book, as will be discussed in chapter two.

In order to work through al-Ghazali's mystical ethics, it is first important to grasp the history and current state of scholarly interpretation of the text in which he presents it most clearly, the *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. While the body of scholarship on al-Ghazali's thought is vast, and cannot be recounted in full here, that on the *Iḥyā'* is disproportionately small in relation to the text's importance. Traditionally, scholars have interpreted the *Iḥyā'* through the lens of his autobiographical *munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, in which it appears as the result of the teacher's great conversion from a worldly philosopher to an ascetic Sufi. In their works, the *Iḥyā'* plays the role of the text through which al-Ghazali single-handedly used the spiritual richness of Sufism to revive Islam, which had been rapidly deteriorating under the weight of the rigid legality of the *'ulamā'*, the members of the jurist class.¹

Along with the changing interpretations of al-Ghazali's entire body of work and its consistency, as discussed in the introduction, the idea that al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā'* brought Sufism into the mainstream of Islamic orthodoxy has also successfully been challenged, leading to a reevaluation of al-Ghazali's intention in writing that text.² Was it truly a work meant to advance Sufi ideals and practices, a guide to those wishing to pursue God? Or was it something more subversive, written with the knowledge that it would cause controversy and dispute over the meaning of important concepts such as knowledge, piety, and the pursuit of God?

¹ MacDonald, "The Life of al-Ghazali," 71-2. Also see Ignaz Goldziher, *Le dogme et la loi de l'Islam: Histoire du développement dogmatique et juridique de la religion musulmane*, Felix Arin (trans.), Paris: P. Geuthner, 1920, pp. 147-55.

² George Makdisi, "Hanbalite Islam," in Merlin L. Swartz, ed. *Studies on Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981): 242-48.

The most recent addition to the debate surrounding al-Ghazali's level of orthodoxy and possible connection to mystical thought is the work of Ken Garden. In both his dissertation and the book that grew out of it he argues for a reinterpretation of the *Iḥyā'* as a text seen by al-Ghazali's contemporaries as a radical reorientation of the hierarchy of Islamic knowledge.³ Garden highlights the violent reactions to the *Iḥyā'* both in the Maghrib and in al-Ghazali's home territories of Nishapur and Tus. He interprets the *Iḥyā'*'s challenge to the established disciplines such as *fiqh*, *kalām*, and *falsafa* not as an effort to establish an orthodox synthesis but as an orchestrated campaign to place his own 'science of the way to the hereafter' (*'ilm tarīqa al-ākhirā*) at the pinnacle of the Islamic sciences as the most complete manifestation of spiritual practice. Rather than try to show al-Ghazali's philosophical or Sufi preferences, Garden advocates for a third alternative, that al-Ghazali builds upon both philosophy and Sufism in the pursuit of felicity (*sa'āda*), which surpasses salvation (*najā*) and is more easily attainable for the elect than the masses.⁴

This dissertation adopts Garden's understanding of the *Iḥyā'* as a radical challenge to the established Islamic sciences of law and *kalām*, and as a work that synthesizes aspects of philosophy and Sufism into a unique and coherent whole. Yet it must be noted that al-Ghazali would doubtfully have thought of himself as creating something radical in the modern sense of the term. He certainly did not conceive of himself as committing innovation (*bid'a*), as this was a

³ Kenneth Garden, "Al-Ghazali's Contested Revival: *Iḥyā'* 'Ulūm al-Dīn and Its Critics in Khorasan and the Maghrib," Unpublished PhD Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2005; Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and his 'Revival of the Religious Sciences'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴ Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 63-103.

grave sin to his way of thinking; rather, Garden presents evidence to support the idea that al-Ghazali considered himself a ‘reviver,’ one who was correcting the wayward understanding of knowledge (*‘ilm*) permeating the intellectual climate of his age.⁵ Garden emphasizes this aspect of al-Ghazali’s personality, arguing that al-Ghazali was indeed aware of his role as the ‘reviver’ of the 5th Islamic century, embracing this duty and advocating for it through the writing of the *Ihyā’*.⁶

Therefore, this work came to be understood as ‘radical’ to its contemporaries, who were accustomed to a structure of knowledge al-Ghazali found misleading and even sinful because it oriented human beings towards the accumulation of worldly prestige and piety rather than towards the purification of the soul and the attainment of the vision of God (*mukāshafa*) in the afterlife. In order to comprehend how the *Ihyā’* incited the violent reactions it did, therefore, we must place it within the context of al-Ghazali’s thought more generally. In many ways, the *Ihyā’* represents a summary of al-Ghazali’s thought, but it is also his most important text, perhaps the pinnacle of his life’s work, and one which has influenced generations of Muslims more than any of his other writings.

A brief summary of the argument al-Ghazali presents in the *Ihyā’* serves two important purposes for the rest of the dissertation. First, it provides support for Garden’s reading of the text as one intended to radically reorient the intellectual climate of al-Ghazali’s age. This opens up an

⁵ The concept of the reviver in the Islamic tradition is based on a prophetic tradition in which Muhammad purportedly states that at the turn of every century a Muslim will come to renew the faith for the community. Al-Ghazali, living at the turn of the 12th Christian century and the 6th Muslim century, was well aware of this tradition and Garden argues that he believed he was the reviver of his time.

⁶ Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 8-11; 158-161.

interpretive space in which to fit our conception of al-Ghazali's mystical ethics, understood only in the broad context of the *Iḥyā'*'s structure, argument, and reception. Second, this summary forms the most immediate context for the close reading performed in the next chapter, since the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation* only makes sense within a reading that takes into account the role poverty plays in al-Ghazali's mystical ethics as a whole. Reading the *Iḥyā'* in this way also offers the opportunity to analyze at the end of this chapter what exactly we mean by the term mystical ethics.

The Reclassification of Knowledge, Mystical Practice, and the Knowledge of God

To adequately understand al-Ghazali's thought, both within and outside the *Iḥyā'*, one must recognize his desire to reclaim and reclassify the concept of knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) in Islam. His theory of knowledge as both theoretical and practical shapes the system of mystical ethics detailed in the *Iḥyā'*, while at the same time serving as a timely critique of his contemporaries' approaches to the religious sciences (*‘Ulūm al-Dīn*). The twin terms *‘ilm al-mukāshafa*, the knowledge of unveiling, and *‘ilm al-mu‘āmalā*, the knowledge of practice, form interpretive lenses through which one may read the entire *Iḥyā'*, including the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation*.⁷ These two facets of knowledge make up the dual components of the *‘ilm tarīqa al-ākḥira*, or the science of the way of the Hereafter, which al-Ghazali considers required knowledge (*farḍ ‘ayn*) for any Muslim who pursues knowledge of God. If the *Iḥyā'* is a work of

⁷ For an analysis of these two terms as keys to al-Ghazali's thought, see Avner Gil'adi, "On the Origin of Two Key-Terms in al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā'* *‘Ulūm al-Dīn*," *Arabica* 36, 1989, 81-92.

mystical ethics, which escorts its readers through the process of spiritual purification and the pursuit of the divine attributes, the *'ilm tarīqa al-ākhirā* represents in its two parts the guiding principles of those ethics; human beings are created in order to seek the hereafter, and the journey involves both the activity of self-purification through ascetic *praxis* (*mu'āmalā*) and the reception of divine knowledge in the heart (*mukāshafa*).

Not only do these key terms constitute the general structure of al-Ghazali's system of thought concerning spiritual development, but they also make up the context within which one may fully appreciate the interpretation of poverty offered in the next chapter. Such important concepts as the human heart (*qalb*), the dichotomy between this world (*al-dunyā*) and the hereafter (*al-ākhirā*), salvation (*najā*), divine unity (*tawhīd*), direct knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*), and the love of God (*maḥabba*) can only be understood properly as components and extensions of the dual concepts of the knowledge of unveiling and the knowledge of practice. These two types of knowledge are, however, merely means to the final end of acquiring a direct knowledge of God through witnessing (*mushāhada*) God in the hereafter, which leads to the love of God and everlasting felicity (*sa'āda*).

In order to expound upon his *'ilm tarīqa al-ākhirā* and its two component parts, al-Ghazali first had to establish its place within the hierarchy of knowledge (*'ilm*) among the religious sciences of Islam. As its title indicates, the *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*'s primary goal is a reclamation, or revivification, of the religious sciences; in the introduction al-Ghazali states, “the science of religion (*'ilm al-dīn*) has disappeared and the torch of guidance [has been] extinguished throughout the world,” and “the science of the way of the hereafter (*'ilm tarīqa al-ākhirā*), upon which the righteous ancestors trod, and which God called in His Book law,

wisdom, knowledge, enlightenment, light, guidance, and righteousness, this science has vanished from creation and has been forgotten.”⁸ In order to rectify this situation, he wishes to bring the true form of religious knowledge back into the Muslim consciousness by redefining the term used for knowledge and classifying it in accordance with the religious sciences found useful by the righteous ancestors of Islam.⁹

Therefore, al-Ghazali utilizes the term *‘ilm* in two ways: first, he identifies *al-‘ilm* as that which “used to indicate the knowledge of God, and His signs, and His actions among His servants and creatures.”¹⁰ Second, he uses it in reference to the limited discipline of jurisprudence, saying that people “altered its meaning by restricting it until most applied it to whomever was occupied by debates with opponents concerning matters of jurisprudence.”¹¹ Al-Ghazali criticizes this contraction of the meaning of *‘ilm* as one that limits the knowledge available to human beings. He disparages the so-called learned men of his age as having no true knowledge of the afterlife, and a major part of his purpose in writing the *Ihyā’* emerges out of a

⁸ *Ihyā’* volume 1:page 9 (*introduction*). In order to contribute to the ongoing effort to establish a more uniform citation system for al-Ghazali’s works, I have here relied on the system suggested in M. Afifi al-Akiti, “Index to Divisions of al-Ghazali’s Often-Cited Published Works,” *Muslim World* 102 no 1 (Jan 2012): 70-200, in which the author uses any and all significant divisions given by Al-Ghazali in the texts. Afifi Al-Akiti’s references to Book XXXIV of the *Ihyā’* in particular appear on pp. 137-8. I have used the preferred source, *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, ed. Ahmad Sa’d ‘Alī, 4 vols. (Cairo: Mustafa al-Bāb 1 al-Halabī, 1939), in conjunction with the more popular sourced based on it, *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-Dīn*, ed. Badawi Ahmad Tabanah, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dar Ihyā’ al-Kutūb al-‘Arabiyya, 1957). The format of reference comes from the 1939 text, and follows the following structure: volume: page, followed in parentheses by any significant textual markers as listed in al-Akiti’s index.

⁹ *Ihyā’* 1:9 (*introduction*).

¹⁰ *Ihyā’* 1:39 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 3, *bayān* 2, *lafẓ* 2).

¹¹ *Ihyā’* 1:39 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 3, *bayān* 2, *lafẓ* 2).

desire to expand the concept of knowledge once again to encompass the knowledge of God, His acts, and His attributes, as originally intended by the term.

Beginning with the prophetic tradition that “Seeking knowledge is an obligation of every Muslim,” al-Ghazali builds an argument for the general excellence of knowledge as a human pursuit.¹² Not only was man “created only to know,” but also knowledge is excellent both due to its usefulness and intrinsically.¹³ On the one hand knowledge “is excellent according to its essence, apart from any relationship; it is a description of God’s perfection, and through it the angels and the prophets are made noble.”¹⁴ On the other hand, knowledge’s usefulness extends both to this world and the next; “the source of felicity in this world and the next is knowledge ... the fruit of knowledge in the hereafter is proximity to the Lord of the Worlds, and attainment of the rank of the angels, and joining the company of the highest ones ... and in this world its fruits are power, dignity, the influence of governance over kings, and an abundance of respect.”¹⁵ This speaks to the value of knowledge in acquiring worldly virtue, but it reflects to an even greater degree the eschatological nature of al-Ghazali’s conception of knowledge, as felicity in the hereafter is the necessary goal of any properly oriented quest for knowledge.¹⁶

¹² *Iḥyā’* 1:15 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 1, *shawāhid* 1, *faḍīla* 2).

¹³ *Iḥyā’* 1:11-14 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 1, *shawāhid* 1, *faḍīla* 1).

¹⁴ *Iḥyā’* 1:19 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 1, *shawāhid* 2).

¹⁵ *Iḥyā’* 1:19 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 1, *shawāhid* 2).

¹⁶ Contained in this perspective is an implicit critique of jurists and others who pursued knowledge for personal gain or power. For al-Ghazali, the goal of knowledge is self-purification and the love of God, and any worldly benefits are merely added value that emerges from one’s acting in accordance with the knowledge gained.

A brief survey of al-Ghazali's re-classification of knowledge reinforces this eschatological reading, serving as a way of entry into discussing the relationship between unveiling and practice. As mentioned earlier, in the introduction to the *Iḥyā'* al-Ghazali separates knowledge into two primary categories, *'ilm al-mukāshafa* and *'ilm al-mu'āmalā*, which form the two complementary sides of the *'ilm tarīqa al-ākḥira*. Moving further into the *Iḥyā'*, in the *kitāb al-'ilm*, the science of the way of the hereafter itself forms a duality with the complementary science of this world (*'ilm al-dunyā*) within the broader category of the 'branches' (*furū'*) of the religious (shari'a) sciences that are *farḍ kifāya*, or incumbent upon the Muslim community as a whole but not each individual Muslim. That knowledge which is *farḍ kifāya* stands as a partner to that which is *farḍ 'ayn*, or incumbent upon every Muslim according to Islamic law.

The branches of the religious sciences, of which the science of the way to the hereafter is a part, rely upon the sources (*'usūl*) of Islam for their authority. These sources consist in the Qur'an, sunnah, *ijma'*, and the Companions' sayings and actions, from which the branches are in fact derived through the use of exegesis involving reason (*'aql*).¹⁷ The sciences of this world and of the way to the hereafter, then, are essentially rational religious sciences that are necessary for the virtue of the *umma*. The sciences of this world are sacred and praiseworthy, but they bear only upon a person's earthly life; they do not satisfy al-Ghazali's teleological conception of knowledge, since they do not aid the believer in the purification of his heart and the achievement

¹⁷ *Iḥyā'* 1:20-24 (*kitāb I, bāb 2, bayān 1-2*). In this section, al-Ghazali explains the structure of knowledge, specifically separating knowledge that is *farḍ 'ayn* from knowledge that is *farḍ kifāya*. We go into more detail about this distinction in chapter three.

of felicity in the hereafter. The most prominent among the sciences of this world is jurisprudence, which al-Ghazali respects as necessary but does not include among the knowledge that bears upon one's ultimate end in the hereafter. A believer must follow the law, but the law does not comprehend the heart, so jurists may not judge the hearts of Muslims.

In this way al-Ghazali actively attempts to create a cohesive hierarchy of knowledge by adding his own concepts to previously utilized categories drawn from Islamic legal and other sources. This serves to formulate a critique of the jurists' contraction of the meaning of *'ilm*, and it forms the basis for his critique of other major intellectual schools of his time, which will be discussed in more detail in the fourth chapter. For now, it is enough to say that al-Ghazali considers jurisprudence limited in spiritual scope, characterizes *kalām* as a glorified form of apologetics, and distinguishes between four branches of philosophy before categorizing two of them as part of *kalām*, identifying one of them as the useful tool logic, and claiming the fourth, physics, as a field in which the philosophers have primarily made heretical statements. None of these major intellectual traditions impacts the purification of one's heart, so they participate in neither *mu'āmalā* nor *mukāshafa*, since these latter forms of knowledge are based around knowledge of the states of the heart.

Such knowledge of “the beliefs and actions of the hearts ... is obligatory ... [and] most of what we have mentioned in the Quarter on Destructive Character Traits are among the *farḍ 'ayn*, which the people have neglected in favor of an occupation with that which has no meaning.”¹⁸ Thus al-Ghazali indicates the inclusion of the knowledge of the heart (*qalb*) and its states as part

¹⁸ *Iḥyā'* 1:23 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 1).

of the knowledge considered *farḍ ‘ayn*, along with knowledge of the meaning and mode of practicing the traditional ‘five pillars’ of Islam. For al-Ghazali, the required ritual practices of Islam are fundamental to one’s spiritual life, but they are not sufficient. What does it matter, he seems to ask, if one performs the ritual prayer correctly, if at the same time one’s heart is not clear of hatred or greed or anger? All Muslims must perform these rituals not only bodily but also with the right intentions; furthermore, they must understand the states of their hearts in order to fully participate in the mysteries of the five pillars.

Therefore, al-Ghazali places his *‘ilm tarīqa al-ākhirā* at the pinnacle of his classification of the Islamic religious sciences. But of what does the science of the way to the hereafter actually consist? It is necessary to understand its component parts, and some of its related concepts, in order to see how it shapes al-Ghazali’s ethical thought, for the *‘ilm tarīqa al-ākhirā* contains not only mere ethical guidelines but also access to a more esoteric knowledge of God. The interdependent nature of *mu‘āmalā* and *mukāshafa* informs our understanding of the *Iḥyā’*, producing a more nuanced reading of al-Ghazali’s treatment of poverty and wealth in the *Iḥyā’* and a reconsideration of Book XXXIV in light of its contextualization.

Praxis and theoria: mu‘āmalā and mukāshafa as Hermeneutical Tools

On the one hand, for al-Ghazali, *‘ilm al- mu‘āmalā* includes both “unveiling (*mukāshafa*) and action in accordance with that unveiling.”¹⁹ On the other hand, *‘ilm al-mukāshafa* involves

¹⁹ *Iḥyā’* 1:11 (*kitāb* I, *introduction*, *bā‘ith* 2).

“the unveiling of knowledge only.”²⁰ Therefore, as has been pointed out by Alexander Treiger and Avner Gil’adi before him, al-Ghazali seems to model his classification of knowledge on that of Aristotle, who utilized the Greek terms *praxis* and *theoria* to represent practical and theoretical knowledge.²¹ Practical knowledge is that which one pursues for the purpose of acting on it, otherwise known as ethical knowledge, while theoretical knowledge is that which is pursued for its own sake, a contemplative or speculative form of knowledge.

The relationship between these two concepts plays an important role in al-Ghazali’s thought generally and in the *Ihyā’* in particular, for they form an interdependent cycle of mystical practice and unveiling, which leads to the knowledge and ultimately the witnessing and love of God. We find that although the *Ihyā’* has traditionally been considered a work of ethics, it is in fact more than that, containing many elements related to *mukāshafa*; this reconsideration transforms our understanding of the *Ihyā’* from a simple spiritual guide into a work of mystical ethics according to which human beings purify their souls by modeling themselves after the divine attributes.

²⁰ *Ihyā’* 1:11 (*kitāb* I, *introduction*, *bā’ith* 2).

²¹ See Avner Gil’adi, “On the Origin of Two Key-Terms in al-Ghazali’s *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*,” *Arabica* 36, 1989, 81-92 for a preliminary breakdown of the source of these terms in Aristotle’s thought. See Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: al-Ghazali’s Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation*. London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 18, 34-7 for a more recent analysis of the impact of these terms on al-Ghazali’s thought more generally. Treiger specifically argues that *mu’āmalā* is “a prerequisite for, and a gateway to” *mukāshafa*. I argue that this relationship is not linear but cyclical and interdependent.

The *Ihyā'* as Manifestation of Mystical *praxis*

As al-Ghazali points out explicitly in its introduction, the structure of the *Ihyā'* illustrates its primary focus as a work on the knowledge of *praxis*.²² The *'ilm al- mu'āmalā* “is divided into the knowledge of the exterior (*'ilm al-ẓāhir*) ... the science of physical actions, and the knowledge of the interior (*'ilm al-bāṭin*) ... the science of the actions of hearts.”²³ The science of the exterior is made up of acts of worship (*Rub' al- 'ibādāt*) and habitual actions (*Rub' al- 'ādāt*), corresponding to the first and second quarters of the *Ihyā'*, respectively. Al-Ghazali places these categories of behavior first because they pertain to the physical performance of human beings; however, he points out that their status as performances of bodily rituals does not exhaust their spiritual meanings. Furthermore, it seems practical that he would treat these topics first because they are issues all Muslims face. Every Muslim needs to know the importance of the five pillars dealt with in the first quarter, and most will need to address what he discusses in the second quarter relating to such habitual actions as diet, marriage, and making a living.

Despite al-Ghazali's classification of the states of the heart as *fard' ayn*, only a small number of believers will progress far enough along the spiritual path to move beyond these bodily and social matters and into the realm of the heart, which, in contrast with the physical body, “is separated from the senses and belongs to the world of dominion,” so that its states consist of something unseen and immaterial.²⁴ Al-Ghazali divides the states of the heart into

²² For a discussion of al-Ghazali's classification of his own works in relation to his classification of the sciences, see Treiger, “al-Ghazali's Classifications of the Sciences and Descriptions of the Highest Theoretical Science.” *Divan: Disiplinlerarasi Calismalar Dergisi*, 2011: 24-8.

²³ *Ihyā'* 1:11 (*kitāb I, introduction, bā'ith 2*).

²⁴ *Ihyā'* 1:11 (*kitāb I, introduction, bā'ith 2*).

attributes that are blameworthy, discussed in the third quarter of the *Iḥyā'*, *The Quarter on Destructive Character Traits (Rub' al-muhlikāt)*, and those that are praiseworthy, discussed in its fourth quarter, *The Quarter on Protective Character Traits (Rub' al-munjīyāt)*.²⁵ The believer's goal should be to purge the heart of its blameworthiness and to cultivate in it that which is praiseworthy; the chief aim of this process in this life is the knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) which produces the love of God (*maḥabba*). In the hereafter, that knowledge is translated into a direct witnessing of the divine (*mushāhada*), which in turn produces a love that becomes pure felicity (*sa'āda*).²⁶

Al-Ghazali portrays the process of acquiring knowledge of God in terms of polishing the mirror of the heart, which occurs in stages. Although al-Ghazali identifies the entire *Iḥyā'* as a work of practical spiritual knowledge (*mu'āmalā*), the second two quarters contain the core of the text's mystical ethics, for they address the internal preparation one goes through in order to receive the unveiling of knowledge of God (*mukāshafa*). The third quarter specifically describes the process by which one moves from cleansing the heart of what is destructive to cultivating in it what is protective. Without this internal process, one may not experience the knowledge of

²⁵ In translating the titles of the third and fourth quarters of the *Iḥyā'*, I have chosen to eschew the traditional use by translators of several terms loaded with Christian connotations. By referring to the quarters as addressing 'character traits', I remain true to the Arabic term used by al-Ghazali (*khulq*, pl. *akhlaq*), and avoid the use of the terms vice and virtue. Secondly, I have translated *munjīyāt* as 'protective' in order to move away from the use of the word salvation, which also leads readers towards a Christian reading of al-Ghazali's text. The character traits discussed in the fourth quarter contribute to a Muslim's escape from the experience of the hellfire in the afterlife, so 'protective' retains the meaning al-Ghazali likely intended, even if it is less literal. Unfortunately, it is more difficult to avoid using the term 'salvation' elsewhere, especially when al-Ghazali uses the Arabic word *najā*, since only the word 'salvation' conveys what he means. This will make it necessary, therefore, to differentiate briefly between the Christian and Islamic understandings of salvation as a theological concept.

²⁶ *Iḥyā'* 4:286-349 (*kitāb XXXVI*). This process is described by al-Ghazali in *kitāb al-maḥabba wa'l-shawq wa'l-uns wa'l-riḍā'*, *The Book of Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment*, which Chapter 3 of the dissertation analyzes in detail.

unveiling, and one will not obtain the knowledge of God requisite for the avoidance of the hellfire in the hereafter. Consequently, al-Ghazali spends a significant amount of time introducing the process of purifying the heart and disciplining the soul.

He begins the Quarter on Destructive Character Traits with three books that give an overall explanation of the purification process, before he moves on to discussions of the specific damaging character traits one should avoid. The *Ihyā'*'s twenty-first book outlines the nature of the heart and its components, as well as their relation to knowledge, its twenty-second describes the process of disciplining the lower soul (*nafs*), and its twenty-third explains how one may break what al-Ghazali identifies as the two fundamental desires of the soul, which are lust and hunger. A brief analysis of the content of these three books will give us a more concrete understanding of the process involved in *mu'āmalā* in the *Ihyā'*, and will therefore provide a richer contextual framework within which to read Book XXXIV in the next chapter.

Polishing the Mirror of the Heart: *'ilm al-mu'āmalā* and the Purification of the Self

Al-Ghazali frequently uses metaphors to explain concepts, and his metaphor of heart-as-mirror serves as an especially powerful image through which to discover what he means by the knowledge of practice, how one acquires it, and how it relates to the knowledge of unveiling. Al-Ghazali defines the heart (*qalb*) as “that which strives toward God in order to obtain proximity to Him ... And by the heart I do not mean the sensible flesh but one of the secrets of God the senses cannot perceive, which is one of His subtleties.”²⁷ This substance is sometimes called spirit (*rūh*)

²⁷ *Ihyā'* 1:59 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 5, *bayān* 1, *wazīfa* 10).

and other times called the tranquil soul (*al-nafs al-mutma‘innah*), but al-Ghazali seems to prefer the term heart (*qalb*), as it is referred to in the religious law (*al-shari‘a*).²⁸ The inner subtle substance represents both the human desire to grow near to God and the human capacity to achieve such proximity; therefore, the heart encompasses both natural inclination (*fiṭra*) and faculty of knowing and loving God.²⁹

Al-Ghazali continues by elaborating on his understanding of the heart in relation to the knowledge of God:

Know that the center of knowledge is the heart ... and [the heart] is in relation to the true nature of intelligibles (*ma‘lūmāt*) like a mirror in relation to the forms of changeable things (*mutalawwināt*). Just as a changeable thing has a form, and the image of that form is reflected in the mirror and represented by it, so also does every intelligible have a true nature, and this true nature has a form that is reflected and made manifest in the mirror of the heart.³⁰

Therefore, al-Ghazali distinguishes between “the heart, the realities of things, and the presence and occurrence of the realities themselves in the heart.”³¹ This means that “‘knower’ (*al-‘ālim*) is a term for the heart in which exists the image of the realities of things, and ‘intelligible’ (*al-ma‘lūm*) is a term for the realities of things, and ‘knowledge’ (*al-‘ilm*) is a term for the occurrence of the image in the mirror.”³² According to this metaphor, knowledge, and especially the knowledge of God, consists of a reflection in the heart of the true nature of things.

²⁸ *Iḥyā’* 1:59 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 5, *bayān* 1, *wazīfa* 10).

²⁹ In fact, in Book XXI of the *Iḥyā’*, *kitāb sharḥ ‘ajā’ib al-qalb*, or *The Book of the Marvels of the Heart*, al-Ghazali details the faculties contained in the heart: appetitive, irascible, and intellective.

³⁰ *Iḥyā’* 3:12 (*kitāb* XXI, *bayān* 6).

³¹ *Iḥyā’* 3:12 (*kitāb* XXI, *bayān* 6).

³² *Iḥyā’* 3:12 (*kitāb* XXI, *bayān* 6). I have strayed here from the language chosen by Walter James Skellie in his translation from *Fons Vitae*. I believe the terms intellect and intelligence misrepresent precisely what al-Ghazali is

To reinforce this understanding of the heart as mirror, as well as to indicate the exalted labor of the saints in “polishing, cleansing, clarifying, and brightening the heart,” al-Ghazali introduces an extended metaphor involving a competition between Chinese and Byzantine artists. In this story, two groups compete to produce the most beautiful work of art possible, side by side on the same wall.³³ The Byzantines use “countless strange colors” and produce a work of unimaginable beauty, but the Chinese busy themselves only with polishing their half of the wall. Thus, in the end the Chinese side of the wall reflects the beauty of the Byzantine’s work, producing an even more dazzling scene, just as the soul of one who polishes his heart ultimately reflects the beauty of God, as opposed to the human knowledge of divine law.

For al-Ghazali, this story illustrates the idea that “the learned (*‘ulamā*) work to acquire knowledge itself, and to draw it into the heart, while the saints among the Sufis work only to polish, cleanse, clarify, and smooth their hearts.”³⁴ The saints, like the Chinese, focus on self-purification through spiritual practice, while the *‘ulamā*, like the Byzantines, seek to acquire knowledge for the adornment of the heart. Both are beautiful pursuits, but the former produces the more beautiful result, since the heart in which divine knowledge is reflected is almost

trying to say here and cast him in a more philosophical mode than he intended. Although al-Ghazali is undoubtedly indebted to earlier philosophers, and especially Ibn Sina, for his religious psychology, he also challenges their positions in important ways. Also, I have been translating *‘ilm* as knowledge throughout the present work, and I wish to remain consistent, preferring to translate as intellect the Arabic word *‘aql*. I have, however, retained his translation of *ma ‘lūmāt* as intelligibles given the limitations of English in producing an alternative that carries the same meaning of formal knowledge.

³³ *Iḥyā’* 3:21 (*kitāb XXI, bayān 9, mithāl 2*).

³⁴ *Iḥyā’* 3:21 (*kitāb XXI, bayān 9, mithāl 2*).

indistinguishable from the knowledge itself, from the true nature of things, while the heart adorned with knowledge is recognizably human, however beautifully embellished.

The truth of divine knowledge, that which is unveiled to the human heart, only exists within the heart as an image of its reality, however, since al-Ghazali's orthodox understanding of *tawhīd* disallows the possibility of this reality (knowledge of God) moving into the human heart. Therefore, the heart-as-mirror metaphor aptly describes from the human perspective how one may acquire knowledge of God: as an image of reality, rather than in actuality. There are two aspects of this acquisition, however, which must be clarified: first, the role of human agency in acquiring knowledge through the polishing of the mirror of the heart comes by means of ascetic *praxis*; second, acquiring such knowledge requires divine agency, in that God casts the light of *theoria* into the heart that has been purified. We will deal with the first of these now in order to discover the specific process by which one polishes the heart; we will address the second issue later in the chapter as part of our discussion on *'ilm al-mukāshafa* and the limitations of discursive knowledge.

So, al-Ghazali presents the heart-as-mirror metaphor in order to describe the process of self-purification that makes up his understanding of *mu'āmalā*. To delve deeper into this process he delineates the heart's "armies" as appetite and anger, which may be either beneficial or detrimental to the heart, and a third named "knowledge, wisdom, and reflection," which in the rightly ordered and obedient heart rules over the former two armies.³⁵ If one fails to order the heart in such a manner, it will become rusted over with the stain of the resulting vices particular

³⁵ *Iḥyā'* 3:5-6 (*kitāb XXI, bayān 2*); *Iḥyā'* 3:52-3 (*kitāb XXII, bayān 2*).

to each army. But if one succeeds, the subsequently produced honorable qualities “increase the clarity, radiance, illumination, and brightness of the mirror of the heart, so that the clear statement of the Real shines in it.”³⁶ The rational faculty (‘*aql* serves to control the other two faculties of anger and appetite, since it pursues knowledge and wisdom rather than the baser desires of the human self.

Al-Ghazali identifies five things that may keep the mirror from reflecting the knowledge of God: natural imperfection, such as that due to youth or mental illness; disobedience and lusts; misdirection of the mirror away from God; the veil of incorrect or overly external belief; and ignorance of the proper direction to turn the mirror. To overcome these difficulties, one must remain obedient to God, and obedience leads to the purification of the heart and ultimately results in “the illumination of faith in it.”³⁷ Al-Ghazali emphasizes that the saints and prophets have not experienced divine inspiration and unveiling through the study of books, but through “renunciation of this world” and turning towards God alone with all of their focus.³⁸ Therefore, the path to unveiling is one of *praxis*, discipline, and the cultivation of one’s nearness to God, but how precisely does one exert influence over an immaterial soul?

The twenty-second book takes up just this topic, and al-Ghazali restates, “goodness of character (*khuluq*) stems from a balanced rational faculty, and a perfection of wisdom, and from the balance of the irascible and appetitive faculties, and their being submitted to the intellect and

³⁶ *Ihyā’* 3:11 (*kitāb XXI, bayān 5*).

³⁷ *Ihyā’* 3:15 (*kitāb XXI, bayān 6, sabab 5*).

³⁸ *Ihyā’* 3:18 (*kitāb XXI, bayān 8*).

the shari‘a.’³⁹ This balance comes through “spiritual exercises (*riyāda*), by means of mimicking, in the beginning, the actions that result from the [good character traits in the heart], so that they will in the end become natural.”⁴⁰ This imitation consequently shapes the heart, polishing it in preparation for illumination, and this act of polishing results in greater ease of right action, since the internalization of good character traits naturally brings about the related behaviors in the believer.⁴¹ Here we begin to glimpse the cyclical nature of the relationship between the heart and the body, and therefore between *theoria* and *praxis*; one begins disciplining the soul by imitating those actions that will eventually flow naturally from the state of the heart one is attempting to cultivate.

In terms of actually eliminating vice and cultivating virtue, al-Ghazali lays out a general rule for determining precisely which behaviors one should choose to undertake when he says, “the general path consists in behaving opposite of those behaviors enticing to the soul.”⁴² The natural inclination of the lower soul (*nafs*) is towards things that feed the appetitive and irascible ‘armies,’ so the role of the intellect is to restrict those actions and determine the right course of action to work against these natural desires. Al-Ghazali applies this principle throughout the *Ihyā’*, so that one notices a relationship between the character traits of the third and fourth quarters; the destructive character traits al-Ghazali warns against in the third quarter have

³⁹ *Ihyā’* 3:56 (*kitāb XXII, bayān 4*).

⁴⁰ *Ihyā’* 3:58 (*kitāb XXII, bayān 4, wajh 2*).

⁴¹ *Ihyā’* 3:58 (*kitāb XXII, bayān 4, wajh 2*). Al-Ghazali here describes the “circular movement” of this process and utilizes a metaphor of a man seeking to become a calligrapher, who practices until it becomes natural. For those who wish to become a “jurist of the soul” (*faqīh al-nafs*), it is the same.

⁴² *Ihyā’* 3:61 (*kitāb XXII, bayān 6*).

protective counterparts in the fourth. For instance, rancor and envy (Book XXV) can be cured by fear and hope (Book XXXIII), pride and conceit (Book XXIX) can be overcome through intention, sincerity, and truth (Book XXXVII), and perhaps most importantly the love of wealth and miserliness (Book XXVII) are counteracted by poverty and renunciation (Book XXXIV). This is of course an overly general and simplified presentation of the complex process of self-purification described by al-Ghazali; it does seem to involve, however, performing actions opposite to the destructive character trait one wishes to eliminate from the soul. The third chapter addresses the implications of this for poverty.

Unveiling the Knowledge of God: *'ilm al-mukāshafa* and Divine Unity

As we have seen, al-Ghazali explicitly identifies the *Ihyā'* as a work concerned primarily with the knowledge of *praxis*; however, he frequently slips into discussions about *'ilm al-mukāshafa* at important places in the text. Al-Ghazali emphasizes the human capacity of achieving this “pure knowledge” of God, one which all believers should pursue as the “noblest of the sciences,” the ultimate goal of which is the “knowledge of God (*ma'rifat Allāh*).”⁴³ This knowledge, however, is not the simple belief (*al-i'tiqād*) of the common person, but rather “a kind of certainty (*yaqīn*), which is the result of a light God casts into the heart of a servant who, through great struggle (*mujāhada*), has purified his interior of harmful things (*khabā'ith*).”⁴⁴ Therefore, a clearer conceptualization of the “light” referred to here as part of God’s unveiling

⁴³ *Ihyā'* 1:58 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 5, *bayān* 1, *wazīfa* 6).

⁴⁴ *Ihyā'* 1:58 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 5, *bayān* 1, *wazīfa* 6).

clarifies further the meaning of Ghazali's mystical ethics. Specifically, it clues us in to how exactly his ethical system, his articulation of *praxis*, is itself mystical in nature; in the end this emerges as the eschatology of the *Iḥyā'* in reference to the love of God (*maḥabba*), as well as the method of arriving at that end through participation in the divine names, such as *al-Ghani*.

According to *The Book of Knowledge* which begins the *Iḥyā'*, "the knowledge of unveiling is the knowledge of the interior (*al-bāṭin*), and it is the end of all sciences."⁴⁵ Furthermore, "it is tantamount to a light that shines in the heart that has been cleansed and purified of its blameworthy qualities."⁴⁶ Through this light of unveiling, "many things are revealed ... until the true knowledge of the essence of God is attained, along with His perfect and eternal Attributes, His Acts, and His wisdom concerning the creation of this world and the Hereafter, and the reason for His ordering the Hereafter over this world."⁴⁷ Therefore, the result of unveiling, of the casting of the light into the human heart, is a direct knowledge of God Himself, including His Attributes and Acts.

There are many other aspects of this knowledge as well, some of which al-Ghazali mentions in the following paragraph:

Through [this light is also attained] the meaning of prophecy and the prophet, and revelation (*waḥī*), and Satan, and the terms angel and devil, and the manner of the devils' enmity towards mankind, and the manner of the angels' appearances to prophets, and how they received divine revelation, and the knowledge of the kingdoms of heaven and earth, and knowledge of the heart, and how the hosts of angels confronted the devils, and the knowledge of the difference between the company of angels and the company of

⁴⁵ *Iḥyā'* 1:26 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 3, *q.* 4, *qism* 1).

⁴⁶ *Iḥyā'* 1:26 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 3, *q.* 4, *qism* 1).

⁴⁷ *Iḥyā'* 1:26 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 3, *q.* 4, *qism* 1). The Arabic reads *taḥṣul al-ma'rifa al-ḥaqīqīyya bi-dāt Allāh*. Note the use of *ma'rifa* here.

devils, and the knowledge of the Hereafter and Paradise and the fire, and of the punishment of the grave, and the bridge [across the fire] (*al-ṣirāṭ*), and the balance [of the Day of Judgment], and the reckoning ... and of encountering God and seeing his generous face (*wajhhu al-karīm*), and of nearness to Him and of dwelling in His vicinity, and of attaining felicity (*sa'āda*) through association with the highest hosts and connection to the angels and prophets, and of the distinctions between the levels of the people of the heavens.⁴⁸

What is revealed to the human being as a part of *mukāshafa*, then, is the knowledge of things unseen. It contains the meaning of those things with which human beings normally struggle, such as prophecy and revelation. It brings to the human heart the knowledge of what will happen in the afterlife and during the end times. It provides one with the knowledge of how to encounter God, to see God's face, to dwell near Him, and to attain the highest form of felicity, felicity in the afterlife (*sa'āda*). This light could be characterized as a form of mystical intuition that allows human beings to know the world from God's perspective, as things truly are, rather than from the flawed perspective of the human senses and perception.

Therefore, the science of unveiling comes to be defined as “that by which the cover is lifted so that the plain truth concerning these things becomes clear, as visible as that which is seen with the eyes, which has no doubt in it.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, the knowledge contained in this unveiling is natural to human beings, but the “mirrors of their hearts” have become rusted over with the filth of this world. The science of the way to the hereafter in this context becomes the

⁴⁸ *Iḥyā'* 1:26 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 3, *q.* 4, *qism* 1). Alexander Treiger has pointed out the constituent parts of this long exposition on unveiling as consisting of knowledge relating to God Himself, cosmology, prophetology, angelology, religious psychology, and eschatology. See Treiger, “Highest Theoretical Science,” pp. 6-9. For a longer quotation and a general treatment of this passage in the *Iḥyā'*, see Timothy J. Gianotti, “Beyond Both Law and Theology: an Introduction to al-Ghazali's ‘Science is the way of the afterlife’ in Reviving Religious Knowledge (*Iḥyā'* ‘Ulūm al-Dīn).” *Muslim World* 101.4 (Oct 2011): pp. 602-5.

⁴⁹ *Iḥyā'* 1:26 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 3, *q.* 4, *qism* 1).

“knowledge of how to remove from this mirror that filth which prohibits the knowing of God, His Attributes, and His Acts.”⁵⁰ Within this system, *‘ilm al-mu‘āmalā* constitutes the process of removing that filth, and *‘ilm al-mukāshafa* consists in the brightened reflection of knowledge from God in the mirror of the heart. This is why it may be described as revelatory knowledge, to which the human being awakes, rather than acquired knowledge, because this knowledge is perpetually cast into the heart, needing only for that heart to be polished to become known to the individual.

Tawhīd, the Knowledge of God, and the Extinction of the Self (fanā’)

If al-Ghazali conceives of unveiling as the human awakening to the knowledge of how things truly are, as the recognition of the light God casts into the heart, then he must explain how this process works with regard to the relationship between human and divine. Perhaps the most significant passage of the *Iḥyā’* dealing with this topic occurs in the *kitāb al-tawhīd wa’l-tawakkul*, immediately following the *kitāb al-faqr wa’l-zuhd*. Particularly in the first part of this thirty-fifth book of the *Iḥyā’*, al-Ghazali discusses the meaning and importance of *tawhīd*, which does not in itself make up an actual stage in the spiritual itinerary; rather, al-Ghazali explains it as the defining theological principle according to which one perceives God, creation, one’s soul, and the relationship between all of these. Therefore, al-Ghazali outlines a four-part classification

⁵⁰ *Iḥyā’* 1:26 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 3, *q.* 4, *qism* 1).

of *tawḥīd*, according to which he develops a hierarchical understanding of the varying degrees to which Muslims achieve proximity to God.⁵¹

The first two stages make up what al-Ghazali calls the “shell” of faith; the first involves speaking the *shahāda* without truly believing it, while in the second one believes the statement in one’s heart.⁵² The first level is that of a hypocrite and protects a Muslim from harm in this life only. The second level is the level of faith achieved by common people, who may turn to theology (*kalām*) in order to safeguard their hearts from error and innovation, and who achieve salvation from hellfire due to the sincerity of their belief, however uninformed or external in degree. Neither of these two groups, however, illustrates the true meaning of *tawḥīd* because both remain at the external level of understanding divine unity. The people who fit into these categories do not venture into the realm of the heart, so they do not conceive of any depth beyond the assertion of doctrinal and theological truth.

The third level of *tawḥīd*, the ‘pith’ of faith, is that “by which one witnesses [*tawḥīd*] through the path of unveiling, by means of the light of truth; it is the station of those who are near [to God], and it occurs when one sees many things, but sees them in their multiplicity as issuing from the Almighty One (*al-wāḥid al-qahhār*).”⁵³ The person who reaches this stage “sees in reality only one agent, since reality has been unveiled to him as it is in itself.”⁵⁴ Al-Ghazali

⁵¹ On al-Ghazali’s varying levels of *tawḥīd*, and their relationship to his larger theological project, see Alexander Treiger, “Monism and Monotheism in al-Ghazali’s *Mishkāt al-Anwār*.” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 9 no 1 (2007): 1-27 and Ken Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 92-98.

⁵² *Iḥyā’* 4:241 (*kitāb XXXV, shaṭr 1, bayān 2, q. 1*).

⁵³ *Iḥyā’* 4:241 (*kitāb XXXV, shaṭr 1, bayān 2, q. 1*).

⁵⁴ *Iḥyā’* 4:241 (*kitāb XXXV, shaṭr 1, bayān 2, q. 1*).

identifies the third level as the one upon which God-reliance (*tawakkul*) stands (thus the placement of *tawakkul* in the thirty-fifth book), since it represents the believer's utter certainty in God as the source of all things. Such reliance upon God manifests itself at the highest level when the believer is "between the hands of God Almighty, whether in motion or in repose, like the corpse in the hands of the washer."⁵⁵ Even one with such faith in *tawhīd*, however, "is not free from the blemish of considering others [than God], or the heeding of the many, in relation to one who sees nothing but the one true reality."⁵⁶

The final person mentioned belongs to the fourth level of *tawhīd*, the substance of the pith, which "is that of one who sees only one in existence, which is the witnessing of the righteous ones (*al-ṣiddīqūn*) and those whom the Sufis call 'annihilated' in *tawhīd*, because he sees only one, not even himself ... he is free from himself in his *tawhīd*, meaning that he is free from consideration of his self and of creation."⁵⁷ Unlike the third level, the fourth consists in leaving behind one's concern for this world, even for one's own soul, as part of an uninterrupted focus on God alone.

Al-Ghazali also emphasizes this idea in texts other than the *Ihyā'*; in both the *mishkāt al-anwār* and *al-maqṣad al-'asnā fī sharḥ 'asmā' Allāhu al-ḥusnā*, al-Ghazali contrasts the different experiences of nearness to God described in the *Ihyā'* as the two highest levels of *tawhīd*. In *al-*

⁵⁵ *Ihyā'* 4:255 (*kitāb XXXV, shaṭr 2, bayān 1, darajā 3*).

⁵⁶ *Ihyā'* 4:241 (*kitāb XXXV, shaṭr 1, bayān 2, q. 1*).

⁵⁷ *Ihyā'* 4:241 (*kitāb XXXV, shaṭr 1, bayān 2, q. 1*).

maqṣad al-Ghazali describes in a lengthy passage the difference between ‘being on the way’ (*sālik*) and ‘arriving’ (*wāṣil*):

You should know that ‘being on the way’ involves refining one’s character, actions, and knowledge, and that means being occupied with one’s formation, externally and interiorly. In all this a man is occupied with himself rather than his Lord – may He be praised and exalted – even though he be taken up with the formation of his inner self, in preparation for ‘arriving.’ The one who arrives is one to whom the clarity of truth is revealed, and who has become immersed in it. If his knowledge be considered, he knows none but God; and if his determination be considered, he has ambition for none but God. So all of him is taken up with the whole of Him, in witnessing and in concern, and so not occupied with himself – either externally in actions of worship or interiorly in refining his character. All of that is geared to purity, and it is the beginning, while the end [170] lies in being stripped of oneself totally, and to be devoted to Him – so that it is as though he were He, and that is ‘arriving’ [or ‘attainment’].⁵⁸

Here we find a description of these two stages similar to that found in the *Ihyā’*; the *sālik* is on the way to nearness with God, constantly approaching God through his devotion to purification of the self, but the *wāṣil* corresponds to the fourth level of *tawḥīd*, in which the human being is occupied with nothing but God, as if in repose at a transcendent level.

Al-Ghazali spends even more time on this topic in the *mishkāt al-anwār*, in which he deals extensively with the experiences of God claimed by the Sufis of his day and earlier. There, he again alludes to a distinction between these two highest levels of knowing God: “The ones who know, after having ascended to the heaven of reality, agree that they see nothing in existence save the One, the Real. Some of them possess this state as a cognitive knowledge. Others, however, attain this through a state of tasting. Plurality is totally banished from them,

⁵⁸ Al-Ghazali, *al-maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ ma ‘ānī asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā*, ed. Fadlou A Shehadi (Beirut: Dar al-Machreq, 1971): 169-70; Al-Ghazali, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, trans. David Burrell (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992): 156-7.

and they become immersed in sheer singularity.”⁵⁹ He goes on, “When this state gets the upper hand, it is called “extinction” in relation to the one who possesses it. Or, rather, it is called ‘extinction from extinction,’ since the possessor of the state is extinct from himself and from his own extinction.”⁶⁰ Those who achieve the cognitive recognition of the oneness of God correspond to the third level of *tawḥīd* described in the *Iḥyā’*, while the fourth level is echoed in the description of those who experience this divine unity through ‘tasting’.

This extensive treatment serves to demonstrate that the goal of *‘ilm al-mu‘āmalā* is the attainment to the nearness to God al-Ghazali describes as extinction or annihilation (both: *fanā’*) through the reflection of *‘ilm al-mukāshafa* in the mirror of the heart. Al-Ghazali makes clear, however, that this does not amount to what others have called ‘unification’ (*ittiḥād*), since this is ontologically impossible. He states in the *mishkāṭ*, “When this intoxication subsides, the ruling authority of the rational faculty – which is God’s balance in His earth – is given back to them. They come to know that what they experienced was not the reality of unification but that it was similar to unification.”⁶¹ The human being cannot become fully identified with God, as this would violate the nature of *tawḥīd*; however, one may achieve this unity to the extent one is able through the embodiment of the divine attributes, as will be discussed below.

⁵⁹ Translation adapted from David Buchman, *The Niche of Lights: A parallel English-Arabic text* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1998): 17.

⁶⁰ *Niche of Lights*, 18.

⁶¹ *Niche of Lights*, 18.

Indeed, we should interpret the difference between the third and fourth levels of *tawḥīd* as an epistemological one, rather than an ontological one.⁶² The third level of *tawḥīd* describes the human experience of creation from the perspective of a created being, albeit one fully aware of God's unity and singularity. In the fourth level, however, the human perspective shifts to a vision of creation from the divine perspective, from which heights nothing can truly be said to exist save God. In other words, the difference should not be construed as ontological, since the human being cannot, according to al-Ghazali, achieve an ontological unity with God; rather, the difference is epistemological, since the human can be said to know things as they truly are, which coincides with the manner in which God knows creation.

Therefore, the knowledge contained within the unveiling received by the mirror of the heart consists of the knowledge of God, which means tasting the experience of the contingency of existence and understanding as deeply as humanly possible that God is the only Reality. This is why, towards the end of the passage of the *mishkāṭ* in which he discusses this idea al-Ghazali states, "In relation to the one immersed in it, this state is called 'unification,' according to the language of metaphor, or is called 'declaring God's unity,' (*tawḥīd*) according to the language of reality."⁶³ Al-Ghazali is willing to admit that from the perspective of the human being experiencing it, the fourth level of *tawḥīd* seems like unification; however, as he points out, it is merely an expression of divine unity in human beings according to which "the ruling authority of

⁶² Alexander Treiger makes this argument in "Monism and Monotheism," pp. 14-17.

⁶³ *Niche of Lights*, 18, parenthetical is mine.

their rational faculty is overthrown.”⁶⁴ The “light” cast into the human heart is just this, a special cognitive state achieved by a select few human beings, and according to which those people become capable of understanding the true nature of reality.

The importance of *mu‘āmala* and *mukāshafa* in al-Ghazali’s thought allows us to consider the interdependence of *theoria* and *praxis*. On the one hand, the perspective from which one *knows* has various levels represented by al-Ghazali’s discussion of *tawhīd*; especially in the two highest levels, this is an epistemological distinction based upon one’s identification with the divine vision of reality. On the other hand, al-Ghazali’s devotion to *praxis* throughout much of the *Ihyā’* illustrates that the process of achieving such identification is not purely epistemological, since self-purification is necessary to obtain unveiling. It is in fact constituted by the placing of knowledge into action through the proper arrangement of the ‘armies’ of one’s heart and the development of habitual behavior in line with the intellect and the shari‘a. Therefore, we refer to al-Ghazali’s mystical ethics: it is an ethics in that it prescribes (and proscribes) certain behaviors and attitudes as proper to the virtuous human; it is mystical in its insistence that human beings can achieve proximity to God emotionally, epistemologically, and spiritually. Al-Ghazali contends that the actions of the human body have a significant impact on the state of the soul, a connection we examine more deeply throughout this dissertation.

Knowledge, Love, Deliverance, Witnessing, and Felicity

⁶⁴ *Niche of Lights*, 18.

The preceding discussion sheds light on the importance, meaning, and content of *mu'āmalā* and *mukāshafa*, the overarching structural concepts al-Ghazali utilizes throughout the *Ihyā'*. The process of polishing the heart (*qalb*), inherent to *mu'āmalā*, through wiping away the filth of this world (*al-dunyā*) and reorienting oneself towards God and the hereafter (*al-ākhirā*), produces within the heart a reflection of that which God casts there via the persistent unveiling of *mukāshafa*. As the heart-mirror approaches perfect clarity, it comes more and more to resemble the divine unity (*tawḥīd*), which contains no distinctions, and which al-Ghazali characterizes as having multiple levels, the highest of which consists in a state that feels to the human being experiencing it like unification with God. This epistemological vantage point allows the one within it to know the true reality of things, namely that God alone exists in any real way.

Many other rewards await the one who successfully rids his heart of the 'destructive character traits' of quarter three and cultivates the 'protective character traits' of quarter four. The ethical knowledge of *mu'āmalā*, which aids in this process of self-purification, ultimately produces the knowledge of God, His Acts and His Attributes, which forms the primary content of *mukāshafa*, as we have seen. This divine knowledge then produces the love of God (*maḥabba*) in the heart, which is the "utmost goal among the stages and the supreme summit of the steps."⁶⁵ The extent to which one attains knowledge of God in this world corresponds to the extent to which one loves God, as deeper knowledge of a pleasing thing necessarily has love as a

⁶⁵ *Ihyā'* 4: 286 (*kitāb XXXVI, introduction*); Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 2. Al-Ghazali discusses *maḥabba* (love), along with its related states, in *Ihyā'* 4: 286-349 (XXXVI), *kitāb al-maḥabba wa al-shawq wa al-uns wa al-riḍā'*. I have also consulted and at many times relied upon the translation by Eric Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment: Book XXXVI of the Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn)* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2012).

byproduct.⁶⁶ This combination of knowledge and love of God opens up the possibility for the seeker of experiencing ‘tastes’ of God in this life, so that certain spiritual adepts briefly transcend this world and glimpse God by “looking on the beauty of lordliness.”⁶⁷

These mere glimpses, however, pale in comparison to what one experiences in the hereafter, the direct witnessing (*mushāhada*) of God’s face: “Just as you know God in this world with a knowledge both real and entire, without either fantasy or mental representation or surmise of form and shape, so too will you behold Him in the world to come.”⁶⁸ This vision (*ru’ya*) of God is not one of the imagination or memory or one constructed from what one knows of God but a *direct* vision of God’s face, a full revelation of the beauty of God. This unveiled witness corresponds to an influx of knowledge of God that overwhelms, producing in the soul the state of felicity (*sa’āda*), a more concentrated version of the *maḥabba* cultivated in this world. Thus al-Ghazali’s mystical ethics ends in a perpetual felicity; human beings seek God’s face, the pursuit of which produces knowledge and love in this life, and the perfection of these two, direct witnessing and felicity, in the afterlife.

Most people will not pass directly to the state of felicity in the hereafter, however, as very few adequately eliminate the destructive and cultivate the protective character traits during their lives in this world. There are several phases of life in the hereafter, the pinnacle of which is the felicity al-Ghazali describes in Book XXXVI of the *Iḥyā’*. The first of these is what he refers to

⁶⁶ *Iḥyā’* 4: 305 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 5*); Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 61.

⁶⁷ *Iḥyā’* 4: 301 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 4*); Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 51.

⁶⁸ *Iḥyā’* 4: 304 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 5*); Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 59.

as *najā*, which I have translated as deliverance, rather than salvation, as it is usually rendered.⁶⁹ Simply put, for al-Ghazali deliverance (*najā*) refers only to the escape from the punishment of the hellfire in the afterlife. This is the most basic achievement of a Muslim believer, and it can be attained through the act of simple, unexplored belief in the articles of the Islamic faith as they are summarized in the *shahāda*. Al-Ghazali clearly allows for the fact that the vast majority of Muslims will accept the teachings of their religious leaders, excusing the masses from the responsibility of pursuing more advanced spiritual development.⁷⁰ Beyond salvation are the reward (*thawāb*) of Paradise in the hereafter and the felicity described as the result of perfect witnessing of God's face.

Due to the comparative nature of the current dissertation, we must briefly differentiate between what I have called deliverance in al-Ghazali's thought and the Christian notion of salvation. In Christian thought, salvation carries with it a much more profound significance than does *najā* for al-Ghazali. While theologians have characterized it in different ways, Christian salvation, as a gift from God, is in general the purification of the soul for the sake of fostering participation in the divine life in some way. Whether this has been depicted in terms of purging oneself of vice, conforming to Christ's example, or atoning for one's sin, all Christian forms have included salvation in their theologies as the reason for Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the Cross. For al-Ghazali, deliverance does not carry such weight, and is not related to Jesus in

⁶⁹ The traditional translation of *najā* has been salvation, but in an effort to distinguish this term from the Christian notion of salvation, especially in a dissertation comparing Christian and Muslim theological positions, I have decided to use the term deliverance. See page 57 of this dissertation for further explanation.

⁷⁰ *Iḥyā'* 4:241 (*kitāb XXXV, shaṭr 1, bayān 2, q. 1*).

particular; *najā* is instead the reward of the average faithful Muslim, who must simply believe in the articles of faith and attempt to live in accordance with God's law to the best of his ability.

The highest pursuit for al-Ghazali, then, is not mere deliverance from the hellfire, nor is it the rewards (*thawab*) provided to believers in Paradise; rather, it is felicity, which emerges only from the witnessing of God and corresponds directly to the knowledge and love of God cultivated in this life. This is ultimately what I intend when I refer to al-Ghazali's 'mystical ethics' as it is articulated in the *Ihyā'*; he presents an ethical system according to which human beings draw near to God through practices associated with earlier mystical practitioners. These connections are explored in more detail in chapter four of this dissertation, but it is important to note here the significance of the divine attributes, as well as the confluence of speculative and ethical thought, to al-Ghazali's mystical ethics.

While I refer to his ethics as mystical, they could not necessarily be classified confidently as Sufi. Garden has already made a similar observation when he notes that for al-Ghazali, "The rigors of the Sufi regime of asceticism are such that they are more likely to result in the distortion of the soul than its correct acquisition of the intelligible forms. Furthermore, those Sufis who do attain divine illumination will lack a theoretical framework for understanding their experience and are likely to be deluded by it, as al-Hallaj and al-Bistami were, mistaking the reflection of the divine realms in the mirrors of their hearts for union with God."⁷¹ Thus, al-Ghazali offers the *Ihyā'* as practical spiritual advice for those who do not have the capacity to attain a purely theoretical understanding of God but who wish to move beyond the simple faith of those who

⁷¹ Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 75.

blindly accept the teachings of the traditional religious authorities. Later chapters will demonstrate how poverty serves as a particularly rich ground to examine this possibility, since it lies at the heart of the ascetic practice Garden mentions; the analysis of poverty reveals al-Ghazali's synthesis of philosophical and mystical elements in his presentation of the protective character traits.

In the next chapter, poverty will also be used as a kind of case study to demonstrate the other distinguishing feature of al-Ghazali's mystical ethics, his incorporation of the divine attributes into his understanding of how human beings draw near to God. The present chapter has already discussed in general terms the concepts of *mu'āmala* and *mukāshafa*, and their significance to interpreting the *Ihyā'* correctly. What will be seen in chapter two and beyond is that al-Ghazali tends to characterize the content of *mukāshafa*, of that revealed divine knowledge, in terms of the ninety-nine attributes or names of God. What emerges is a mystical ethics that involves the human imitation of these attributes, which ultimately shine forth in the mirror of the heart, producing an effect by which human beings essentially embody the divine attributes through their own actions in this life. Thus, al-Ghazali avoids the trap of identification into which he believed the Sufis to have fallen, but he retains the mystical quality of becoming more like God in a tangible way.

Conclusion

All this has been explained with a view to presenting the general thrust of al-Ghazali's mystical ethics, which some would argue constitutes the primary emphasis of the *Ihyā'*. Among the protective character traits cultivated in the process of polishing the mirror of the heart,

poverty offers a uniquely fertile ground for exploring this process of self-purification in the context of that text. Al-Ghazali's treatment of poverty clearly demonstrates his mystical ethics at work, as one recognizes the interplay between mystical *praxis* and unveiling in the human endeavor to take on the divine attribute of Needlessness (*al-Ghanī*) by accepting and eventually pursuing poverty. The polishing of the mirror of the heart is not merely to reflect *al-Ghanī*, however, as one does not pursue a single virtue at a time. The polishing takes place in reference to all virtues, and as the reflection becomes clearer, the servant resembles the divine more and more.

This holistic process is the subject of chapter three, but poverty is unique, since it serves one particular role in it. We argue in the next chapter that poverty is instrumental to the final turning away from this world and towards God. Although poverty is not the entrance to the path of spiritual purification, it does constitute one of the most important stages, as the temptation of material wealth is among the strongest in this world; therefore, poverty is both instrumental and essential to one's ability to break this world's hold on the heart. In order to develop these ideas further, chapter two offers a close reading of Book XXXIV of al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*.

Chapter Two: A Close Reading of *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation*

Al-Ghazali's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* contains four quarters, each split into ten books.¹ The quarters concern acts of worship (*rub' al-'ibādāt*), habits of daily life (*rub' al-'ādāt*), destructive character traits (*rub' al-muhlikāt*), and protective character traits (*rub' al-munjīyāt*).² Each of the fourth quarter's books deals with one or two "praiseworthy character traits (*khulq*, pl. *akhlaq*) and desirable qualities (*hasla*), from among the qualities of the near ones (*al-muqarrabūn*) and the faithful ones (*al-ṣiddīqūn*), by means of which the servant draws near to the Lord of the Worlds."³ The fourth book within the fourth quarter, the thirty-fourth book overall, is titled *kitāb al-faqr wa'l-zuhd*, or *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation*.⁴ In this book al-Ghazali presents the majority of his ideas about poverty, although it receives attention frequently throughout the entire *Ihyā'*, and he deals with it extensively in three other books, namely the fifth (*kitāb asrār al-zakāh*), thirteenth (*kitāb adab al-kasb wa'l-ma'āsh*), and twenty-seventh (*kitāb ḍamm al-bukhl wa ḍamm ḥubb al-māl*). Therefore, this chapter focuses on Book XXXIV, while chapter three consists of a contextualization of that book through an analysis of poverty as al-Ghazali deals with it throughout the first three quarters of the *Ihyā'*.

¹ I have explained my system for referencing the *Ihyā'* in Chapter 1, note 7.

² On my translation of the titles of these texts, see Chapter 1, note 24. In making the decision to use the term "character traits" rather than "virtues," I have departed from some notable authors, namely Muhammad Abul Quasem, *The Ethics of al-Ghazali: a Composite Ethics in Islam*. (Published by the author in Malaysia, 1975) and Mohamed Sherif, *Al-Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: SUNY, 1975). Sherif argues correctly that al-Ghazali falls within the philosophical tradition of virtue ethics, and that *faqr* is among what Sherif calls the "mystical virtues," but "character traits" prevents any anachronistic associations the readers might make with the longer history and tradition virtue ethics has, especially within Christianity.

³ *Ihyā'* 1:10 (*kitāb I, introduction, index*).

⁴ Many have chosen to translate *zuhd* as "asceticism," but I have chosen to follow Michael Cooperson in translating it as "renunciation." See Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of Al-Ma'mun* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 154-87.

In terms of secondary literature, many scholars have produced studies on the importance of renunciation and asceticism to the development of early and medieval Islamic spirituality. Very few have identified the significance of poverty in these early ascetic practices and their accompanying spiritual and theological systems; however, al-Ghazali treats poverty along with renunciation in his *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, indicating that it too deserves serious study as a substantial stage in the human progress towards an encounter with the divine.⁵ An analysis of Book XXXIV of al-Ghazali's *Iḥyāʾ*, therefore, rectifies the neglect of the study of poverty by providing one important example of the thinking about poverty in the eleventh and twelfth centuries of Islam, elucidating not only al-Ghazali's thought about the practice of material poverty but also the manner in which he considers it connected with and instrumental to renunciation. Furthermore, poverty serves as a uniquely rich conceptual vehicle through which to recognize al-Ghazali's broader system of mystical ethics, by which the divine attributes become the bases for human self-purification.

This chapter, then, marks the beginnings of an argument that seeks to locate poverty in its rightful place as a character trait contributing to a person's deliverance from hellfire and eventual meeting of God in the hereafter. It shows that one's acceptance of poverty represents one's attitude towards not only wealth but also this world as a whole, making it fundamental to the

⁵ There are a few notable exceptions to this dearth of attention to poverty. For a discussion of poverty as a sociological force, see Adam Sabra's *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250-1517*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, which contains a short chapter summarizing the understanding of poverty in early Sufi thought. For a cursory discussion of the hadith traditions concerning poverty and wealth, see the article by Leah Kinberg, "Compromise of commerce: a study of early traditions concerning poverty and wealth." *Der Islam* 66 (1989): 193-212. Neither of these studies deals with Al-Ghazali's time and place, nor do they perform in-depth analyses of poverty as a theological or spiritual concept.

progression towards renunciation and God-reliance (*tawakkul*).⁶ Furthermore, the analysis performed in this chapter demonstrates poverty's critical role in this process, since it is portrayed as the entry point into renunciation of this world, countering the capacity of wealth to engender further sinning and world-attachment. Finally, we consider not only material poverty but also the poverty of existence that characterizes the entirety of the created order, as well as the function material poverty plays in helping human beings transcend this poverty of existence, recognize God as the only one who is truly rich (*al-Ghanī*), and embody that divine attribute by becoming fully detached from material wealth and this world.

Book XXXIV Key Concepts and Terminology

Before delving into al-Ghazali's presentation of poverty, let us first draw attention to several key concepts necessary for a complete understanding of this book. Al-Ghazali begins with an introductory passage in which he presents the principles on which he builds the rest of his treatment of poverty and renunciation, so a brief analysis of this passage brings these key terms to light. In this passage, al-Ghazali states, “[God] created the human being ... and He adorned his form with the best formation and perfect proportion, and He protected his heart (*qalb*) by the light of guidance from the trouble of error.”⁷ Then the human being was anointed

⁶ *Tawakkul* is one of the subjects of the thirty-fifth book of the *Ihyā'*, immediately following the Book of Poverty and Renunciation, demonstrating a correlation between poverty, renunciation, and God-reliance. Al-Ghazali pairs his discussion of this subject with that of *tawhīd*, or divine unity, which has four levels, the third of which corresponds with *tawakkul* itself so that one becomes “as a corpse in God's hands.” See *Ihyā'* Vol. 4, pp. 238-285 (*kitāb XXXV*). We explain the relationship between *tawakkul* and *faqr* briefly at the end of the current chapter and in more depth in chapter three.

⁷ *Ihyā'* 4:185 (XXXIV, *introduction*).

“with the light of consideration so that he saw by its luminosity the presence of Majesty,” including “splendor and beauty and perfection.”⁸ In this pristine state, human beings witness God perfectly, their hearts guarded from the possibility of being pulled away from God and toward something else.

This perfect witnessing of God is interrupted, however, because the “visible of this world (*al-dunyā*) presents itself to him in the form of a beautiful woman,” who tempts men and keeps them from reuniting with God.⁹ Ultimately, the “knowledgeable ones” (*‘arifūn*) discover her true nature, seeing through her attempts to conceal it, and “they [renounce] (*zahada*) the detested one and they set her aside and they [leave] behind vainglory and the increase of material possessions (*amwāl*).”¹⁰ In doing so, they free themselves to enter again into the presence of God, “expecting from it a loving reunion (*wiṣāl*) that does not know separation, and the eternal vision (*mushāhada*) that knows neither dissolution nor extinction.”¹¹ Therefore, “this world is the enemy of God ... and the love of it is the beginning of sin and misdeeds, and the hatred of it is the mother of pious deeds, and the foundation of worship.”¹²

By means of this allegory al-Ghazali incorporates some of the major concepts of his general thought (discussed in chapter one) into his consideration of poverty and renunciation.

Thus, we find the human heart (*qalb*) is the locus of the human ability to know (*‘arifa*) God, and

⁸ *Iḥyā’* 4:185 (XXXIV, introduction).

⁹ The dichotomy of *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirā* is a common theme in Al-Ghazali’s work as well as that of other early and medieval Muslim writers. The significance of his teleological focus will be explored further in the next chapter.

¹⁰ *Iḥyā’* 4:185 (XXXIV, introduction).

¹¹ *Iḥyā’* 4:185 (XXXIV, introduction).

¹² *Iḥyā’* 4:185 (XXXIV, introduction).

that it has become corrupted through the temptations of this world (*al-dunyā*). Knowledge of the states of the heart, as well as the method of drawing near to God, contributes most immediately to the freeing of the heart from the grasp of this world, so we see those who have gained such knowledge give up their material possessions, accepting poverty, and renounce this world entirely, to enter into the path of obedience to God and begin constructing the “foundation for worship.”¹³ This path ultimately leads to the eternal witnessing (*mushāhada*) of God in the hereafter (*al-ākhirā*). Each of these concepts essential to al-Ghazali’s thought receives attention in *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation*, demonstrating the connections al-Ghazali makes between them and *faqr* and *zuhd*.

The Heart: *qalb*

The heart is arguably the most fundamental concept in al-Ghazali’s theological anthropology, and its place in his thought will be addressed in more detail in chapter three. In *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation*, as seen from the passage above, the heart receives God’s protection and guidance; the heart is that which is oriented towards or away from God within the human being. For instance, it is the heart that can be “restricted by a love of wealth” or “variable between slavery and freedom.”¹⁴ The heart cannot be empty, so it is either caught up with God or distracted from God by the world.¹⁵ Al-Ghazali mentions several hadith concerning the heart; in

¹³ *Iḥyā’* 4:185 (XXXIV, *introduction*).

¹⁴ *Iḥyā’* 4:187 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

¹⁵ *Iḥyā’* 4:198 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

one, the Prophet Muhammad exhorts his people to “give God the satisfaction of [their] hearts” in order to claim their reward from God.¹⁶ In another, “God fills the servant’s heart with the light of faith.”¹⁷ The heart, then, is portrayed as the center of the human being, as that which reflects the state of the person, whether he progresses down the path leading to destruction or the one leading to deliverance from the hellfire. In this particular book, as well, the heart features prominently as the human faculty that determines a person’s status as poor or renunciant.

Furthermore, al-Ghazali stands in a long line of Islamic thinkers who utilize the analogy of the mirror to describe the heart as a core element of the human person. According to this analogy, “ascetic *praxis* is defined as ‘polishing’ the mirror of the heart and removing the tarnish of the vices that mar and erode its surface.”¹⁸ This is al-Ghazali’s general purpose in writing the *Ihyā’*, the instruction of his readers in the practice of polishing the heart in order to purify their souls in preparation for knowing, witnessing, and loving God in the hereafter. The heart itself may be understood as both the human faculty allowing one to achieve both knowledge and love and as the place within the human being where they actually occur.

This World and the Hereafter: *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirā*

Perhaps the defining element of his mystical ethics, the dichotomy al-Ghazali establishes between this world (*al-dunyā*) and the hereafter (*al-ākhirā*) forms the context within which the

¹⁶ *Ihyā’* 4: 201 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 5).

¹⁷ *Ihyā’* 4:215 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 2).

¹⁸ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, 18.

human progression towards God may be understood. This dichotomy is not unique to al-Ghazali's thought, but he emphasizes it throughout the *Iḥyā'* and elsewhere to the extent that one cannot understand his thought without some knowledge of the relationship between these two worlds.¹⁹ This is especially true regarding his thought about poverty and renunciation, both of which constitute states of the heart as it stands in relation to this world and the next. I argue in chapter four that al-Ghazali relies on earlier Sufi thought in his eschatological focus on the hereafter; the Sufi understanding of the "way" (*tarīqa*) toward God forms the guiding principle of al-Ghazali's mystical ethics, coloring the ways we may read the *Iḥyā'* and adding to the spiritual significance of material poverty argued for in this chapter.

As the introductory passage above indicates, al-Ghazali typically portrays *al-dunyā* as a negative influence on the human being. It traps people, forcing them to struggle to deal with its concerns, ranging from money to food to sex to pride and many others, while they become neglectful of their indebtedness and obedience to God. Only the acquisition of knowledge frees one from the binding restraints of this world, allowing one to turn away from it and toward the hereafter, which stands in opposition to it after death. The hereafter is the location of hell and paradise, its beauty and reward is the counterpoint to the struggle and tribulation of this world. One focused on the hereafter is properly oriented, for it inspires correct behavior and mystical *praxis*. The one focused on this world will surely come to destruction, for it is fleeting and distracts one from God. The most spiritually adept people will look even beyond the hereafter

¹⁹ Al-Ghazali's references to *dunyā* and *ākhirā* are too numerous to list, but in Book XXXIV in particular, see *Iḥyā'* 4:198 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

and see God alone, but this is reserved for saints and prophets, of whom there are few.²⁰ As will be shown in this chapter, poverty serves as the beginning of the process of turning away from this world and towards the next.

Knowledge and Proximity to God: *'ilm* and *ma'rifa*

An examination of the relationship between these two terms in al-Ghazali's thought could form the subject of an entire monograph; however, even an incomplete understanding of the ways in which al-Ghazali uses them is essential to reading the *Iḥyā'* properly, including Book XXXIV. Historically, both *'ilm* and *ma'rifa* mean 'knowledge' in the Islamic tradition; the former occurs much more frequently in the Qur'an than the latter, and therefore it achieved greater importance earlier in Islamic intellectual history.²¹ By al-Ghazali's time, the term *'ilm* had gone from being "used to indicate the knowledge of God, and His signs, and His actions among his servants and creatures,"²² to being used in reference to very specific intellectual disciplines or 'sciences,' a development he laments repeatedly throughout the *Iḥyā'*, and to which the title itself refers.²³ In writing the *Iḥyā'*, al-Ghazali wishes to reclaim this original meaning of *'ilm* as a comprehensive form of divine knowledge, so he utilizes *'ilm* both to

²⁰ *Iḥyā'* 4:198 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

²¹ For treatments of this early history of the terms, see Renard, J., *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 11-19; Rosenthal, F. *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 1-40.

²² *Iḥyā'* 1:39 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 3, *bayān* 2, *lafẓ* 2).

²³ *Iḥyā'* 1:2-3 (*muqaddima*).

indicate this original meaning and (critically) to indicate the various religious ‘sciences’ of his own time, including *tafsīr*, the study of *hadith*, and *fiqh*.²⁴

In contrast with his use of *‘ilm*, al-Ghazali refers to *ma‘rifa* as a direct and experiential form of human knowing, thus remaining in line with the Sufi tradition’s distinction between these two terms. Specifically, this term designates an intimate knowledge of God by those human beings who have been able to progress far enough along their spiritual journeys to achieve glimpses of the divine. Al-Ghazali distinguishes between *‘ilm* and *ma‘rifa* by “using the term *ma‘rifa* rather than *‘ilm* to designate the type of knowledge that leads to felicity (*sa‘āda*) in the afterlife,” signifying the greater importance of *ma‘rifa* in his teleology, and therefore also in his mystical ethics more generally.²⁵ For al-Ghazali, then, on the one hand *ma‘rifa* is the kind of knowledge pursued by human beings through disciplining their souls and developing praiseworthy character traits. On the other hand, *‘ilm* is divine knowledge, that which is the result of drawing near to God and which one accesses through the development of *ma‘rifa*.

Moreover, for al-Ghazali *ma‘rifa* holds an importance in the progression of every human being’s pursuit of God, in that the attainment in this life of the intimate knowledge of God indicated by *ma‘rifa* translates directly into the direct witnessing of God in the afterlife al-

²⁴ His dual usage of *‘ilm* poses a difficulty for the translator; therefore, we will translate *‘ilm* as ‘science’ when Al-Ghazali refers to the individual disciplines, and as ‘knowledge’ when he refers to the more comprehensive earlier meaning.

²⁵ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 34. I disagree, however, with Treiger’s larger point about Al-Ghazali’s interchangeable use of these terms, since clearly *ma‘rifa* is a form of knowledge of which God has no need; it is a uniquely *human* form of knowing, specifically oriented in the context of Al-Ghazali’s mystical theology towards knowing and loving God in this life, which leads to the witnessing (*mushāhada*) of God in the hereafter. On the other hand, *‘ilm* can be understood as knowledge generally, and specifically knowledge of the divine, to which human beings aspire by growing near to God; it is the content of knowledge.

Ghazali calls *mushāhada*. He alludes to this in the prologue to *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation*; only those who know (*‘arīfūn*) recognize the beautiful woman of this world for the terrible old hag it truly is. Therefore, *ma‘rifa* is the kind of knowledge human beings require in order to achieve any of their ultimate ends: the love (*maḥabba*) of God in this life, and the witnessing (*mushāhada*) of God in the hereafter, a vision the beauty of which leads to the highest felicity (*sa‘āda*).

In Book XXXIV itself, al-Ghazali is sometimes inconsistent with his use of the term; for instance, as we have stated, it is the “knowledgeable ones” (*‘arīfūn*), on the one hand, who discern the truth about this world, able to see beyond its disguise to “her secret shame.”²⁶ Later in the book, on the other hand, al-Ghazali writes, “renunciation has been attributed to the knowledgeable (*‘ulamā*’), and he describes his people with knowledge, and this is the highest praise.”²⁷ Here he connects *‘ilm* rather than *ma‘rifa* to renunciation, but still later he writes, “So this is the one who is perfect in renunciation, and its cause is the perfection of knowledge (*ma‘rifa*),” and “The one who leaves behind this world for the hereafter is near to the people of knowledge (*ma‘rifa*) and the masters of hearts inhabited by witnessing and unveiling.”²⁸ Al-Ghazali establishes a connection between the renunciant and his knowledge of God and the world, and still later, at the very end of the book, al-Ghazali distinguishes between the “knower” (*‘arīf*) and the renunciant, with the knower claiming the higher position.²⁹ So, despite some

²⁶ *Iḥyā’* 4:185 (XXXIV, introduction).

²⁷ *Iḥyā’* 4:214 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 2).

²⁸ *Iḥyā’* 4:221 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 3, *daraja* 3).

²⁹ *Iḥyā’* 4:237 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 5).

moderate inconsistency in his use of the term, *ma'rifa* serves a critical purpose in al-Ghazali's mystical ethics, as the prerequisite for any advanced spiritual state.

Foundational Structural and Conceptual Elements of the Book

Establishing some cursory understanding of the key terminology al-Ghazali uses in this book allows us to turn to his conceptualization of poverty itself. In *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation* al-Ghazali employs a structural configuration common to the other books of the *Ihyā'*, especially those in the fourth quarter. A brief glimpse at his arrangement of the materials in Book XXXIV aids our analysis by facilitating the location of certain passages contextually within it. This will also be useful as we move forward through chapters three and four because al-Ghazali's placement of ideas in specific sections of his books both demonstrates what method he uses to proceed through his discussions of their particular topics and sheds light on the manner in which he uses historical and contemporary sources to support his assertions.

Book XXXIV contains two major sections; the first half deals with poverty (*faqr*), and the second half with renunciation (*zuhd*). The section concerning poverty contains four primary types of writing: one section on the "true meaning" (*haqīqa*) of poverty; three sections on the "excellence" (*faḍīla*) of the state of poverty in relation to itself and to other states; four sections on the behavior (*adab*) of the poor, with special attention paid to begging; and one final section on the states (*ahwāl*) of those who beg. The second half of the book, devoted to renunciation, follows a very similar (though not identical) pattern: one section on the "true meaning" of renunciation; one section on the excellence of renunciation; a section, which can be seen as an extension of the previous one, on the levels (*darajāt*) and divisions (*aqsām*) of renunciation; a

section on the specific details concerning the renunciation of worldly goods – an analogue to *adab*; and a final section on the signs (*‘alāmah*) of renunciation.

Each half of the book contains a distinction between the theological understanding of the subject at hand and its practical application. In the half on poverty, this occurs between the final *faḍīla* section and the first *adab* section; in the half on renunciation, this occurs between the section on the levels and divisions of renunciation and the section dealing with its specific requirements in material terms. The first two sections, the *haqīqa* and *faḍīla* sections, appear in the majority of the books of the *Ihyā’*; although some books contain sections on *adab*, and some contain sections on *aqsām* and *darajāt*, the “true meaning” and “excellence” categories appear in each of the books of the fourth quarter of the *Ihyā’* and in many of the books in the other three quarters as well.

Both halves of the book begin with sections discussing the “true meaning” of the subject at hand. Al-Ghazali uses his most philosophical language in these sections, as he tries to explain the essence of the concepts he addresses, namely poverty and renunciation. He begins by offering definitions of these terms, definitions which serve as guiding principles for the rest of the book; out of these definitions al-Ghazali builds his understanding of poverty and renunciation. He then makes philosophical distinctions between the different “parts” of poverty and renunciation. Finally, he complicates these definitions and divisions by considering alternate ways of thinking about these concepts and adding new parts or presenting more nuanced definitions. This then leads him to search the traditional materials for answers and support, which leads to further refinement of the concepts.

The *haqīqa* sections, therefore, lead naturally into the *faḍīla* sections, so that the structure of the book relates significantly to the meanings of the concepts of *faqr* and *zuhd*. In other words, al-Ghazali uses the *haqīqa* sections to present his philosophical conceptualization of each topic, while in the *faḍīla* sections he digs through traditional Islamic sources, such as Qur’anic *āyāt*, hadith, and the sayings of earlier Sufis and Muslim religious scholars, in order to support and refine his prior theological and philosophical discussion. In weaving together his own assertions about each subject, al-Ghazali makes use of the two most influential intellectual disciplines of his time, philosophy and *hadith* science, placing them within the framework of his own mystical ethics, the teleology of which is drawn primarily from earlier Sufi traditions.

Establishing the Conceptual Framework: *haqīqa* and *faḍīla* in Book XXXIV

Al-Ghazali tends to utilize the *haqīqa* and *faḍīla* sections as his means of delivering an introduction to the conceptual framework of his books’ subjects. These two sections serve different purposes, however, as the former typically contains both preliminary, as well as primary, conceptual definitions and distinctions, while the latter serves as a forum in which he can support and further refine his assertions through appeal to traditional Islamic authorities. In these sections al-Ghazali also displays one of his most distinctive characteristics as a thinker, that of synthesizing seemingly contradictory or misaligned sources and ideas. So, the section on a subject’s excellence not only provides support for al-Ghazali’s earlier assertions about the true meaning of that subject, but it also allows him to bring together various and often competing Muslim intellectual traditions in an effort to produce clear and sophisticated conclusions about

the subject at hand. The later sections on the specific practices related to the subject serve the practical purpose for which al-Ghazali intends the *Iḥyā'*, as a guide to mystical *praxis*.

The configuration of Book XXXIV serves then as the scaffolding upon which al-Ghazali constructs his argument about poverty and renunciation. Moving from general to specific, from abstract and conceptual to concrete and practical, al-Ghazali slowly refines his understanding of poverty and renunciation in a way that satisfies both the reader concerned with philosophy and the practitioner seeking guidance. The majority of our analysis will derive from the earlier sections, since al-Ghazali locates his most conceptual discussions of poverty in presenting its true meaning and excellence. It is in these sections we discover what al-Ghazali means by poverty, and it is through these we may arrive at an understanding of poverty's instrumental role in al-Ghazali's broader program of mystical ethics.

The True Meaning and Excellence of Poverty

Al-Ghazali begins the *haqīqa* section with a seemingly simple definition of poverty: "Poverty consists in not having what one truly needs; lacking what is not necessary is not called poverty."³⁰ The interpretation of this definition hinges upon what al-Ghazali means by "necessary", and he spends much of the book explaining precisely that. He establishes a tripartite system, which he uses throughout Book XXXIV as a rubric by which to judge the appropriateness of possessing certain material goods. According to this system, one may store material possessions sufficient for one year of living, for 40 days of living, or for one day and

³⁰ *Iḥyā'* 4:186 (XXXIV, *shatr* 1, *bayān* 1).

one night of living.³¹ To exceed one year pushes one out of the realm of poverty and into the general consideration of those who live in excess. Although he discusses these limitations of time generally in the section related to poverty, in reference to renunciation he identifies six things in particular that one may possess in moderation: “food, clothing, shelter and its furnishings, marital relations, and material wealth (*māl*),” the last of which al-Ghazali refers to as “the instrument to the other five.”³²

The half of Book XXXIV devoted to poverty, then, covers al-Ghazali’s assessment of one’s attachment to the last of these six things, material wealth, and what one needs concerning it in particular.³³ The second half of Book XXXIV, on renunciation, deals with the more general topic of one’s attachment to all created things, not only material wealth. Therefore, poverty (*faqr*) may be understood first and foremost as a state (*hāl*) of the heart (*qalb*) reflecting one’s relationship to material wealth (*amwāl*, s. *māl*) in this world (*dunyā*). To the extent one does not have material wealth, one is poor, yet al-Ghazali recognizes the necessity of material wealth in this world for the subsistence of most people. As we shall find, however, a select few can progress beyond this need for material wealth, transcending altogether the relationship one’s heart has with it and leaving behind the state of poverty for other, higher states.

³¹ *Iḥyā’* 4:201-2 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 5).

³² *Iḥyā’* 4:225 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 4); *Iḥyā’* 4:234 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 4, *muhimm* 6). It is important to note the difference between two terms al-Ghazali uses to designate wealth, *māl* and *ghanā*; the former indicates a more tangible material wealth, while the latter denotes a more general sense of “richness”. To avoid confusion, I have always used the term “material wealth” for *māl*, and have used simply “wealth” for *ghanā*.

³³ *Iḥyā’* 4:186 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

In order to support his definition of poverty, al-Ghazali turns in the *faḍīla* section to what he refers to as *āyāt*, the verses of the Qur'an, as well as to what he calls the *akhbār* and *āthār*.³⁴ Specifically, he relies upon two Qur'anic verses to demonstrate the excellence and importance of poverty for Muslims: "It is the poor who emigrated and who were driven from their homes and their possessions" (Q 59:8); "It is the poor who are dedicated to the path of God, for they cannot travel the land" (Q 2:273).³⁵ He interprets these verses to mean poverty "precedes and surpasses their attributes of emigration and dedication," asserting its importance as an attribute worthy of pursuit by Muslims.³⁶ That poverty surpasses the attribute of emigration demonstrates the importance al-Ghazali places on poverty as a protective character trait, considering the lofty standing of the *muḥājirūn* in the context of early and medieval Islamic societies. This also speaks to his emphasis on individual spiritual development over bloodline as a marker of piety, as many in Islamic history have appealed to their familial relations to those who emigrated from Mecca to Medina with Muhammad in order to establish themselves as culturally or religiously superior to others.

He similarly draws upon a plethora of statements by Muhammad and other prophets (specifically Christ and Moses), the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*) of the Prophet Muhammad, and other

³⁴ Al-Ghazali's use of traditional Islamic source materials in Book XXXIV is the same as in most other books of the *Iḥyā'*. In the *faḍīla* sections he utilizes selections from the Qur'an (*āyāt*), prophetic reports (*akhbār* – seemingly used by Al-Ghazali as a synonym to *hadith*), and non-prophetic sayings (*āthār*), usually from earlier Sufi and legal scholars who fall into the category of *al-ṣaḥāba* in relation to the Prophet Muhammad. Although all of these categories appear in the majority of the books of the *Iḥyā'*, and especially in those books of the fourth quarter, their use by Al-Ghazali is not uniform, reflecting his typical laxity in the use of traditional materials. These categories are, however, critical to an examination of his use of sources, a subject we take up in chapter four of this dissertation.

³⁵ *Iḥyā'* 4:189 (XXXIV, *shatr* 1, *bayān* 2).

³⁶ *Iḥyā'* 4:189 (XXXIV, *shatr* 1, *bayān* 2).

wise men of the Islamic tradition to support his claim about poverty's importance in Islamic spiritual life. From these the reader learns several principles concerning poverty in general. For instance, Muhammad claims the best of men is "the poor man who strives (*jahada*)."³⁷ Poverty is "the believer's gift in this world," and it "adorns the believer as the beautiful cheek does the horse."³⁸ Poverty is placed along *jihād* as one of two things beloved by Muhammad, and as a character trait it is seen as a beautiful adornment on the heart of the believer. Al-Ghazali clearly considers it an excellent character trait among the highest of those prized in Islamic tradition.

More than this, poverty and wealth have the power to impact one's entry into the hereafter. Not only will the "the poor of [Muhammad's] people enter paradise before its rich by 500 years," but also Solomon will be the last of the prophets to enter paradise due to his wealth.³⁹ Al-Ghazali also repeatedly mentions the difficulty faced by the Companion 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Auf, who "suffered punishment for his great wealth" by having to account for it, thereby arriving late to paradise.⁴⁰ Not only does poverty contribute to one's protection from the hellfire, but also wealth works against it, indicating their inter-relatedness as well as their instrumentality in relation to the hereafter.

³⁷ *Iḥyā'* 4:189 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 2).

³⁸ *Iḥyā'* 4:191 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 2).

³⁹ *Iḥyā'* 4: 189; 191 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān*. 2).

⁴⁰ *Iḥyā'* 4:193 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 2).

The Levels of Poverty

Not all poor men are equal in piety, however, and accordingly al-Ghazali delineates five levels of poverty in the heart: the renunciant (*zāhid*), the content (*radīyan*), the satisfied (*qani'an*), the greedy (*harīs*), and the needy (*muḍṭarr*).⁴¹ Each of these states possesses its own characteristics, again drawn by al-Ghazali from the Qur'an and other traditional materials. He notes that he will not spend much time discussing the fifth of these levels because it consists of involuntary poverty, which is both dangerous and undesirable, since it weighs upon the heart rather than purifying it. Furthermore, the first and highest level, that of the renunciant, he deals with in the second half of Book XXXIV, a clear announcement of the connection between *faqr* and *zuhd* that indicates a progression from the former to the latter. As one moves away from one's attachment to material wealth, one moves away from one's attachment to the world as a whole, perfecting the states of poverty until once reaches the state of renunciation. A brief analysis of these five levels of poverty will deepen our understanding of poverty as a protective character trait and lead us into the next phase of the argument, according to which poverty acts instrumentally in the progression towards God-reliance (*tawakkul*).

Although al-Ghazali considers poverty generally excellent, not all poor men embody poverty as a character trait in their souls; this exception applies to the two lowest levels of poverty, those of the needy and the greedy, which are related to a certain extent. Al-Ghazali states, "The seeker of food is not capable of contemplation or remembrance ... poverty is a

⁴¹ *Iḥyā'* 4:186 (XXXIV, *shatr* 1, *bayān* 1).

plight that is inescapable.”⁴² In fact, one of the only circumstances in which poverty is not seen as better than wealth is when “poverty is far from the amount necessary, so that it is almost near unbelief. This is not good in any way, for when its presence persists in his life, he will make use of his food and his life for disbelief and disobedience. If he died of hunger, his sins would be fewer.”⁴³ This is the poverty to which he refers earlier in the book when he quotes Muhammad: “I seek refuge in You from poverty,” and “poverty is near to disbelief.”⁴⁴ This kind of poverty, involuntary and absolute, damages the believer, and al-Ghazali indicates his preference for those who would die of hunger rather than use their lives and food and possessions for disbelief and disobedience.

Related to this state is that of the greedy poor man; he is “rabid in the pursuit of material possessions, since for him there is nothing else.”⁴⁵ Destitution often leads to the desire to possess things, and al-Ghazali defines the level of greed in detail early in the book:

It is such that he relinquishes the pursuit [of God] because of weakness, and he desires things, and were he to find a path for their pursuit, then he would work in order to pursue them, and he would be distracted [from God] by their pursuit. We call the adherent of this state “greedy.”⁴⁶

These people pursue material possessions to the exclusion of God; they desire things and work to obtain them, regardless of the impact such a pursuit has on their hearts. As a result of their

⁴² *Iḥyā’* 4:200 (*shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 2).

⁴³ *Iḥyā’* 4:200 (*shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 2).

⁴⁴ *Iḥyā’* 4:188-9 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

⁴⁵ *Iḥyā’* 4:200-1 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 2).

⁴⁶ *Iḥyā’* 4:186 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

pursuit of material possessions, and their negligence of God, these poor “will not be rewarded for [their] poverty,” for “sometimes the desirous man, through the absence of contentment, detests the work of God for holding back this world from him ... that detestation is what causes the reward of poverty to come to nothing.”⁴⁷ Therefore, desire for this world, even in the poor, can negate the benefits derived from poverty itself, indicating that poverty is not inherently excellent, an idea reiterated later in this chapter by our further analysis of al-Ghazali’s use of poverty in his mystical ethics.

The above excerpts demonstrate not only the consequences of greed but also the oppositional relationship between greed and contentment in relation to poverty. Al-Ghazali characterizes greed as the absence of contentment, and elsewhere he states, “it is well known that satisfaction is the opposite of greed.”⁴⁸ Al-Ghazali draws both of these terms from *aḥādīth*, which he quotes, “The Prophet of God (*ṣalla Allāhu ‘alayhi wa salam*) said, ‘Blessed is the one who is guided to submission, so that his life is sufficient and he is satisfied with it. He (*ṣalla Allāhu ‘alayhi wa salam*) said, ‘O poor men! Give God the contentment of your hearts and you will seize the reward of your poverty. If not, then not.’”⁴⁹ Ultimately, al-Ghazali defines satisfaction as meaning that a person prefers the presence of material possessions over their absence but will not pursue things actively; this person is satisfied with his status in the world

⁴⁷ *Iḥyā’* 4: 195 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 3).

⁴⁸ *Iḥyā’* 4: 195 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 3).

⁴⁹ *Iḥyā’* 4: 195 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 3).

and neither renounces nor pursues wealth. The one who is content does not crave the possession of material things at all, even rejecting any gifts offered to him.⁵⁰

Al-Ghazali continues his explanation of these terms when he states, “he [*ṣalla Allāhu ‘alayhi wa salam*] said, ‘Everything has a key, and the key to paradise is the love of the poor and needy for their patience.’”⁵¹ Later, he quotes Dhu al-Nun, “The people who draw near to disbelief are possessors of poverty without patience for it.”⁵² Not only are satisfaction and contentment states counter to greed, but they are also characterized by the degree to which one possesses the virtue of patience in relation to poverty.⁵³ The progression from greed to satisfaction to contentment becomes clear, then, as a process of responding to the trial of adversity that accompanies poverty. One’s *response* to poverty determines one’s level of spiritual advancement along the spectrum of poverty, with patience operating as the key attribute according to which a person endures the trial of poverty. Furthermore, these levels of advancement are not only related to poverty but also to one’s response to material wealth. The extent to which one abandons the pursuit of wealth and embraces or even pursues poverty determines the depth of one’s embodiment of poverty as a protective character trait. This interrelatedness of poverty and wealth may seem obvious, and in a superficial manner it certainly is, but al-Ghazali uses their connection to elaborate in great depth on his understanding of

⁵⁰ *Iḥyā’* 4:186 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

⁵¹ *Iḥyā’* 4: 195 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 3).

⁵² *Iḥyā’* 4: 196 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 3).

⁵³ Al-Ghazali discusses patience (*ṣabr*) as a protective character trait in the second book of the fourth quarter of the *Iḥyā’*, along with thankfulness (*shukr*). He views them both as intimately connected with poverty and renunciation.

poverty as instrumental to the development of world-renunciation and subsequently God-reliance.

The Instrumentality of Poverty and the Renunciation of the World

In the section of *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation* covering the excellence of poverty over wealth, al-Ghazali attempts to resolve a debate concerning the difference in piety between the patient poor man and the thankful rich man, a debate he inherits from his predecessors. Al-Ghazali takes the view that poverty is generally preferred over wealth, but this specific case presents a challenge because the thankful rich man spends his wealth generously and in God's cause, seemingly doing more than the poor man to contribute to his own spiritual advancement and protection from the hellfire. He ultimately concludes, "the excellence of the poor man and the rich man is only in accordance with the attachment of their hearts to material possessions; so if they are equal, their levels are the same."⁵⁴ Again we see the importance of one's response to wealth and poverty and one's attachment to material wealth as the defining characteristic of one's poverty.

Al-Ghazali does not end his analysis here, however, because he claims, "the temptation of prosperity is stronger than the temptation of adversity."⁵⁵ This is not due to any inherent evil present in wealth or any inherent good present in poverty; rather, material possessions and their

⁵⁴ *Iḥyā'* 4:198 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

⁵⁵ *Iḥyā'* 4:198 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

lack exist as instruments for one's ability or inability to enjoy this world. Al-Ghazali discusses this extensively in the following passages:

One should not guard against this world for its own sake but because it is an obstacle to the attainment to God Almighty. Poverty is not required for its own sake but because in it is the absence of the obstacle to God Almighty and the absence of distraction from Him. How many rich men has wealth distracted from God, such as Solomon – peace be upon him – and ‘Uthman and ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Auf – May God be satisfied with them – and turned them away from the goal? The extreme limit of the goal in this world is love of God Almighty and intimacy with Him, which comes only after knowing Him, and the behavior of the path of knowledge contains impossible distractions, and poverty is among the distractions as wealth is among the distractions. However, the distraction is strictly speaking the love of this world. When one does not bring it together with a love of God Almighty in the heart, the lover of the things of this world is one distracted by it, whether by leaving it or by reuniting with it. Whether his distraction in leaving it is greater, or his distraction in reunion with it is greater, this world is the beloved of the neglectful. Those excluded from it are distracted by its pursuit, and the powerful within it are distracted by its preservation and its enjoyment.⁵⁶

...

[People] are distinguished on account of the power of property [to cause] intimacy with this world, and the enjoyment of it through that power, and the feeling of comfort in its lowliness. And all of this brings with it intimacy with this world. But to the extent that the servant is comfortable with this world, he is estranged from the hereafter. And the extent to which he is comfortable with an attribute among his attributes, except the attribute of the knowledge of God, he is estranged from God and from His love. Whoever cuts off the reasons for intimacy with this world, his heart withdraws from this world and its beauty, and the heart, when it withdraws from whatever is not God Almighty, is like a believer in God who turns his attention absolutely towards God. An empty heart is inconceivable, and only God Almighty and what is not God exist, so whoever draws near to other than Him is lacking, withdrawing from Him; and whoever draws near to Him withdraws from other than Him. A person advances toward one of them to the extent that he withdraws from the other. His proximity to one of them is to the same degree as his distance from the other, for these two are like East and West insofar as they are two directions. He wavers between the two to the extent that he doesn't draw near to one of

⁵⁶ *Iḥyā'* 4:197-8 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

them or become distant from another. The source of nearness to one of them is the source of distance from the other, and the source of love for this world is the source of hatred of God Almighty. So the object of the knower's reflection should be his heart, with respect to its withdrawal from this world and [the removal of] intimacy with it.⁵⁷

These passages are worth quoting at length because they capture the heart of al-Ghazali's argument about material poverty and its connection to wealth. On the one hand, poverty is instrumental to the human being's ability to draw near to and achieve intimacy with God, both in this world and in the hereafter. On the other hand, material wealth forms a barrier between the seeker and God, thus inhibiting one's closeness and intimacy with God. The details of how poverty and wealth operate in relation to one's intimacy with God are essential to understanding poverty's instrumentality to al-Ghazali's mystical ethics.

Material wealth has the power to stimulate a love for this world, and the extent to which one loves this world is the extent to which one neglects God. Wealth is not, then, inherently evil but rather allows one to access and enjoy all of the evils that are present in this world: pride, ostentation, miserliness, and greed, among many others. The ease of life that accompanies wealth incites one to neglect the state of one's heart, as well as one's religious duties. Wealth is seen as an instrument to disobedience and sinful living, and it is one of the most difficult things to avoid in this world, since it is necessary for the maintenance of life. This increases one's attachment to wealth because it is through wealth that the rest of life's necessities are within reach. Thus, wealth may be viewed as the "source of love for this world," since it is through wealth that one comes first to subsist in the world and eventually to revel in its delights. Therefore, it becomes

⁵⁷ *Iḥyā'* 4:198 (XXXIV, *shatr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

critical to break one's connection to wealth before addressing the baser desires wealth generates for this world.

Material poverty then becomes the antidote to wealth; by embracing poverty and turning away from material possessions one decreases one's reliance upon wealth. In breaking this attachment to wealth, one necessarily becomes separated from the other things of this world, since wealth is the means to their enjoyment. Poverty is therefore not inherently good but is instrumental to the process of detachment from this world, for "poverty is not required for its own sake but because in it is the absence of the obstacle to God Almighty and the absence of distraction from Him."⁵⁸ Furthermore, al-Ghazali depicts the love of this world and the love of God as a zero sum equation, so that hatred of one necessarily leads to intimacy with the other. Within this system, poverty is not merely a virtue sought after as part of the process of purifying the heart; rather, it is a foundational state according to which the seeker after God begins to turn away from this world and towards the ultimate ends of knowing, loving and witnessing God.

Renunciation as the Highest Level of Poverty

Poverty does not lead directly to loving God, however, and its perfection leads to the next state in the process, world-renunciation (*zuhd*). Al-Ghazali's decision to name *zuhd* as the highest level of poverty clearly announces its relationship to *faqr*, and further investigation into precisely how these two are connected reinforces both poverty's necessity and its instrumentality in terms of the process of self-purification. First, however, we must establish what al-Ghazali

⁵⁸ *Iḥyā'* 4:197 (XXXIV, *shatr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

intends by the term *zuhd* before looking into the relationship between *zuhd* and *faqr*. The foundational principle of renunciation is that “this world is the enemy of God,” and al-Ghazali builds his discussion of both poverty and renunciation out of this idea; these two concepts constitute the means by which a “knower” comes to display his hatred of this world.⁵⁹ Al-Ghazali discusses the negative consequences of loving this world in Book XXVI of the *Ihyā’*, so Book XXXIV considers only “the benefit of hating it and the renunciation of it,” since “there is no hope for deliverance from the hellfire except by a withdrawal and distancing from this world.”⁶⁰

Therefore, renunciation is necessary for human evasion of the hellfire, but what exactly is it? Al-Ghazali states among his preliminary definitions of the levels of poverty that renunciation “is such that if one is given material wealth it disgusts and troubles him, so he flees from taking it, for he hates it and is careful of it as a distraction [from God].”⁶¹ In the second half of Book XXXIV he elaborates, “renunciation ... is a term indicating the departure from a thing and toward what is better than it according to desire.”⁶² Anyone who gives up one thing for another is technically one who renounces one thing for another, even the one who “sells the hereafter for this world,” but in the context of al-Ghazali’s mystical ethics *zāhid* refers specifically to one who renounces this world (*al-dunyā*) in favor of God or the hereafter (*al-ākhirā*).⁶³ Furthermore,

⁵⁹ *Ihyā’* 4:185 (XXXIV, introduction.).

⁶⁰ *Ihyā’* 4:185 (XXXIV, introduction.). For his discussion of the dangers of this world, see also *Ihyā’* 3: 196-224, XXXVI, *kitāb ḍamm al-dunyā*.

⁶¹ *Ihyā’* 4: 186 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

⁶² *Ihyā’* 4: 211 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 1).

⁶³ *Ihyā’* 4: 212 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 1).

when one turns away from one thing, one must necessarily turn towards something more beloved than the previous thing, for while one may leave behind a formerly beloved thing, one may not leave behind love itself.⁶⁴

The motivating knowledge undergirding the state of renunciation comes from the Qur'an: "the hereafter is better and more lasting" (Q 87:17).⁶⁵ To the extent one possesses this knowledge and internalizes it, one achieves a level of renunciation, of which al-Ghazali identifies three. According to the highest level, the absolute renunciant, one "dislikes all except God Almighty, even paradise ... [and] one loves only God Almighty."⁶⁶ Next comes the believer who renounces this world in pursuit of paradise, rather than for God alone; finally, there is the one who gives up portions of this world but not others.⁶⁷ Those who are a part of this final level do not belong to the renunciants but rather to the repentant, who give up the forbidden things of this world but not the permissible things.⁶⁸ Finally, one's renunciation must be due to this knowledge about the superiority of the hereafter and God over this world; many who renounce their possessions, for the sake of generosity or social convention or even out of a desire for praise, do not fall within the state of renunciation.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ *Iḥyā'* 4: 212 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 1).

⁶⁵ Quoted by Al-Ghazali: *Iḥyā'* 4: 212 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 1).

⁶⁶ *Iḥyā'* 4: 212 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 1).

⁶⁷ *Iḥyā'* 4: 212 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 1).

⁶⁸ Al-Ghazali discusses repentance (*ṣabr*) in *Iḥyā'* 4:2-59.

⁶⁹ *Iḥyā'* 4:214 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 1).

With this brief summary of al-Ghazali's definition of renunciation, its relationship with poverty begins to emerge. Whereas poverty appears to consist in the acceptance of lacking material possessions in particular, renunciation is a concept which can be more generally applied to the leaving behind of this world as a whole. In fact, as mentioned at this chapter's outset, the categories of things in this world that are necessary but should be renounced to some degree are six: food, clothing, shelter, home furnishings, sexual activity, and material wealth.⁷⁰ The inclusion of *māl* at the end of this list demonstrates the more particular character of poverty, and in the passage dealing specifically with the renunciation of material wealth, al-Ghazali refers to it as "the instrument to the other five" categories of necessary things.⁷¹ Our reading of poverty as instrumental is thus reinforced by our understanding of renunciation. The rejection of material wealth in particular is necessary for one to be able to renounce the things in the other five categories.

Another clue to the relationship between poverty and renunciation comes very early in the book, where al-Ghazali states, "There is no hope for protection from the hellfire except by a withdrawal and distancing from this world, but this separation comes either through its isolation from the servant, which is called poverty, or through the isolation of the servant from it, which is called renunciation."⁷² Al-Ghazali here seems to indicate a fundamental difference between poverty and renunciation; poverty is a kind of trial given to the servant by God, which must be

⁷⁰ *Iḥyā'* 4:225 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 4).

⁷¹ *Iḥyā'* 4:234 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 4, *muhimm* 6).

⁷² *Iḥyā'* 4; 185 (XXXIV, *introduction*).

endured with patience and eventually embraced with contentment, while renunciation is the active rejection of wealth (and then the other things of this world) as a perfection of one's acceptance of poverty. Whereas renunciation is defined by one's desire to choose the hereafter over this world, poverty is not something chosen in the sense that the servant becomes poor by giving up all of his wealth immediately; this is an advanced state of poverty reserved for the prophets and saints of Islam. Rather, poverty is chosen in the sense that one who becomes afflicted by it must choose to respond to poverty with patience, which leads to the cultivation of satisfaction, contentment, and *then* the renunciation of wealth, which in turn guides one to the renunciation of the other necessary aspects of life such as food, shelter, and sex.

In this way the relationship between *zuhd* and *faqr* brings out al-Ghazali's fundamental concern in this book: one's attitude towards wealth is what defines one's piety, not one's actual financial status. If the believer accepts poverty and rejoices in it, even thanking God for poverty, then he demonstrates his detachment from wealth, which leads naturally into a detachment from this world more generally, as has been shown above. In fact, since both love of self and hatred of self can become equally distracting from God, the highest form of renunciation is not the physical renunciation of things but the spiritual renunciation of the heart's attachment to this world and its temptations. This is why in the introduction to Book XXXIV al-Ghazali mentions the ability of the ones who know to renounce this world; they possess the knowledge that this world is full of temptation and the "hereafter is better and more lasting," so they are happy to leave this world behind.

Al-Ghazali vividly illustrates this concept through an analogy of two men sitting on a camel walking towards Mecca on the path of the pilgrimage. The lover of this world faces away

from Mecca, unaware of his destination and unable to see it. The hater of this world sits facing forward on the camel, able to see the Ka‘ba and eager to reach it. Both men will reach the destination, and both are distracted, albeit by different things; however, the man facing the Ka‘ba enjoys a status higher than the other, since he hopes for the attainment of the holy place.⁷³ The piety of both pales in comparison, however, with the man “secluded inside the Ka‘ba, the one who abides in it, who does not go out from it until he needs to.”⁷⁴

This person is as the one who abides in God’s presence, content to ignore this world completely, only to emerge from such a state for the sake of necessity, such as food. Thus, one should not “believe that hatred of this world is intentional in his eyes; rather, this world is an impediment to God, and one does not attain to Him but through pushing away the impediment.”⁷⁵ Renunciation should not be viewed as the goal of spiritual practice but as the means by which a direct encounter with God may be secured; this encounter comes through one’s detachment from wealth and this world, rather than through the actual hatred and rejection of them. Hatred and renunciation of this world are better, however, than loving this world, since one’s occupation with hating this world may at some point produce the total engagement with God attained by the one abiding in the Ka‘ba itself.

All of this adds up to poverty’s instrumentality regarding the achievement of such a meeting with God. The acceptance of poverty by the servant leads him through a progression of

⁷³ *Iḥyā’* 4; 187 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

⁷⁴ *Iḥyā’* 4; 187 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

⁷⁵ *Iḥyā’* 4; 187 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

spiritual states climbing upward to the renunciation of this world. Al-Ghazali mentions a state of poverty even higher than *zuhd*, however, that we have yet to address; the “one without need” (*mustaghni*) illustrates in a powerful way the connection between material poverty and the poverty of existence plaguing all of creation. Understanding what al-Ghazali means by the state of the *mustaghni* brings to light not only a deeper comprehension of poverty’s importance but also something more fundamental about al-Ghazali’s mystical ethics in general, for it is precisely through one’s acceptance of material poverty that one overcomes the poverty of existence and begins to embody the divine attribute of Absolute Needlessness (*al-Ghani*).

The ‘One without Need’ (*mustaghni*) and the Poverty of Existence

Although the vast majority of the Book of Poverty and Renunciation deals with material poverty, al-Ghazali spends a significant amount of space discussing the implications of what I have called the “poverty of existence” inherent to all created beings, including (and perhaps especially) humans. In fact, my reading of al-Ghazali leads me to conclude that it is only through the acceptance of material poverty and the pursuit of renunciation that human beings may counteract their poverty of existence and draw closer to God through their embodiment of the divine attribute of Needlessness. Imperfect human beings cannot possibly embody this attribute fully, so they must do so through a state al-Ghazali indicates is higher than renunciation. The following analysis shows that this state, the ‘one without need’ (*mustaghni*) should be interpreted as one coinciding with God-reliance (*tawakkul*), or at least as a preliminary version of it. Furthermore, it demonstrates the role of *faqr*, or material poverty, in opening for human beings the pathway to transcendence of their existential poverty, which forms a barrier between

themselves and God. All of this will then be discussed in the next chapter in terms of al-Ghazali's broader mystical ethics, according to which one polishes the mirror of the heart, purifies the self, and thereby attains knowledge, which leads to an escape from hell and an achievement of direct witnessing of God in the hereafter.

The state believers should pursue, then, is not actually renunciation through the hatred and rejection of the world; al-Ghazali states, "In addition to these five states [of poverty] is one higher than renunciation; it is such that having material wealth and lacking it are equal, so if one has it, one is not glad and does not detest it, and if one lacks it, it is just the same ... the adherent of this state should be called 'the one without need' (*mustaghni*)."⁷⁶ Being without need of wealth is a different and higher form of renunciation; rather than hating the world and falling into the trap of being distracted by one's hatred, one should renounce the world to the extent that one pays no attention to it whatsoever. While al-Ghazali identifies *zuhd* as the highest form of *faqr*, both of which involve the renunciation of the bodily comforts of this world, he asserts that the *mustaghni* renounces the intimacy of the heart with this world. Like the pilgrim who abides in the Ka'ba, the one without need concerns himself only with God, neglecting his relationship with this world.

Al-Ghazali differentiates his use of the term *mustaghni* from two grammatically related ones.⁷⁷ First, he wishes to distinguish it from the person who is rich (*ghanī*), because while the latter has little need of wealth due to his possession of large amounts of it already, he retains in

⁷⁶ *Ihyā'* 4; 186 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

⁷⁷ *Ihyā'* 4; 187 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

his heart an attachment to wealth such that he needs to maintain its levels or to acquire more of it, or such that he would regret losing it.⁷⁸ Rather, the one without need (*mustaghni*) has achieved a detachment from his possessions, and the level of his material wealth is a moot point, meaning he is without need of it regardless of its presence or absence. He may be materially poor or rich, but he is entirely without need of the things of this world. Al-Ghazali repeatedly illustrates this idea using the example of Muhammad's wife 'A'isha, who gives away 100,000 dirhams despite her family's need of food with which to break the fast, so that when she is asked about this she replies simply: "If you had told me, I would have done that," meaning set aside some money for food.⁷⁹ Both her dismissal of a great fortune and her ambivalence towards keeping some of it back for food demonstrate her advanced state of detachment from material wealth, providing a model both for those who are wealthy and those who do not have enough to afford food.

Second, and more important for this study, al-Ghazali distinguishes between the one without need (*mustaghni*) and God's divine name, the Absolutely Needless (*al-Ghani*). These two Arabic terms derive from the same root, so he finds it necessary to draw a distinction between them, perhaps the most important one he makes in Book XXXIV. As noted at the

⁷⁸ It is crucial to note al-Ghazali's use of these terms: *mustaghni* is the *maṣḍar* of the tenth form of the verb *ghaniya*, used to indicate his new category of detachment from material possessions (it is also interesting to point out here that the tenth Arabic verb form carries the connotation of seeking to do or be something, so al-Ghazali's use of this form seems to support our argument concerning his belief in the human ability to embody the divine attribute of *al-Ghani*); *ghani* is the indefinite masculine noun derived from the first form of that verb, used to indicate the status of wealth generally; *al-Ghani* is one of the divine names, used only in reference to God's Necessary Being.

⁷⁹ *Iḥyā'* 4; 187 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

beginning of this chapter, al-Ghazali defines poverty as “not having what one truly needs.”⁸⁰ He immediately complicates this definition, however, when he states:

If what is needed is an existing resource for him, then the one needing it is not poor. If you realize this, then there will be no doubt that all of existence other than God Almighty is poor because it is in need of the continuity of existence according to secondary circumstances,⁸¹ a continuity of existence acquired from the blessing of the existence of God Almighty. And since His existence is not acquired from other than Himself, then He is the Absolutely Needless (*al-Ghanī*), and all besides Him are in need of Him, in order for their existences to persist in time.⁸²

So poverty refers not only to one’s relationship to material wealth but also to one’s ontological status in relation to God. All of creation, including human beings, exists in a state of neediness because it possesses an existence contingent upon the necessary existence of God, who exists in a state of richness due to His self-subsistence. This relationship is solidified in God’s role as Creator, since human beings depend upon God both for their origins and for their continuation in this world.

This extends to the Arabic word *faqr* as well, as its range of meanings includes not only poverty but also “neediness”. Al-Ghazali plays with the nuances of the Arabic language in order to establish a connection between the material poverty of some members of creation and the poverty of existence inherent to the entirety of creation. For if poverty is “not having that which one truly needs,” and the only necessary thing is God, then one remains poor until one achieves

⁸⁰ *Iḥyā’* 4; 186 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

⁸¹ The Arabic is strange here, reading *thanī al-hāl*. I read it as referring to the contingent existence of creation, in contrast to God’s necessary existence.

⁸² *Iḥyā’* 4; 186 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1). Al-Ghazali refers to God here as *al-Ghanī*, which is one of the divine names he discusses in his *al-maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ ma’ānī asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā*.

some form of participation in the necessary Being of God. Conversely, if “lacking what is not necessary is not called poverty,” and only God is necessary, then lacking anything else, including and especially material goods, does not make a person poor. Human beings are not poor, therefore, in relation to their material wealth, but as a result of their inherent poverty of existence; this is how al-Ghazali reconciles the seemingly contradictory prophetic *ahādīth* in which Muhammad states, “Poverty is near to disbelief,” “I seek refuge in you from poverty,” and “Let me live as a beggar and let me die as a beggar.”⁸³ According to al-Ghazali, even Muhammad distinguished between the poverty of destitution, which can lead to sin and unbelief, the poverty of existence from which human beings should seek refuge with God, and the character trait of poverty each person should accept and even pursue.

Further distinguishing the one without need from the One who possesses the divine attribute of Needlessness, al-Ghazali states, “If the heart is restricted by a love of wealth it is a slave but the ‘one without need’ is free ... hearts are variable between slavery and freedom ... and therefore the name absolutely “Needless” does not apply to [human beings] perfectly but only as a metaphor.”⁸⁴ So, human hearts are incapable of manifesting perfectly the divine attribute of Needlessness, not only on account of a contingent existence beyond their control but also because of their inconsistent piety. They waver between attachment to this world and attachment to God, so that they can never fully become without need. The one who masters the character trait of *faqr* is caught up in the struggle against wealth, just as the one who masters

⁸³ *Iḥyā’* 4; 189 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 2).

⁸⁴ *Iḥyā’* 4; 187 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

zuhd engages in the hatred of this world more fully. Even the one who achieves the state of *mustaghni*, being without need, must attend to his bodily needs, never approaching even a glimmer of God's self-sufficiency.

Al-Ghazali's discussion of the divine name *al-Ghani* in his *al-maqṣad al-'asnā fī sharḥ ma'āni 'asmā' Allāhu al-ḥusnā*, his exposition on the ninety-nine beautiful names of God, reinforces this interpretation. In that text, al-Ghazali pairs *al-Ghani* with another of God's attributes, *al-Mughni*, the Enricher; what he says there sheds further light on our analysis of his conceptualization of the relationship between poverty and wealth:

The rich one is he who has no connection with another – neither for his being nor for the attributes of his being, but rather transcends connections with things other than himself. For when one's being or the attributes of one's being depend on things outside oneself, then his existence and his perfection depend on them essentially, and he is actually poor: in need of acquiring what is his. Yet it is inconceivable that any but God – may He be praised and exalted – be free of all such dependence.

And God – great and glorious – is the Enricher [*al-Mughni*] as well. But it is inconceivable that the one who is enriched become in his enrichment absolutely rich, since he will at least be in need of the one who made him rich. So he is not in fact rich, though he is able to dispense with everything but God, but only because He supplies him with what he needs; not because his neediness has been cut off at the roots. The truly rich one has need of nothing at all, while the one who is needy yet possesses what he needs is called rich figuratively.⁸⁵

Here al-Ghazali continues to establish a division between the richness of God and the poverty of everything else, including human beings; meanwhile, he adds to the complexity of this division by referencing God's role as the Enricher, through which God provides created beings with those

⁸⁵ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *al-maqṣad al-'asnā fī sharḥ ma'āni 'asmā' Allāhu al-ḥusnā*, edited by Fadlou A. Shehadi (Beyrouth: Dar al-Machreq, 1971): 156. I also consulted the English translation by David Burrell, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992): 143.

things of which they are in need. Al-Ghazali is careful to remind us, however, of the limitations of the enrichment of human beings, since they are called rich only figuratively, and are still needy in comparison with God's richness. Thus, God serves as the source of human poverty through separation, through His transcendent self-sufficiency, and as the remedy for these human characteristics, through His provision and blessing.

In both the *Ihyā'* and the *maqṣad*, al-Ghazali draws his thinking about poverty from the Qur'an: "God is Needless and you are needy."⁸⁶ The Arabic word used in reference to God (*al-Ghanī*) is contrasted with the neediness of human beings generally, a neediness extending to all of creation. As an attribute of God, *al-Ghanī* indicates not a divine detachment from material wealth, which may increase and decrease frequently, but an utter independence, an ontological needlessness derived from a self-sufficiency that could never be decreased in any way. Those human beings who are wealthy are "without need" of material things, but the absolutely wealthy, God, is without need of all things other than Himself.

Faqr and Embodying *al-Ghanī*: Transcending the Poverty of Existence through Material Poverty

Thus, al-Ghazali rightly points out the restricted nature of human beings, for we are unable to overcome the ontological limitations intrinsic to our poverty of existence. It is possible, however, to transcend these limitations through mystical *praxis*, which involves the embodiment of God's divine attributes. Specifically, the material poverty of *faqr* leads to the development of *zuhd* and then *mustaghni*, which is itself a reflection in the human heart of the absolute

⁸⁶ Q 47:38; the Arabic reads: *Allāh al-Ghanī wa antum al-fuqarā'*

Needlessness indicated by the divine name *al-Ghanī*. Cultivating the reflection of this attribute in the heart enables one to detach from this world, both materially and spiritually, as required for one to attain intimacy with God. The process of purification enabled through the perfection of the character trait of poverty not only informs our understanding of that concept but also instructs us as to al-Ghazali's mystical ethics in general, built around the embodiment of divine attributes.

Al-Ghazali discusses this process only briefly, during his defense of the superiority of poverty over wealth, where he deals with the objection raised by Ibn 'Atā' that "Being rich is better because it is an attribute of God."⁸⁷ Ibn 'Atā' here relies on the literal meaning of the Name of God *al-Ghanī*, arguing that God's attribute of wealth indicates the benefit of wealth for human beings, so long as they use that wealth properly. Al-Ghazali takes a different view, as we have seen, interpreting *al-Ghanī* to mean God's necessary Being, since the idea of God having material wealth is absurd. He states, "if the servant is without need, it is from the possession of property and its general lack, so that these are equal, having it and not having it ... it is not like having the wealth of God Almighty because God Almighty is needless in His essence, not by what possibly decreases."⁸⁸ In this way al-Ghazali joins others in objecting to Ibn 'Ata's statement, arguing that relating God's needlessness to material wealth undermines the Absolute Needlessness of God intended by the term *al-Ghanī*.

⁸⁷ *Iḥyā'* 4; 196 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

⁸⁸ *Iḥyā'* 4; 199 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

Al-Ghazali mentions another objection to Ibn ‘Ata’ based on a different line of reasoning: that human beings cannot participate in God’s attributes because the attributes are too exalted for human beings to approach. In opposition to this idea (as well as to Ibn ‘Ata’s original statement) al-Ghazali asserts, “what is discussed about the attributes of God not being fit for the servant is incorrect; rather, the knowledge of His attributes is an excellent thing for the servant, for the highest degree of servant has been shaped according to the nature of God Almighty.”⁸⁹ He then quotes an anonymous shaykh: “Some shaykh was heard saying, ‘When one follows the path of God Almighty, before he traverses the path the 99 divine names appear as attributes for him,’ meaning that he receives from each of them a share.”⁹⁰ Furthermore, al-Ghazali delineates in his *maqṣad* three levels according to which human beings may come to “share in the meanings of the names of God the most high.”⁹¹

Human beings have the capacity to share in the divine attributes in some way, therefore, and in fact they should pursue them; “the extent to which [the servant] is comfortable with an attribute among his attributes, except the attribute of the knowledge of God, he is estranged from God and from His love.”⁹² Al-Ghazali wishes for the servant to become uncomfortable with his own creaturely attributes, except the attribute of knowing God, through which he attains to the

⁸⁹ *Iḥyā’* 4; 196 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

⁹⁰ *Iḥyā’* 4; 196 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

⁹¹ Al-Ghazali, *al-maqṣad*, ed. Shehadi, 43-4; Burrell, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 31-2.

⁹² *Iḥyā’* 4; 198 (XXXIV, *sh.atr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1). Al-Ghazali here asserts the human capacity to embody the divine names; in chapter three, we will explore this tendency in his thought in more depth, especially as he expresses it in his *al-maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ ma‘ānī asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā*.

love of God.⁹³ So, one gains a share in these attributes through the acquisition of knowledge, which is “as wealth in its truth because it is among the attributes of God Almighty.”⁹⁴ And in relation to the particular attribute of Needlessness, “if having possession of property and lacking it are equal, then there is a kind of wealth which can be attributed to God when compared face to face with the rich man ... and it is excellent.”⁹⁵ If one achieves the state of the one without need in this life, one achieves a kind of spiritual wealth that surpasses the material wealth of the rich man. This spiritual wealth comes through acquiring knowledge and partaking in a share of the divine name *al-Ghanī* by embodying the state of the human heart al-Ghazali has designated *mustaghni*.

Human beings are shaped according to the nature or essence of God; they have been created to resemble God’s essence, and they therefore have the ability to embody imperfectly the attributes God embodies absolutely. More than this, human beings have the obligation to pursue those attributes, as they form the bases of the protective character traits. The pursuit of knowledge lay at the center of the embodiment of these attributes, each of which consists of its own particular knowledge, just as the knowledge pertaining to poverty is made up of recognizing the excellence of poverty and its superiority over wealth, and just as the knowledge pertaining to renunciation is that “the hereafter is better and more lasting.” The acquisition and application of such knowledge is itself the true form of wealth, since it leads to one becoming less reliant on

⁹³ *Iḥyā’* 4; 197 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

⁹⁴ *Iḥyā’* 4; 200 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

⁹⁵ *Iḥyā’* 4; 200 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

this world and more intimate with God. One can be considered wealthy in terms of the level of one's knowledge of the attributes, which itself leads to the internalization of those attributes in the heart, contributing to the heart's purification. Therefore, becoming *mustaghni* is a way of at least partially or temporarily transcending the poverty of existence and achieving spiritual wealth by embodying (to the greatest degree possible) the divine attribute of Needlessness.

Conclusion

The progression from the acceptance of poverty to the pursuit of renunciation to the attainment of the state of *mustaghni* demonstrates the critical and instrumental role of poverty in the process of obtaining knowledge of and intimacy with God. Material poverty may be understood as the means not only to eliminating one's desire for wealth but also to the detachment of one's heart from this world. The rejection of material wealth contributes to one's spiritual formation by means of the effects it has on the heart's relationship with God, indicating a significant connection between the physical actions of the body and the spiritual states of the heart, both of which are informed by the acquisition of knowledge by the human intellect. As al-Ghazali shows in the introductory passage in which this world appears as a tempting woman, the knowledgeable ones are able to see things as they truly are, so they give up material wealth, reject this world, and by virtue of their true vision of this world are able to achieve a true vision of God.

From this we may suggest the material and bodily aspects of the human being have significant impacts on the development of those that are immaterial and spiritual. The action of accepting poverty and enduring it with patience cultivates the character traits of satisfaction,

contentment, and renunciation. The physical act of being materially poor, of possessing only those things required for existence, contributes to one's ultimate proximity to God by enriching one's spirit and transforming one's heart. This is the foundation of al-Ghazali's mystical ethics, which will be explored in more depth in the next chapter. Al-Ghazali wrote the *Ihyā'* as a guide for spiritual *praxis*, a handbook for those wishing to purify their hearts, and the starting place for such a process is action. Of all actions, the pursuit of poverty offers the most visceral results because it removes the means by which one may enjoy the pleasures of this world, it reminds one of the suffering of hell, it brings to one's mind the rewards for patience, and it starts one down the path of God leading to world-renunciation and God-reliance.

In this way the state of *mustaghni* may be interpreted as coinciding with the character trait al-Ghazali treats in the thirty-fifth book of the *Ihyā'*, God-reliance (*tawakkul*). *Tawakkul* emerges from the knowledge that all things ultimately come from God, and the action of relying solely upon God's grace for one's subsistence. It is an extreme form of renunciation according to which the believer places himself "between the hands of God Almighty, whether in motion or in repose, like the corpse in the hands of the washer."⁹⁶ The sublimation of the human will in the divine will results in a seeming identification of the human heart with God, but the poverty of existence cannot be overcome fully because that would require an ontological transformation. It can, however, be transcended through the "tasting" and "witnessing" of God's Being. Glimpses of God's essence are contained in His unveiling, and they lead to the love of God, which in the hereafter translates into bliss or felicity (*sa'āda*). In the next chapter, therefore, poverty will be

⁹⁶ *Ihyā'* 4: 255 (XXXV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 1, *daraja* 1-3).

placed into its proper textual and conceptual context within the *Iḥyā'* in two phases. First, we perform an analysis of al-Ghazali's treatment of poverty in the first three quarters of the *Iḥyā'*; then, we examine poverty within the context of the fourth quarter in order to see how it functions as a significant part of al-Ghazali's mystical ethics, according to which each servant cultivates the love of God in this world and hopes for felicity in the hereafter.

Chapter Three: Poverty as a Means to Loving God

The close reading performed in chapter two identified poverty as a character trait instrumental to the development of a heart detached from this world and oriented towards God and the hereafter. The instrumentality of poverty leads not only to the cultivation of renunciation and detachment but also (eventually) to the love of God (*maḥabba*), which al-Ghazali considers the highest of character traits attained in this world. The discussion of this progression from poverty to love begins early in the *Iḥyā'*, a text devoted to teaching its readers how to acquire the knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) that ultimately produces love. In fact, al-Ghazali begins to introduce his thinking concerning poverty and wealth as early as the fifth book of the *Iḥyā'*, and he devotes one book in each quarter of that text to a new facet of their meanings and relationship.

The current chapter analyzes in two parts al-Ghazali's presentation of poverty in all four quarters of the *Iḥyā'*; both parts of this chapter expand our understanding of poverty in that text and help locate Book XXXIV in its proper textual and conceptual contexts. The first part complements chapter two by looking at al-Ghazali's thought on poverty, wealth, and renunciation in the first three quarters of the *Iḥyā'*. This reveals a conceptual progression in al-Ghazali's thinking, which becomes less tolerant of wealth and its possible benefits as one moves from the first to the fourth quarter, from the obligatory and external to the special and internal aspects of spirituality. The second part then returns to the fourth quarter of the *Iḥyā'*, placing *The Book on Poverty and Renunciation* into the context of the other positive character traits al-Ghazali treats there. Part two brings together the general introduction to al-Ghazali's mystical ethics presented in chapter one with the detailed reading of Book XXXIV performed in chapter two to provide a comprehensive picture of precisely how poverty operates within al-Ghazali's

mystical ethics. Poverty emerges from this analysis as the character trait central to the heart-mirror's shift away from this world and towards God.

Part I – Al-Ghazali on Poverty and Wealth in the First Three Quarters of the *Ihyā'*

Despite his detailed exposition of poverty in Book XXXIV, al-Ghazali also pays substantial attention to it in each of the *Ihyā'*'s other quarters. In the first quarter on acts of worship, *The Book on the Mysteries of Almsgiving (kitāb asrār al-zakāh)* relates directly to the use of wealth in the performance of one's ritual duty to God.¹ The second quarter contains *The Book on the Etiquette of Earning and Livelihood (kitāb adab al-kasb wa'l-ma'āsh)*, which focuses on the appropriate method and mindset one must have about work and income while making one's way in this world. And in the third quarter, *The Book on the Condemnation of Miserliness and Love of Wealth (kitāb ḍamm al-bukhl wa ḍamm ḥubb al-māl)* addresses the vices associated with an overdeveloped attachment to material wealth.²

These four books make up the bulk of the *Ihyā'*'s discussion about poverty; however, al-Ghazali also mentions it in various hadith and *āthār* throughout other books, in order to make points about a wide spectrum of praiseworthy and blameworthy character traits. As a preliminary observation, noted in the previous chapter, one's poverty relates intimately to one's connection

¹ Besides the Arabic text, and due to a lack of better options, I have also used as a general guide the insufficient translation by Nabih Amin Faris, *The Mysteries of Almsgiving* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1980).

² At the time of this writing, there are no available and acceptable English translations of the Book on Earning and Livelihood or the Book on the Condemnation of Stinginess and Love of Wealth. There is a translation of Book XIII, but I have been unable to obtain it and its quality is unknown to me: *The Book of the Proprieties of Earning and Living*, translated by Adi Setia (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2013). I have used as a general guide to sections the English summary made from the Urdu translation of the text by Mawlana Fazlul Karīm.

to wealth. The current chapter reinforces this observation through an analysis of al-Ghazali's treatment of that relationship in the three other books mentioned above. Al-Ghazali's interpretation of the connection between poverty and wealth progresses from the first to the fourth quarters along a line of thinking that begins with the external and legal understanding and moves inward towards the consequences the various levels of poverty and wealth have on the heart. More precisely, as one moves through different stages of spiritual *praxis* and development, one becomes subject to a shifting evaluation of poverty and wealth as good and evil, respectively. According to this program, poverty becomes increasingly superior to wealth at various stages in the process of spiritual purification, until the final cultivation of poverty as a character trait casts wealth as something to be avoided unless absolutely necessary or at a supremely advanced spiritual state. Therefore, the current chapter progresses through these books in a similar manner, in order to chart al-Ghazali's shifting interpretations of poverty and wealth.

Almsgiving and the Purification of Wealth: Book V of the *Ihyā'*

As one of the "pillars of Islam", *zakāh* is fundamental to the practice of believing Muslims; therefore, al-Ghazali treats it in the fifth book of the first quarter of the *Ihyā'* (*rub al-'ibādāt*), called *The Book on the Mysteries of Almsgiving*. He spends much of the chapter discussing specific rules relating to the giving of different kinds of wealth and property, such as livestock, land, and gold and silver. We can still gain a solid understanding of his attitude towards wealth, however, through a brief analysis of the introduction to the book, as well as

other significant passages in which he writes about the principles undergirding his treatment of *zakāh*.

Early in the book, al-Ghazali refers to God as the one who has “reduced [some] to poverty and made [some] rich,” and who “created living creatures from an ejected life-force,³ then was isolated from creation through the attribute of Needlessness (*al-Ghanī*).”⁴ Despite God’s creation and measuring out of this world, the divine attribute *al-Ghanī* keeps God from associating with it directly. This world, in its entirety, is a form of created wealth, both needed and needy in some way or another, so God may not partake in this process. God’s Needlessness contrasts with the contingent existences of human beings, as they depend on God to determine their levels of material poverty and wealth: God “pours out his blessing upon whomever he wills, making him more prosperous by it, so he is made rich, and He impoverishes whoever is unsuccessful in his livelihood, so he is given little, for the purpose of trial and testing.”⁵ Poverty and wealth are among God’s blessings and curses, tools used to test the faith of his human servants; al-Ghazali reiterates this idea in later books of the *Iḥyā’*.

Al-Ghazali sees the obligation of *zakāh* as the primary method of overcoming one’s trials and tribulations in poverty, such as when he states, “He makes clear that, by His grace, his servants are purified by almsgiving, and by it their wealth and property are increased.”⁶ And

³ The Arabic reads *nufḥa tamannu’*, which literally means “rejected semen”.

⁴ *Iḥyā’* 1:215 (*kitāb V, prologue*). Faris reads this as *al-ghina*, but I think using *al-Ghanī* works better due to its inclusion in al-Ghazali’s list of the Divine Names in *al-maqṣad*, his use of this Attribute in Book XXXIV, and its roots in the Qur’an (i.e. 47:38).

⁵ *Iḥyā’* 1:215 (*kitāb V, prologue*).

⁶ *Iḥyā’* 1:215 (*kitāb V, prologue*).

finally, al-Ghazali quotes the Qur'an before commenting on it: "Those who hoard gold and silver, and do not spend it in the way of God, announce to them an excruciating punishment," (9:34) so 'spending in the way of God' means setting aside the right amount of alms."⁷ People *must* give alms, in fact, in order to avoid the punishment that naturally follows the acquisition of wealth. Given the necessity of wealth and property in this world, *zakāh* becomes a ritual obligation for all Muslims, but it also allows human beings to overcome their attachment to wealth through a display of their indifference towards it in almsgiving. As seen in chapter two, it is this detachment that most resembles God's Needlessness and transforms one's material poverty into spiritual wealth.

Al-Ghazali follows this with a detailed account of the measures of different kinds of almsgiving, and then he presents and explores an idea that shapes the way he views poverty and informs most explicitly our own reading of the thirty-fourth book. In a section on the "interior etiquette concerning almsgiving" he states, "Wealth is beloved by people because it is the means by which they enjoy this world and because of [wealth] they are intimate with this world and they are averse to death, even though through [death] the beloved (God) is met. So, they test the affirmation of their devotion to the beloved, and they surrender the wealth which is their [earthly] attention and affection."⁸

Al-Ghazali introduces here two concepts fundamental to his understanding of the relationship between poverty and wealth. First, he indicates that wealth is the *means* to the

⁷ *Iḥyā'* 1:215 (*kitāb* V, *prologue*).

⁸ *Iḥyā'* 1:220 (*kitāb* V, *faṣl* 2, *bayān* 2, *waḥīfa* 1, *ma'nā* 1).

enjoyment of and distraction with this world; wealth provides the context in which human beings may become caught up in something other than God. Second, he asserts that giving up wealth helps to alleviate this distraction with the world and to demonstrate one's devotion to God. In the context of this fifth book, the surrender of wealth is for the most part mandatory according to Islamic law; however, later in the book and in the *Ihyā'*, this principle continues to guide al-Ghazali's thinking about the significance of poverty's role in self-purification. Third, al-Ghazali points out that while wealth maintains life, the giving up of wealth reminds human beings of their mortality despite the fact that they will only meet God after their lives end. The second part of this chapter expands upon this idea, but it is important to note that even at this early juncture al-Ghazali sets the stage for poverty's relationship to the intimate encounter with God he describes in the fourth quarter of the *Ihyā'*.

Shortly after this discussion, al-Ghazali lays out three tiers of piety, which not only relate to almsgiving but also seem to correspond to the levels of poverty and renunciation from Book XXXIV. The first and highest group "surrendered all of their wealth and did not hoard even a dinar or a dirham. So they refused to undertake the duty of almsgiving."⁹ They take it upon themselves to give away all of their wealth, and do not think about *zakāh* because such a modest duty does not come close to the level of renunciation (*zuhd*) they have achieved. The second group "withholds their wealth until the arrival of the time of need and the season of giving ... these people do not limit themselves according to the prescribed amount of almsgiving," because they choose instead to go beyond it. These people do not renounce their wealth, nor are they

⁹ *Ihyā'* 1:220 (*kitāb* V, *faṣl* 2, *bayān* 2, *waḥīfa* 1, *ma'nā* 1).

stingy in their almsgiving. The members of the third group “confine themselves to the performance of what is required [meaning the *zakāh*] ... because of their stinginess and strong love for wealth, and their weak love for the hereafter.”¹⁰

Al-Ghazali presents these levels in terms of their relationships to the pillar of almsgiving, but they aid our reading of Book XXXIV as well. The highest levels in both cases pertain to those who renounce wealth or otherwise detach themselves from it, which ultimately releases one from performing the duty of almsgiving because of one’s comprehensive rejection of all wealth. The second level mentioned here assumes one has wealth, making it more difficult to find a parallel for it in Book XXXIV. It could perhaps correspond to the levels of the satisfied and the content, although these are levels of poverty; either way, the relationship to wealth is similar, since both here and in the thirty-fourth book the middle levels consist of an attachment to wealth born of a need that conflicts with the desire to go beyond what is merely required of one regarding almsgiving or poverty. The lowest levels also resemble one another; although in the present book the members of the lowest group perform their Muslim duty, al-Ghazali makes it clear that they are stingy and lovers of wealth, which corresponds closely to the category of the greedy.

One final section of the fifth book provides context for al-Ghazali’s continuing discussion of poverty. As part of a section describing the acceptable recipients of *zakāh*, he differentiates between two kinds of poor, both of whom are eligible to receive alms. The poverty-stricken man (*al-faqīr*) “has no wealth, nor power to earn a living; if he has his daily sustenance and his

¹⁰ *Iḥyā’* 1:220 (*kitāb* V, *faṣl* 2, *bayān* 2, *wazīfa* 1, *ma’nā* 1).

necessary clothing, then he is not poverty-stricken but he is a poor man (*miskīn*).”¹¹ This latter person holds his position because his “income is not sufficient to cover his expenses,” meaning that his status as poor man is relative to his status in society.¹² The former lacks even the ability to work, whether due to injury or illness, while the latter works and still cannot satisfy more than his most basic needs.

This dichotomy applies to *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation* as well, for al-Ghazali includes the *miskīn* among the levels of poverty, although he discounts it as involuntary poverty, which does not contribute to one’s self-purification. The *faqīr*, as one who embodies poverty, possesses a deeper level of poverty, and at least in the thirty-fourth book does so willingly. It is unclear in the fifth book whether there is a difference concerning one’s willingness, although it seems that both the *faqīr* and the *miskīn* occupy those conditions involuntarily. Both are equally deserving of alms, however, as long as the *miskīn* does not own anything superfluous to his needs that he could sell to pay for expenses. Therefore, while these terms do not correspond directly to the way al-Ghazali uses them in the thirty-fourth book, their presence this early in the *Ihyā’* hints at the possibility of a progression from its beginning to its end.

Although the discussion of poverty itself is limited within *The Book on the Mysteries of Almsgiving*, it provides some important context for understanding and interpreting poverty throughout the remainder of the *Ihyā’*. Of particular note is the notion that the surrender of wealth works as an act of purification; in this book al-Ghazali argues for the possibility that one

¹¹ *Ihyā’* 1:228 (*kitāb* V, *faṣl* 3, *bayān* 1, *ṣinf* 1).

¹² *Ihyā’* 1:228 (*kitāb* V, *faṣl* 3, *bayān* 1, *ṣinf* 2).

may purify one's wealth through the duty of *zakāh*, but as we progress to later books we find that he extends this idea to its extreme limit in his understanding of poverty as a state of the heart and a protective character trait.¹³ At this early stage, and for all Muslims, since all Muslims must perform their ritual duty of almsgiving, material wealth is a necessary part of religious life. In fact, it aids in one's spiritual purification here, even if this occurs by giving it up; one uses part of one's material wealth to purify the remainder of it, an admission of its necessity (and possibly even importance) to human life. The ability to go beyond the required amount of alms, or even to gain an exemption through renunciation of all wealth, however, foreshadows al-Ghazali's later treatment of wealth as a detriment to spiritual purification, despite its role in the purification of material goods.

The Necessity of Earning a Living and the Attitude towards Wealth: Book XIII of the *Ihyā'*

Al-Ghazali continues the progression of his thinking about poverty and wealth in the third book of the second quarter of the *Ihyā'*, which deals with the issues of earning a living (*kasb*) and maintaining a livelihood (*ma'āsh*). As part of the quarter of the *Ihyā'* dealing with every day actions (*rub al-'ādāt*), book thirteen takes a practical perspective on the necessity of working and earning money in this world. Accordingly, wealth receives a more lenient treatment in this book than in the others analyzed here; its necessity in the lives of most people requires a system according to which wealth is not seen as inherently evil. Al-Ghazali's presentation of wealth and poverty does not, however, deviate from his general interpretation of that

¹³ In fact the literal translation of *zakāh* into English would be "to cleanse," or "purification," so the connection made here by al-Ghazali is a common one.

relationship, as he continually reminds the reader of the preference for the hereafter over this world.

For instance, in the introduction to the thirteenth book, al-Ghazali states, “[God] made the hereafter the abode of rewards and punishments, and this world the abode of efforts and troubles and work and earning. Working in this world is sufficient for the hereafter without livelihood, but livelihood is the means to the hereafter and its seed, and this world is the field of the hereafter and the path to it.”¹⁴ This sums up what he says throughout the rest of the book; working leads one to the hereafter if done in an honorable way. In fact, one can even view earning a living as a means to the hereafter, in a similar way to poverty, since it constitutes the proper use of one’s abilities in this world.

All of this is tempered, of course, by al-Ghazali’s defining teleological emphasis, which colors his view of all actions in this world. Thus, al-Ghazali immediately lays out a hierarchy of human beings in relation to work that resembles the one we saw in the fifth book in relation to almsgiving:

People are of three kinds: (1) the man whose livelihood distracts him from his return [to God in the hereafter] – he is among those who will be destroyed; (2) the man whose return distracts him from his livelihood – he is among those who will be triumphant; (3) the closest to moderation is the third, who works at his livelihood in devotion to his return – he is among those who adopt a middle course. He who does not persist in the pursuit of livelihood necessary for expenses will not obtain the rank of moderation, nor will he rise from the pursuit of this world to the way of the hereafter and its means unless he is educated in his pursuit by the norms of the *shari‘a*.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Iḥyā’* 2:62 (*kitāb* XIII, introduction).

¹⁵ *Iḥyā’* 2:62 (*kitāb* XIII, introduction).

This short passage contains the principles according to which al-Ghazali evaluates the necessary human act of working for a living. Despite its connection to wealth, earning a livelihood aids one's pursuit of the hereafter, as long as one's work is guided by Islamic legal prescriptions. Al-Ghazali describes this as the middle course; while distraction with the pursuit of worldly things is clearly pernicious, and complete renunciation of this world is only fit for the few who will not be troubled by its difficulties, this middle course fits the majority of believers, to whom al-Ghazali appeals throughout the *Iḥyā'*, and especially in this quarter about daily actions.

Al-Ghazali continues beyond the introduction by detailing the different kinds of commerce, manufacturing, and livelihood acceptable to Muslims. The reader gets a sense of the necessity, and even the inherent good, of working and earning money. For instance, he quotes the Prophet Muhammad, "God loves the servant who undertakes a profession in order to manage by it without [help from] the people, and He hates the servant who learns knowledge, undertaking it as a profession."¹⁶ This seems to denigrate begging and glorify working for a living, a duality we saw in the last chapter to be fairly complicated, and on which al-Ghazali refines his position later in the *Iḥyā'*. It also presents an interesting take on the value of knowledge; while al-Ghazali clearly values the pursuit of knowledge, here as in the first book we find him warning against that pursuit for its own sake. The contexts of the different books help explain this shift; the place of the thirteenth book in the second quarter of the *Iḥyā'* leads one to believe that it addresses the concept of wealth from the perspective of external realities. As we will see shortly, however, at the internal level of the heart the relative benefits of wealth and

¹⁶ *Iḥyā'* 2:63 (*kitāb XIII, bāb 1*).

poverty take on a different calculus in relation to the believer's association with this world and the hereafter.

Although he takes a much more positive view of wealth in this chapter, given its necessity in performing one's religious duties, supporting one's family, and caring for one's physical body, al-Ghazali does not praise it in a way that is inconsistent with his larger goal in the *Ihyā'*. In fact, the final section of the book concerns the necessity of the tradesman to remain anxious about his relationship to the hereafter. He likens the man who becomes distracted with his work to one who trades the hereafter for riches in this life; this man's "life is wretched and a poor transaction," since he cannot be redeemed by this world but only in the hereafter.¹⁷ Even in a book on the necessity of work and its benefits in this world, al-Ghazali emphasizes the primacy of the next world and one's engagement in working towards it; although believers should work to avoid relying on others' generosity, that work should always be limited by the pursuit of the hereafter.

Moreover, al-Ghazali cautions, "the discerning man knows to be worried about his soul, since his worry about his soul is the apex of his wealth, and the apex of his wealth is his religion and his working in it."¹⁸ Here al-Ghazali alludes to the existence of various degrees of poverty and wealth, as discussed in chapter two. The apex of wealth mentioned here can be understood only as a spiritual wealth, obtained through developing one's religion by working to purify oneself through a process detailed in later books of the *Ihyā'*. The self-purification that

¹⁷ *Ihyā'* 2:84 (*kitāb XIII, bāb 5*).

¹⁸ *Ihyā'* 2:84 (*kitāb XIII, bāb 5*).

constitutes the heart of al-Ghazali's mystical ethics occurs not only in relation to wealth, but also in relation to other aspects of creation that pull human beings toward this world and away from God and the hereafter. Despite the practical emphasis of Book XIII, therefore, al-Ghazali remains consistent in his interpretation and presentation of wealth and poverty by inserting allusions to this higher, interior kind of wealth.

Thus, the hierarchy al-Ghazali presents at the beginning of the book by laying out the various spiritual levels of those who work for their living represents something more universal in relation to poverty and wealth and how they impact one's relationship with this world and the hereafter. Like the levels al-Ghazali details concerning *zakāh*, these three levels resemble the many presented in Book XXXIV, where he describes poverty and renunciation with a similar tripartite structure of distraction with this world to the detriment of one's proximity to God, distraction with God to the extent one leaves this world behind, and a moderate level of satisfaction with one's state in this world, with the hope of escaping from the hellfire and growing closer to God in the hereafter. As al-Ghazali turns toward the science of the heart in the third and fourth quarters of the *Ihyā'*, however, he begins to present the dichotomy between poverty and wealth in starker terms that mirror the one between this world and the hereafter.

Therefore, distraction with this world destroys people, as we shall see in our analysis of the twenty-seventh book, and the return to God in the hereafter is the ultimate and only true goal. The method of rising above this world and achieving victory in the next is through, at least initially, following the precepts laid out in the shari'a, which governs the external aspects of Muslim life. At this point in the *Ihyā'*, al-Ghazali does not yet move beyond this external level to any significant degree because he speaks to the concerns of the majority of Muslims; in quarter

three, he turns to a discussion of damaging character traits that he expects the elect to remove from their hearts.

Love of Wealth as the Means to Other Sins

As shown in chapter one, al-Ghazali moves in the first few books of the third quarter of the *Ihyā'* to a discussion of the heart, its purification, and the specific character traits one should eliminate from it. The general principle of this process lays in the use of opposites against one another in order to strike the right balance for the sake of virtuous action and transformation of the heart. He applies this principle throughout the rest of the third quarter of the *Ihyā'*, allowing it to determine his choices of topics to address. This bears on our interpretation of poverty in several places. First, he identifies wealth (*māl*) as one of four veils making up the barrier between the disciple and God.¹⁹ Second, he names wealth and fame together as the third most dangerous desires of the human soul, after the urges for food and sex; at the same time, he points toward his reason for including poverty as one of the character traits, since he views wealth as a “means to the expansion of one’s desires for sex and food,” identifying the instrumental nature of wealth to sin and of poverty to piety.²⁰

Third, and perhaps most important for our study, he devotes the entire twenty-seventh book of the *Ihyā'* to condemning miserliness and the love of wealth. Once again, the introduction to the book presents the principles al-Ghazali applies and refines throughout the rest of its pages;

¹⁹ *Ihyā'* 3:72 (*kitāb XXII, bayān 11*).

²⁰ *Ihyā'* 3:76 (*kitāb XXII, bayān 11*).

he states, “the temptations of this world are many . . . but wealth is the most significant of its temptations and the greatest of its trials.”²¹ God created the trial of wealth and livelihood as a way to test His servants and force them to remove themselves from the constant vacillation of the heart between many states, such as wealth and poverty, fortune and insolvency, and miserliness and generosity.²² In fact, wealth constitutes one of the most significant challenges to polishing the heart, due to wealth’s necessity and the ease with which human beings may, through wealth’s great usefulness, become attached to this world at the expense of the hereafter. The twenty-seventh book, then, shows us the nature of this difficulty and provides clues to the importance of poverty in countering it.

As a general rule, “[wealth] possesses both benefits and harms; its benefits are among those things leading to protection from hellfire, and its harms are among those things leading to destruction.”²³ God tests human beings with both poverty and prosperity, each of which has its own difficulties and benefits; in poverty one can be either content or greedy, and greed manifests itself as either envy or industriousness. On the other hand, prosperity leads either to the hoarding of wealth or generosity, the latter of which results in either extravagance or moderation. The analysis of Book XXXIV tells us al-Ghazali considers the rich man who hoards wealth the worst of these possibilities, while the greedy poor man follows close behind. The best of these paths is

²¹ *Iḥyā’* 3:225 (*kitāb* XXVII, prologue).

²² *Iḥyā’* 3:225 (*kitāb* XXVII, prologue).

²³ *Iḥyā’* 3:225 (*kitāb* XXVII, prologue).

to be a contented poor man or an extravagantly generous rich man, which al-Ghazali compared to one another in Book XXXIV, ultimately declaring the poor man superior in piety.

Notably, al-Ghazali does not mention here the possibility of detachment from wealth, such as that characterizing the renunciant or the one without need from Book XXXIV. Again we find evidence of al-Ghazali's progressive presentation of his ideas throughout the *Iḥyā'*; this is not the place for him to bring in a discussion of *zuhd* or *mustaghni* because he remains at the external level of discussion. He does not yet consider the positive character traits of the heart, among which these higher degrees of poverty and renunciation belong. Therefore, this categorization reinforces what we have already demonstrated regarding al-Ghazali's attitude towards poverty and wealth, while at the same time informing our reading of the rest of book twenty-seven.

Al-Ghazali continues to build his conceptualization of wealth with the support of several Qur'anic verses: "wealth is both good and evil, and it is praiseworthy when it is good, and it is blameworthy when it is evil; it is neither purely good nor purely evil ... its dignity comes when it acquires food and clothing, necessary for maintaining the body, which is necessary for maintaining the soul."²⁴ Wealth is praiseworthy insofar as it is put to use for praiseworthy ends, and it is blameworthy insofar as its use goes beyond this and into the realm of the blameworthy; wealth, then, is an instrument to be used in one way or another, determined by the will of the person who possesses it.²⁵ Used positively, such as in maintaining one's physical body,

²⁴ *Iḥyā'* 3:228 (*kitāb XXVII, bayān 2*).

²⁵ *Iḥyā'* 3:229-30 (*kitāb XXVII, bayān 2*).

contributing to charity, or paying for pilgrimage or holy war, wealth may contribute to one's escape from the hellfire. In books five and thirteen, al-Ghazali explored the positive aspects of wealth as people use it to satisfy their ritual duties and earn it in accordance with the shari'a; however, those books remain at the external level of interpretation, so they do not provide a complete view of al-Ghazali's thinking concerning poverty and wealth.

Book twenty-seven, therefore, houses the presentation of wealth's pernicious attributes; al-Ghazali goes to a deeper level by thinking through the ways in which wealth eats away at one's heart, despite its usefulness for religion and daily life. Wealth's dangers consist in three things: it leads to sin, it leads to the acceptance of permissible things, and its maintenance distracts from the remembrance of God.²⁶ Again, wealth plays an *instrumental* role in the destruction of the servant through his distraction from the hereafter and God. The love of wealth should be treated with its opposite action, which al-Ghazali identifies as generosity; using wealth for its proper purpose, which is to help those in need, cultivates in one an appropriate relationship to one's wealth.²⁷ If one is comfortable with giving away one's wealth freely, one has taken the first step towards detaching oneself from its grasp on the heart.

Ultimately, wealth is seen as more dangerous than poverty, although poverty may for some lead to greed for what they lack. As long as this can be avoided, poverty should be pursued by earning only what is necessary to survive, although al-Ghazali recognizes here (and in book thirty-four) the existence of varying degrees of poverty. If greed tempts a person, he should

²⁶ *Iḥyā'* 3:236 (*kitāb XXVII, bayān 5, amr 2*).

²⁷ *Iḥyā'* 3:251-8 (*kitāb XXVII, bayān 10-13*).

counter it with patience, curtailed hope, the knowledge of the benefits of contentment, and the avoidance of hoarding wealth.²⁸ These actions “are able to engender the creation of contentment, and the pillar of power is patience and the reduction of hope, as well as to know that the result of his patience for a few days in this world will be the enjoyment of long eons [in the hereafter].”²⁹ Thus action combined with knowledge produces the state of contentment with poverty, which makes up a critical stage in the progression towards happiness in the hereafter.

Therefore, according to al-Ghazali’s general system of treating vices, the dangers of wealth must be countered through the acceptance (and eventual pursuit) of poverty. This helps explain the intimate relationship al-Ghazali develops between poverty and renunciation, since he views wealth as the gateway to sins involving the belly and sexual desire; the acceptance of poverty eliminates the desire to achieve one’s other, baser cravings, and it allows one to address these more fundamental aspects of this world’s hold on the soul. Thus, poverty becomes in the formula of al-Ghazali’s mystical ethics a necessary stage in the process of moving towards God, since any remaining wealth will, to the degree that it remains, tempt one to other sins. And the removal of wealth conversely decreases one’s ability, and thus one’s desire, to sin, freeing one to focus on further purification of the self.

This also brings to light al-Ghazali’s progressive presentation of the relationship between wealth and poverty. In Book XXVII, wealth has taken on a much more negative connotation than in the earlier books in which it was discussed. But this shift must be seen as one of degrees, not

²⁸ *Iḥyā’* 3:235-7 (*kitāb* XXVII, *bayān* 5).

²⁹ *Iḥyā’* 3:237 (*kitāb* XXVII, *bayān* 5, *amr* 5).

as one of kind. Al-Ghazali consistently presents wealth (and poverty) as relative concepts, their blameworthiness or praiseworthiness determined by the servant's use of them in pursuit of this world and God, respectively. Once al-Ghazali turns to the interior life, however, wealth becomes a more dangerous character trait, as hearts are more easily swayed than bodies, the actions of which follow the states of hearts. In this context, mystical *praxis* means knowing the dangers inherent to wealth and putting this knowledge into action through the pursuit of poverty as a character trait. It is in the fourth and final quarter of the *Ihyā'* that al-Ghazali takes up this pursuit; poverty makes up a critical stage in the movement toward loving God in this world and achieving the felicity that results from the direct vision of God in the hereafter.

Part II – *Faqr* and the Path to Loving God: Poverty and *Praxis* in the *Ihyā'*s Fourth Quarter

While the first three quarters of the *Ihyā'* provide greater detail about poverty through the books discussed above, the location of Book XXXIV in the fourth quarter necessitates paying closer attention not only to what al-Ghazali says about poverty there but also to what he says about the character traits surrounding poverty. If al-Ghazali intended the *Ihyā'* as a guide to spiritual *praxis*, an exposition on his own *'ilm al-mu'āmalā*, then its fourth quarter contains the character traits he views as praiseworthy enough to cultivate in the heart. In the context of the present study, this means these character traits reflect divine attributes in the hearts of men, whose self-purification al-Ghazali characterizes as a polishing of the heart's mirror, as discussed in chapter one. Poverty represents one character trait among others, and locating it in relation to the others helps to clarify its role in this process of self-purification and reflection.

We may understand the process of *'ilm al-mu'āmalā* better by placing it into the context of al-Ghazali's broader thought. He addresses the concept of mystical *praxis* in many places, but as I asserted in chapter one he grounds it in a theological position advocating for self-purification as a method of becoming more like God by embodying the divine attributes, a position he puts forward explicitly in his *al-maqṣad al-asnā*. In that text, he describes three modes of knowing the meanings of God's names: the first is "a knowledge of those meanings by way of witnessing (*mushāhada*) and unveiling (*mukāshafa*)" so that one has no doubt about them; the second "belongs to those who so highly esteem what is disclosed to them ... [that it] releases a longing to possess this attribute in every way possible to them, so that they may grow closer to the Truth;" and the third involves "the effort to acquire whatever is possible of those attributes, to imitate them and be adorned with their good qualities, for in this way man becomes 'lordly' – that is, close to the Lord most high."³⁰

Here, al-Ghazali indicates not only that there are different levels of sharing in God's attributes, but also that human beings have the capacity to possess those very attributes in some way native to their beings. In fact, the extent to which one embodies these attributes is the extent to which one attains proximity to God, by virtue of becoming more like God. In applying this process to *'ilm al-mu'āmalā*, we may say that the polishing of the mirror of the heart equates to preparing oneself to receive the attributes of God; however, one begins the polishing itself by behaving in ways that align with the attributes of God. If one would like to cultivate the trait of

³⁰ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *al-maqṣad al-'asnā fī sharḥ ma'āni 'asmā' Allāhu al-ḥusnā*, edited by Fadlou A. Shehadi (Beyrouth: Dar al-Machreq, 1971): 43-4; David Burrell, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992): 31-2.

generosity, for instance, and to enshrine in one's heart the attribute corresponding to the divine name *al-Karīm*, then one would behave generously to others in order to cultivate this trait in the heart.

This process takes place fully within one's attempt to cultivate each individual character trait, and therefore within the *'ilm al-mu'āmalā*, but it also occurs at a more general level in the relationship between the science of practice and the science of unveiling. As we can see from the *al-maqṣad* quotations above, unveiling occurs early in the process of embodying the divine names, but al-Ghazali also makes it clear in the *Iḥyā'* that "the goal of the science of practice (*'ilm al-mu'āmalā*) is unveiling (*mukāshafa*)."³¹ The science of unveiling, then, forms a complement to the science of *praxis* in al-Ghazali's thought, as detailed in chapter one; unveiling and *praxis* exist within an interdependent cycle in his mystical ethics, so that one receives knowledge about how to obtain the attributes of God, and the pursuit of those attributes results in more and more perfect unveiling. This unveiling does not occur suddenly, but constantly; therefore, the polishing of the heart simply makes visible the content of what is being unveiled, which then reflects itself in a person's actions.

As an interpretive lens through which to read *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation*, what al-Ghazali says about the science of unveiling establishes an epistemological framework through which poverty can be conceptualized as something more than the lack of material wealth. This reinforces the conception of God as the Absolutely Needless (*al-Ghanī*), in relation to whom creation is utterly impoverished. Human beings can never fully overcome their poverty

³¹ *Iḥyā'* 1:58 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 5, *wazīfa* 6).

of existence, as that would mean becoming ontologically self-sufficient, but they do have the capacity to transcend it through direct encounters with the divine presence. The experience of God resembles deification, but it is in fact a shift in the perspective according to which one knows the world, an epistemological transformation allowing one to share in God's knowledge of things as they truly are.

Since knowledge must always lead to practice for al-Ghazali, the science of practice forms the context of mystical ethics within which poverty makes up an important locus for the interplay between theoretical and practical knowledge, as a turning point from this world to the next world. Al-Ghazali explicitly addresses poverty in relation to its material rather than its ontological significance, however, since material wealth constitutes one of the most dangerous temptations that distract human beings from the love of God. Therefore, we have arrived at a position from which to interpret poverty's operation in al-Ghazali's mystical ethics. Further analysis of the other character traits al-Ghazali discusses in the *Ihyā'*'s fourth quarter elucidates both poverty's universality, representative of the pursuit of divine attributes, and its singularity, as the primary means by which believers erode their attachment to the things of this world, not only material wealth but also the heart's other, baser desires and temptations.

On Loving God: Poverty's Teleology of Love in the Fourth Quarter of the *Ihyā'*

The knowledge of God unveiled at the end of the process of self-purification leads to the love of God (*maḥabba*), which al-Ghazali considers the highest attainment of the Muslim in this life. This process may best be viewed as an interdependent combination of mystical *praxis* and *theoria* that involves gaining a greater understanding of *tawḥīd* by conforming one's heart to that

very unity through the embodiment of divine attributes, represented in the *Ihyā'* by the protective character traits of the fourth quarter. In this context the significance of poverty to this process will come to light as instrumental to the elimination of one's love for the world and the cultivation of one's love for God. Ultimately, however, this love pales in comparison with what one finds in the hereafter of felicity (*sa'āda*), which emerges from the direct witnessing (*mushāhada*) of God and is directly proportional to the degrees of knowledge and love of God achieved in this life.

Al-Ghazali constructs the fourth quarter as a form of spiritual itinerary, which consists of an inter-related set of character traits categorized according to both the importance al-Ghazali places upon each one and their association with certain other character traits. Therefore repentance (*tawba*) begins the process of purifying the heart, patience (*ṣabr*) and thankfulness (*shukr*) shape one's responses to trials and boons, fear (*khawf*) and hope (*rajā'*) characterize one's outlook regarding the hereafter and God, and poverty (*faqr*) and renunciation (*zuhd*) demonstrate the degrees of one's attachment to or detachment from this world. The extremely important character traits of divine unity (*tawhīd*) and God-reliance (*tawakkul*) describe the extent to which one identifies with God's essence and will, respectively. The final stage is the love of God (*maḥabba*), which then produces a number of secondary character traits, such as longing (*'ishq*), intimacy (*uns*), and contentment (*riḍā'*).

The way in which al-Ghazali organizes these character traits into books in the fourth quarter seems to indicate that he believes some of them are more closely related than others. For instance, al-Ghazali groups patience and thankfulness in the same book (XXXII) due to their special connection to one another as responses to similar circumstances. And *The Book of*

Poverty and Renunciation leads directly into the *kitāb al-tawhīd wa 'l-tawakkul*, demonstrating the critical role of poverty in the movement from world-attachment to God-reliance. Things are not so simple as that, however, since al-Ghazali consistently cross-references character traits, and it quickly becomes clear that poverty is intimately related to others besides renunciation, such as patience, thankfulness, and God-reliance, not to mention the tangential relationships between poverty, fear, hope, and repentance. Such complexity necessitates the sorting out of poverty's precise function in al-Ghazali's mystical ethics, accomplished through a brief tour of each character trait and an analysis of its relationship to poverty.

Al-Ghazali begins the fourth quarter with *The Book on Repentance (kitāb al-tawba)*, early in which he states, "repentance from sins is ... the starting point of the path of the seekers, the capital of the prosperous, the first step of the disciples, the key to straightening the bent, and the beginning of the selection and election of the ones who are near [to God]."³² Repentance must precede all of the other character traits because it is the process by which one absolves oneself of sins; it does not end after one act of penitence, however, as it is rather an ongoing process that applies to the totality of the spiritual quest.³³ Therefore, al-Ghazali states, "For the future, it involves the determination to abandon forever the sin which causes alienation from the Beloved."³⁴ Not only must one regret one's past sins and avoid committing them in the present,

³² *Ihyā'* 4:2 (*kitāb XXXI*, introduction).

³³ *Ihyā'* 4:3 (*kitāb XXXI*, *rukn 1*, *bayān 1*).

³⁴ *Ihyā'* 4:3 (*kitāb XXXI*, *rukn 1*, *bayān 1*).

one must also refrain forever from sinning in the same way. In fact, *tawba* is built upon the knowledge that sins are themselves barriers between the human and the divine.³⁵

Once one realizes “that it is the means to eternal bliss ... that what keeps him away from encountering God is following the lusts and fondness for this ephemeral world and the pursuit of affection for something with which he inevitably must part ... then there is no doubt that renunciation of the path leading away [from God] is obligatory in order to achieve closeness to Him.”³⁶ Just as we have argued that poverty constitutes the concrete turn away from this world and towards God, so repentance makes up the very beginning of this process, the recognition of one’s sin and the drive to leave it behind. This is why al-Ghazali compares repentance to renunciation, the highest level of poverty, in Book XXXIV: “repentance is a term that indicates the leaving behind of forbidden things, and renunciation is a term indicating the leaving behind of permissible actions.”³⁷ Just as repentance signals a shift from one’s delusion about sin to the acceptance of one’s imperfections, so poverty indicates a second shift from leaving behind the forbidden to leaving behind the permissible, rooted in an effort to become even closer to God and to eliminate all hold this world may have on the heart.

Although one may not pursue poverty without first repenting, repentance cannot be perfected except through the development of patience, which has a much more direct relationship with poverty.³⁸ In *The Book on Patience and Thankfulness (kitāb al-ṣabr wa’l-shukr)* al-Ghazali

³⁵ *Iḥyā’* 4:2 (*kitāb XXXI*, introduction).

³⁶ *Iḥyā’* 4:3 (*kitāb XXXI*, *rukn 1*, *bayān 1*).

³⁷ *Iḥyā’* 4:212 (*kitāb XXXIV*, *shaṭr 2*, *bayān 1*).

³⁸ *Iḥyā’* 4:59 (*kitāb XXXI*, *rukn 4*, *aṣl 2*, *q. 2*).

defines patience (*ṣabr*) as the victory of the religious impulse (*bā'ith al-dīn*) of the heart over its impulse of desire (*bā'ith al-hawā*).³⁹ Therefore, patience takes on different forms in relation to different desires of the heart: “When [patience means renouncing luxuries] beyond the necessities of life, it is called ‘renunciation’ (*zuhd*); its opposite is greed (*hirs*). When patience means living in proportion to the meagerness of one’s fortune, it is called ‘satisfaction’ (*qanā'a*); and gluttony (*sharah*) is its opposite.”⁴⁰ Here we find reference to the names given to patience in relation to two of the five levels of poverty discussed in the previous chapter, helping to deepen our understanding of those terms. Renunciation becomes not only a level of poverty but also a level of patience with the giving up of everything unnecessary for subsistence; likewise, satisfaction consists not in giving up one’s wealth, but rather in remaining satisfied with the limits of one’s wealth and not seeking to increase it.

Furthermore, here in Book XXXII, al-Ghazali discusses the difference between patience in poverty and patience in prosperity, just as he did in *The Book on Poverty and Renunciation*. Thus, “the true man is whoever is patient with well-being ... this patience is connected to thankfulness, and it is fulfilled only through undertaking true thankfulness.”⁴¹ Here, as in Book XXXIV, al-Ghazali writes, “all that has been related concerning the excellence of poverty points to the excellence of patience, for patience is the state of the poor man, and thankfulness is the state of the rich man.”⁴² Just as he declares poverty to be more excellent than wealth, al-Ghazali

³⁹ *Iḥyā'* 4:62 (*kitāb XXXII, shaṭr 1, bayān 2*).

⁴⁰ *Iḥyā'* 4:65 (*kitāb XXXII, shaṭr 1, bayān 4*).

⁴¹ *Iḥyā'* 4:69 (*kitāb XXXII, shaṭr 1, bayān 6, naw' 1*).

⁴² *Iḥyā'* 4:133 (*kitāb XXXII, shaṭr 2, rukn 3, bayān 3, maqām 1*).

also declares patience more excellent than thankfulness, due to their respective relationships with those traits.

He does not stop here, however, because the excellence of patience is determined for the common people, while those who have insight and knowledge consider each situation in its particularity. Thankfulness can at times be superior to patience, and in fact it is if one is not only patient with but also thankful for one's poverty, or if one recognizes God as the source of all gifts, and the knowledge of God as the only true giver and gift. This treatment of thankfulness reminds one of the level above *zuhd*, that of the "one without need," who remains indifferent towards wealth and its earthly benefits. The thankful person, like this detached one, recognizes that God gives to whom He wills and that the purpose of this life (including material wealth) is to ascertain knowledge of God and happiness in the hereafter.

While the progression towards thankfulness involves one's response to trials and rewards, among which are wealth and poverty, al-Ghazali presents a similar dichotomy in *The Book of Fear and Hope (kitāb al-khawf wa 'l-rajā')*.⁴³ Early on he provides a definition of the two terms fear (*khawf*) and hope (*rajā'*): "if the existence of something in the future occurs to your mind and prevails over your heart, it is called expectation and anticipation. If the thing is abhorred, with pain in the heart resulting from it, it is called fear and distress. If it is something desired, with pleasure and relief of heart resulting from the expectation of it and the attachment of the heart to it and the occurrence of its existence to your mind, that relief is hope."⁴⁴ Fear and hope

⁴³ *Iḥyā'* 4:138-84 (*kitāb XXXIII*).

⁴⁴ *Iḥyā'* 4:139 (*kitāb XXXIII, shaṭr 1, bayān 1*).

apply to anything, however, meaning on the one hand that one may fear one's earthly fate or hope for the extension of life; on the other hand, one may fear the fires of hell and God's justice, or one may hope for the rewards of paradise and God's mercy.

Therefore, fear and hope seem to make up one's emotional orientation to the future, while patience and thankfulness correspond to one's responses to a present state. One's willingness to have patience, or to express gratitude, derives from one's fear of God's wrath or hope for God's mercy. Similarly, in Book XXXIV, al-Ghazali points to hope as both dangerous and helpful. In relation to the hoarding of wealth, he states, "that one stores up for 40 days and what is beyond is included in great hope," meaning one who hoards so much wealth clearly hopes for his life to extend long enough to use it.⁴⁵ This hope can be damaging, and those who wish to become renunciants must beware, since "al-Thawri said, 'renunciation is the shortness of hope.'"⁴⁶ Hope may also be a positive trait, as al-Ghazali states, "that one renounces desire for the rewards of God and his bliss and the promised pleasures of his Paradise ... is the renunciation of the hopeful ones."⁴⁷ So, hope for the hereafter can lead one to renounce this world, while hope for a longer stay in this world will lead one to pursue the means by which to extend one's life, namely material wealth.

Al-Ghazali does not establish as intimate a connection between fear and poverty as between hope and poverty. He does consider fear a motivation to pursue poverty, however, as he

⁴⁵ *Iḥyā'* 4:201 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 5, daraja 2*).

⁴⁶ *Iḥyā'* 4:223 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 3, faṣl 3*).

⁴⁷ *Iḥyā'* 4:221 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 3, faṣl 2, daraja 2*).

states, “each one who abandons from this world anything according to his choice, out of fear for his heart and for his religion, then his is entry into renunciation to the extent of what he abandons.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, most people tend towards too much hope, an extension of over-confidence in their own abilities and worth, so for the general public “it is allowable to say absolutely that fear is the higher good ... because disobedience and self-deceit are the more dominant over the creature.”⁴⁹ For those who may control this urge and remain obedient, however, al-Ghazali considers hope the stronger source for human benefit: “action on account of hope is of a higher order than action on account of fear, because the creatures who are nearest to God are those who love him most, and love dominates hope.”⁵⁰ The connection between hope and the love of God, the highest of all protective character traits, creates a bond between the servant and God that fear cannot replicate.

After the *kitāb al-khawf wa'l-rajā'* we find Book XXXIV, the *kitāb al-faqr wa'l-zuhd*, analyzed in chapter two of this dissertation. Whereas patience, thankfulness, fear, and hope all characterize responses to circumstances of trial and benefit, poverty is itself one of those circumstances, while renunciation is the pursuit of poverty, as well as a more general renunciation of things other than money. So, in reference to these earlier character traits poverty can be interpreted as a significant turning point in the process of polishing the mirror of the heart, since it involves the intersection of the external and internal aspects of spirituality. Just as

⁴⁸ *Iḥyā'* 4:236 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 5*).

⁴⁹ *Iḥyā'* 4:162 (*kitāb XXXIII, shaṭr 2, bayān 5*).

⁵⁰ *Iḥyā'* 4:141 (*kitāb XXXIII, shaṭr 1, bayān 2*).

throughout the *Ihyā'* the meanings of poverty and wealth progress, each of these first few books of the fourth quarter describes a transition from an early form of each state towards a more advanced form, which generally involves growing farther from this world and closer to God.

The movement towards God can only be understood within the context of the thirty-fifth book of the *Ihyā'*, the *kitāb al-tawhīd wa'l-tawakkul*, which not only demonstrates the intimate connection between poverty and God-reliance but also reveals the ways in which al-Ghazali conceives of polishing the heart as the process by which one aligns oneself with the divine unity to varying degrees of perfection.⁵¹ Here al-Ghazali turns to the four levels of *tawhīd* discussed in chapter one of this dissertation to provide a framework within which to understand the gradual perfection of each character trait already mentioned. Out of this framework he builds his arguments about God-reliance and the love of God, which he views as the two highest character traits to which one may attain.

Further analysis of the section on *tawhīd* reveals that *'ilm al-mu'āmalā* and the subsequent attainment of *'ilm al-mukāshafa* are essentially made up of the process by which human beings embody divine attributes, and in doing so they move from the sensible world of multiplicity (which al-Ghazali calls the 'world of dominion and witness': *'ālam al-mulk wa'l-shahāda*) to the world of dominion (*'ālam al-mulk*), which is primarily characterized by divine unity (*tawhīd*).⁵² For instance, in Book XXXV, al-Ghazali states, "our intention is to inform

⁵¹ *Ihyā'* 4:238-285 (*kitāb XXXV*). See also David Burrell, translator, *Faith in Divine Unity and Trust in Divine Providence: kitāb al-tawhīd wa'l-tawakkul: Book XXXV of the Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn)* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2001).

⁵² Others have dealt with al-Ghazali's cosmology: Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, 123-274; Timothy J. Gianotti, *Al-Ghazali's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul: Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology of*

about the path of *tawḥīd* in action: that the true actor is One, that He is the one feared and hoped for, and the One in whom we trust and depend.”⁵³ Divine unity consists in the recognition of a single divine agent, and all of the character traits are oriented towards attaining proximity to Him. Al-Ghazali’s treatment of *tawḥīd* serves as a kind of interlude, therefore, between his books on the preliminary and preparatory character traits and his discussions of the more advanced states of *tawakkul* and *maḥabba*.

This is further illustrated by returning to the four levels of *tawḥīd* discussed in chapter one. The first level of *tawḥīd* corresponds to the mere outward performance of the ritual obligations of Islam, as well as the proper daily behavior of Muslims without the internal sincerity of belief; this is the jurisdiction of *fiqh*, since it can regulate behavior but not hearts. This is insufficient for anything besides avoiding punishment or discrimination in this world, since even in the first and second quarters of the *Iḥyā’* al-Ghazali is clear that the five pillars and daily actions contain depths not recognized or explored by the jurists. The second level of *tawḥīd* is the level of faith that comes from believing in the truth of the *shahāda*, which is a recognition of God’s divinity but does not involve a direct experience of Him. These people remain solely at the external level of understanding God, His Acts, and His Attributes, turning to *kalām* to defend their beliefs from outside threats but never delving into the mysteries of the heart for themselves. They rely exclusively on the teachings of established religious authorities,

the Iḥyā’ (Leiden: Brill, 2001): 148-76. The ‘world of dominion and witness’ is the world of multiplicity because it contains elements of both divine sovereignty and the created human experience.

⁵³ *Iḥyā’* 4:250 (*kitāb XXXV, shaṭr 1, bayān 2, q. 9*).

and they achieve escape from the hellfire but do not achieve any proximity to God in the hereafter.

The third and fourth levels, however, relate more directly to the mystical *praxis* indicated by *'ilm al-mu'āmalā*; by eliminating destructive character traits and perfecting protective ones, a person moves away from the world of multiplicity and towards *tawhīd*. As a result, as one climbs higher along this path, the character traits begin to merge together and become more intertwined than at the lower stages, due to the greater proximity to a divine unity that by its very nature resolves distinctions. Thus, at their highest stages thankfulness and God-reliance and renunciation and even poverty begin to resemble one another because each individual character trait involves detachment from this world and turning towards God as the Truly Real.⁵⁴ The third level of *tawhīd* is that from which these character traits emerge because they still require the recognition of the world's existence; one needs a 'this world' in existence from which to be detached if one is truly to perfect one's heart. In this system, then, the fourth level of *tawhīd* emerges even more clearly as an *experiential* dimension rather than an ontological one, due to the necessity of this world in the spiritual progress towards God.

Therefore, if the shift to the fourth level of *tawhīd* is experiential, it is also epistemological, allowing one to know the world as it truly is, as God knows it. This is the full disclosure of knowledge received at that level, and it is the reason those who reach it often confuse it with identification (*ittiḥād*). One knows God fully, and knows that there is nothing other than God, so one cannot see that the lower self (*nafs*) still persists, even after one returns to

⁵⁴ Al-Ghazali frequently refers to God by the divine name *al-Haqq*, the Real.

this world. And since these glimpses of God while in this world are temporary, people always return from their seemingly transcendent state to continue their lives on earth. Al-Ghazali locates his discussion of *tawhīd* before *tawakkul* on purpose, as he first describes the ascent to the experience of unity with God before critiquing the idea that this is a true identification with God, as many have mistakenly believed.

The result of experiencing such an advanced proximity to God is that one achieves a perfection of the character traits listed above, eventually leading to the embodiment of *tawakkul*, or God-reliance. In terms of our study, and as seen in part one of this chapter, poverty, renunciation, and God-reliance should be thought of as antidotes to the destructive character traits of loving wealth and loving this world. By relying upon this world and its riches for sustenance, one comes to believe in this world as the source of subsistence; therefore, as we have already shown, God calls His followers to reject material wealth and pursue poverty, and to renounce this world in favor of the hereafter. Renunciation is only complete, however, when one relies completely on God, as al-Ghazali writes, “renunciation cannot be fulfilled except through God-reliance.”⁵⁵ In order to achieve the highest level of renunciation, then, which al-Ghazali identifies as “being without need” (*mustaghni*), one must move through the other levels of poverty and renunciation and into the realm of *tawakkul*. Once one has freed oneself from the grip of this world, one becomes free to be caught up with God’s beauty because one’s knowledge of God has reached its highest state.

⁵⁵ *Iḥyā’* 4:237 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, epilogue*).

God-reliance itself has stages, which al-Ghazali describes in order from lowest to highest: first is to trust God as one does a legal trustee (*wakīl*); second is the trust a child has with his mother; third and finally is the stage at which one is “between the hands of God Almighty, whether in motion or in repose, like the corpse in the hands of the washer.”⁵⁶ The perfect manifestation of God-reliance means the perfect alignment with the Divine will, which is achieved through the process of purifying the heart, aligning oneself with the Divine attributes, and “battling against one’s soul.”⁵⁷ The movement towards the perfection of God-reliance resembles similar movements towards patience, thankfulness, poverty, and renunciation. All of them consist in detaching oneself from this world, recognizing God as the sole cause of all, and aligning oneself with that knowledge through the actions of accepting poverty, renouncing this world entirely, and trusting God to provide for your subsistence. It is important to remember, however, that this detachment is at its best not a rejection of all livelihood but a renunciation of the soul’s attachment to the importance of wealth and this world.

God-reliance goes beyond merely trusting God to provide one’s daily sustenance, however, as the highest state involves giving one’s will over entirely into the hands of the Divine will. The perfection of knowledge and the ascent to glimpsing God in this life leads to perfect action, in full accordance with God’s will, upon the return from the epistemological experience al-Ghazali describes as the fourth level of *tawhīd*. The one who has achieved this becomes a

⁵⁶ *Iḥyā’* 4:255 (*kitāb XXXV, shaṭr 2, bayān 1, daraja 2*).

⁵⁷ *Iḥyā’* 4:259 (*kitāb XXXV, shaṭr 2, bayān 3, fann 1, daraja 2*).

representative of God on earth, a spiritual model for others to follow; his actions are no longer considered solely his own, but inspired by the Divine will through this proximity.

Al-Ghazali argues that one's love for a thing emerges from one's knowledge of it, so the epistemological experience of true reality naturally leads to the development of the highest character trait of all, *maḥabba*. Therefore, if *tawakkul* emerges out of the third level of *tawḥīd*, as al-Ghazali asserts, *maḥabba* is produced from the fourth level of *tawḥīd*, the complete enrapture with God that causes this world to drop completely from view and sometimes fools one into thinking one has achieved real unification with God. In the end, one's proximity to God and the extent to which one's heart is aligned with *tawḥīd* by reflecting the knowledge contained within unveiling inevitably lead to the development of love because love and knowledge are inextricably connected, especially in relation to God, who is supremely beautiful. Therefore, to the extent one unifies the divine attributes in one's heart, one increases the amount of love for God there and decreases one's love for this world.

Love of God

Developing the love of God in this life is the paramount goal for al-Ghazali, and only those who know God fully will achieve this intimacy. In the *Book on Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment (kitāb al-maḥabba wa'l-shawq wa'l-uns wa'l-riḍā')*, which is the sixth book of the *Iḥyā*'s fourth quarter, al-Ghazali writes, "the fullness of light is not transmitted except according to the increase of unveiling, and only the knowers in this world will attain to the level

of insight and vision.”⁵⁸ God’s casting of light into the human heart, the unveiling of divine knowledge that manifests as a mere reflection of Reality, in the hereafter transforms into a true witnessing of God. The extent to which one increases one’s knowledge (*ma’rifā*) of God in this world relates directly to the clarity of the vision of God in the next world.⁵⁹

The knowledge reflected in the mirror of the heart leads ultimately to the love of God (*maḥabba*) in this life, which is the “utmost goal among the stages and the supreme summit of the steps. There is no stage beyond the grasp of love that is not one of its fruits and one of its consequences ... nor is there prior to love any stage that is not preparatory to it, such as repentance (*tawba*), patience (*ṣabr*), and renunciation (*zuhd*), and the like.”⁶⁰ There are many grounds for loving a thing, all of which apply to God as well: love of self, love of a benefactor for the good he brings, love of a benefactor for his own sake, love of beauty for its own sake, and the love shared between two beings sharing a spiritual affinity. Of course, for al-Ghazali the only worthy recipient of love is God, for God surpasses all other things; God is the origin of all other selves, God is the source of all benefaction, God is the supremely beautiful, and finally, God shares a spiritual connection with human beings.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Iḥyā’* 4:303 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 5*). Al-Ghazali discusses *maḥabba* (love), along with its related states, in *Iḥyā’* 4: 286-349 (XXXVI), *kitāb al-maḥabba wa al-shawq wa al-uns wa al-riḍā’*. I have also consulted and at many times relied upon the translation by Eric Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment: Book XXXVI of the Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn)* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2012).

⁵⁹ For an extended discussion of the transformation of knowledge into vision after death, see *Iḥyā’* 4:299-307 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 4-5*). Al-Ghazali is clear that knowledge leads to love and the knowledge transforms into the vision of God after death.

⁶⁰ *Iḥyā’* 4: 286 (*kitāb XXXVI, introduction*); Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 2.

⁶¹ *Iḥyā’* 4: 288-99 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 2-3*); Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 10-41.

On this spiritual affinity, al-Ghazali states, “the nearness of man to his Lord in those attributes which he has been commanded to imitate ... consists in the acquisition of laudable qualities from among such divine attributes as knowledge, righteousness, benevolence, kindness, dispensing goodness and mercy upon creatures, giving them counsel and guiding them to the truth while keeping them far from what is false.”⁶² Thus the purest form of love of God one may achieve involves the imitation and acquisition of divine attributes, which only become known through their reflection in the mirror of the heart. And one brightens that reflection through the mystical *praxis* of performing deeds in accordance with the character traits one wishes to perfect.

The knowledge of God obtained in this world pleases human beings, even more than do other things, as “the pleasure of knowledge is stronger than other pleasures; stronger, that is, than the pleasures of appetite, anger, or the rest of the five senses.”⁶³ This pleasure is magnified if the seeker reaches the stage at which he can “look on the beauty of lordliness,” attaining to a level of spiritual development at which he may glimpse visions of God.⁶⁴ These glimpses are the utmost goal of the seeker, and experiencing them delights him; “When these delights appear, cares will be wiped away together with all desires; the mind will be immersed so utterly in felicity that were the blessed to be cast into fire, they would not feel it in their ecstasy. Were all the pleasures of this world to be spread out for them at that moment, they would not spare them a glance because they possess consummate bliss and that utmost joy which is limitless.”⁶⁵

⁶² *Iḥyā’* 4: 298 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 3, sabab 5*); Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 38.

⁶³ *Iḥyā’* 4: 300 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 4*); Ormsby, *Love of God*, 46.

⁶⁴ *Iḥyā’* 4: 301 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 4*); Ormsby, *Love of God*, 51.

⁶⁵ *Iḥyā’* 4: 302 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 4*); Ormsby, *Love of God*, 53.

Thus the journey away from the love of wealth and the world which began with the acceptance of poverty culminates in the complete and utter enjoyment of God in the afterlife. For al-Ghazali, poverty begins this important process of turning away from the world and towards God's face; although repentance commences the overall spiritual quest, the character trait of poverty involves a much more difficult and thus more significant point of conversion within the process. The acquiescence to and pursuit of poverty that constitutes renunciation and ultimately *mustaghni* reflects the more general movement from the world of multiplicity to the divine unity. Furthermore, it prepares the human soul for the cleansing process of the hereafter; if one has already become accustomed to experiencing God directly, even in fleeting moments, the shock of God's luminosity will not be so painful when God's full light becomes unveiled after death. Nor will the separation from the world be so abrupt if one has cultivated a detachment from the world and its wealth during life. This constitutes the great benefit of the role of *faqr* in the movement towards *mahabba*: one who has already turned from the world and towards God will know what to expect in the hereafter and will welcome the transition to a direct vision of God.

Al-Ghazali's *mahabba* in historical context

While al-Ghazali assigns poverty a notable role in his mystical ethics, he is not the only Muslim scholar to have discussed poverty in relation to the love of God. Other Islamic mystics and theologians have incorporated poverty into their systems of thought, and some important scholarly works of recent decades have portions devoted to the relationship between poverty and

love.⁶⁶ In his important *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, Joseph Norment Bell discusses the Hanbalite critique of the Sufi ascetics of the ninth to eleventh centuries. Specifically, he presents the understanding of *zuhd* expressed by Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1200), a Hanbalite scholar who came to notoriety in the century following al-Ghazali's death. According to Bell, Ibn al-Jawzi had high regard for certain aspects of the life of asceticism and mysticism ... he believed them to be no longer properly understood by the Sufis of his day."⁶⁷ Utilizing a common method of criticism at that time, Ibn al-Jawzi claims the Sufis have misinterpreted the true meaning of *zuhd*, or perhaps even changed its meaning to fit their own desires for spiritual practice.

Going into more detail, Bell points us toward Ibn al-Jawzi's own perspective: "Although he is not explicit on the point, *zuhd* for him would seem to be not abstinence, as the Sufis see it, but simply perseverance in moderation and avoidance of attachment to the things of this world. Certainly it is clear that he did not consider complete abstinence from permitted things to be implied by *zuhd*."⁶⁸ This directly contrasts with al-Ghazali's own approach to poverty and renunciation, which he views as a more and more complete turning away from the world: "So 'repentance' (*tawba*) is a term indicating the leaving behind of forbidden things, and 'renunciation' (*zuhd*) is a term indicating the leaving behind of permissible actions."⁶⁹ Bell continues by presenting one of Ibn al-Jawzi's primary points: "when one abstains from the

⁶⁶ Specifically, I refer to Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1979) and Binyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of al-Ghazali and al-Dabbagh* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

⁶⁷ Bell, *Love Theory*, 43.

⁶⁸ Bell, *Love Theory*, 43.

⁶⁹ *Iḥyā'* 4: 212 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 1).

permissible, the praise of men is substituted for the thing denied to the soul.”⁷⁰ Again echoing a common reproach of Sufi practice, Ibn al-Jawzi claims they replace the sins of lust and greed with the sin of pride at having renounced the world.

More to our point, Bell highlights how Ibn al-Jawzi brings together the discussions of renunciation and love in his “argument against Sufi asceticism in sexual matters.”⁷¹ Ibn al-Jawzi was concerned both with the inaccuracy of the complete renunciation of physical expressions of love between human beings and with the consequences of refraining from sexual relations with women: “in particular the spiritual concert (*samā’*), usually accompanied by expressions of passionate *‘ishq* to God, and *nazar*, the spellbound gazing at comely youths, with its overtones of perversion.”⁷² Ibn al-Jawzi clearly argued against inappropriate sexual ethics, which he believed emerged from the practice of excessive renunciation of human relationships and love.

Bell’s account of Ibn al-Jawzi’s critique of his contemporary Sufis’ practices of love and renunciation is instructive on two levels. First, it shines a light on the Hanbalite conceptualization of the relationship between poverty, renunciation and love; Ibn al-Jawzi discusses these ideas almost entirely in the context of sexual relations, rather than in theological terms. His rejection of the Sufi expressions of *‘ishq* reflects his denial of the human ability to enter into a loving relationship with God in the manner described by those he criticizes. These are human emotional relationships with which he is concerned. Secondly, Bell’s account casts in

⁷⁰ Bell, *Love Theory*, 44.

⁷¹ Bell, *Love Theory*, 44.

⁷² Bell, *Love Theory*, 44.

relief the more radical Sufi practices of the twelfth century, with which we could not confidently identify al-Ghazali any more than we could call him a Hanbalite scholar. He would agree with Ibn al-Jawzi in many ways, in that he also warns of the danger of excessive renunciation for those who are not properly prepared. Especially in reference to sexual relations al-Ghazali is careful not to advise celibacy but marriage, as was the practice of Muhammad. Al-Ghazali did, however, discuss poverty, renunciation and love at a theological level not seemingly explored by Ibn al-Jawzi. Thus, Bell's work supports the claim made in this dissertation that al-Ghazali is unique in the Islamic theological tradition in his treatment of poverty as a way to love.

In another notable recent work, Binyamin Abrahamov has discussed al-Ghazali's approach to the love of God; here again we find a heavier emphasis on *zuhd* rather than *faqr*. In fact, many earlier Islamic scholars emphasized the importance of renunciation to the acquisition of the love of God. Rabi'a "was perhaps the first to lay stress upon the doctrine and to combine with it the doctrine of *Kashf*, the unveiling at the end of the way."⁷³ She was also "among the first to hold the doctrine of disinterested love for God which expresses itself in carrying out God's will."⁷⁴ What we find, even in earliest Sufis on love, such as Rabi'a, is the idea that "To reach such a stage (of disinterested love), man must sever his bonds with this world, leaving the material things for the sake of ascending to the spiritual domain in which God is revealed in His perfect beauty."⁷⁵ This notion is repeated commonly in later Sufi works, including al-Ghazali's:

⁷³ Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, 27.

⁷⁴ Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, 27.

⁷⁵ Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, 28.

Shaqiq of Balkh places *zuhd* as the first of four stages of the mystic, and love as the last.⁷⁶ Al-Muhasibi describes the process of “breaking off anything which separates man from God.”⁷⁷ Dhu al-Nun al-Misri says that part of the process is to “love what God loves, to hate what God hates, to reject what diverts man from God.”⁷⁸ Al-Junayd says that in order to return the soul to its primordial state one must go through “the annihilation (*fanā*) of the material aspects of life, a gradual process, and participation in the divine. The goal of man is to isolate his soul from all material impediments and to live a divine life.”⁷⁹ Al-Makki includes the need “to practice the ascetic way of life (*zuhd*)” among his signs of love for God.⁸⁰

Once again we discover that both the Islamic scholarship and the secondary scholarship of Islamic mysticism generally neglect the study of the relationship between poverty and the love of God. This makes al-Ghazali unique in the history of Islamic mystical thought; his emphasis on poverty brings to light an important aspect of the progression from loving this world to loving God. Without poverty, al-Ghazali points out, one cannot move to renunciation, which he considers a perfection of the earlier, more basic state of poverty. One must lack material wealth, and one must accept the lack of material wealth, before one can begin to pursue such a poverty through the practice of renunciation. And it is only through this perfection of poverty that one

⁷⁶ Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, 28.

⁷⁷ Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, 29.

⁷⁸ Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, 30.

⁷⁹ Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, 30.

⁸⁰ Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, 35.

can sufficiently cut ties with the material world and free one's gaze to settle on God, both in this life and in the hereafter.

Conclusions Related to Poverty in Context

We have learned many things about the role of poverty in the *Iḥyā'* generally and in the process of self-perfection that is the subject of that text and of its fourth quarter in particular. Poverty emerges from this analysis as a critical stage in the process of restraining the soul and polishing the mirror of the heart. This polishing occurs through the embodiment by the human being of the divine attributes as represented by the protective character traits discussed in the fourth quarter; each of these character traits has stages corresponding to the human recognition of and alignment with Divine unity (*tawḥīd*), which constitutes the foundational theological principle of al-Ghazali's (and all Muslims') thought. The cultivation of these traits ultimately leads to the unveiling of knowledge about God, His Acts and His Attributes, among other mysteries, to the heart, which then informs further action in this world, contributing to the continued polishing of the mirror of the heart. The process ends at death, when one's knowledge of God, conceived of in this life as an "imagining" of the intellect, transforms into a direct "witnessing" (*mushāhada*) of God's face in the Hereafter, resulting in perfect happiness (*sa'āda*).

In a spectrum ending with the vision and love of God, poverty serves as one of the primary 'treatments' for the love of this world, the source of human temptation away from God in al-Ghazali's mystical ethics. Love itself, as defined by al-Ghazali, always exists, and it must be oriented towards something, so poverty is instrumental to breaking not only the desire for

wealth but also the baser desires for food and sex, which are only enabled by the acquisition of wealth. Although material poverty plays this important role, it is only the recognition of one's poverty of existence, one's eternal and existential need for God that allows one to move beyond the lower stages of poverty to the higher level of renunciation. Just as recognizing God as sole provider of gifts moves one towards thankfulness from patience, one's recognition of God as Absolutely Needless (*al-Ghanī*) and one's pursuit of embodying that character trait by becoming one without need (*mustaghni*) in this life, moves one towards a deeper recognition of *tawhīd* in God-reliance.

For al-Ghazali, poverty makes up the first concrete step in the direction of recognition of God as sole agent and provider, and thus the initial and critical stage in truly beginning one's journey towards God. In order to embrace poverty, one must first recognize that this world and its treasures are transient, mutable, and detrimental to one's status in the hereafter; furthermore, to deepen one's poverty means to know with greater and greater certainty that "the hereafter is better and more lasting."⁸¹ Al-Ghazali uniquely identifies poverty as the entrance into the ascetic lifestyle of the early Muslim mystics, which informed his understanding of spirituality to a significant degree. The next chapter engages in an analysis of his reliance upon his predecessors, and investigates the extent to which he incorporated into his *Iḥyā'* the ideas of mystics, philosophers, and theologians. His emphasis on poverty as an important aspect of the spiritual journey demonstrates his unique place among both his predecessors and his contemporaries as a

⁸¹ Qur'an 87:17. Al-Ghazali quotes this verse throughout the Book of Poverty and Renunciation as the defining principle of the 'knowledge' aspect of the character trait *zuhd*.

scholar who drew from all aspects of the Islamic tradition in an effort to establish his own hierarchy of knowledge to inform his system of mystical ethics.

Chapter Four: The Sources and Interlocutors of Book XXXIV of al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'*

The previous chapters aimed to establish al-Ghazali's understanding of poverty's meaning and role in the context of the *Ihyā'*, and to a limited extent al-Ghazali's thought on poverty as articulated in his other texts. It now becomes necessary to place his thought into its proper historical context, in relation to a number of sources. Poverty as an operational idea within al-Ghazali's own system of mystical ethics only makes sense once we identify the extent to which his ideas concerning poverty in the *Ihyā'* are original. He most certainly did not begin the Islamic consideration of the virtue of poverty, as many early teachers such as al-Junayd, al-Hasan al-Basri, and Abu Yazid al-Bistami mention its positive aspects. Nor was al-Ghazali the first to discuss it at length; scholars such as Abu 'Abd Allah al-Ḥarith bin Asad al-Muhasibi (d. 857), Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 996), and Abu'l-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim b. Hawazin al-Qushayri (d. 1072) devoted significant portions of their own works to discussing poverty.

Asceticism had long been a trend within certain Islamic spiritual circles by al-Ghazali's time, but Sufi brotherhoods had not yet developed to the extent they would in the generations after him. He seems to have played a significant role in systematizing the method by which ascetic practice came to permeate every corner of the Muslim world through the development of those brotherhoods. His works have always been viewed as some of the most important in all of Islamic history, but little scholarly analysis has been completed on his possible influence in that development.¹ Therefore, in order to better comprehend al-Ghazali's place in the historical

¹ Several scholars have some work in this direction, most notably Treiger, Alexander, "Al-Ghazali's Classifications of the Sciences and Descriptions of the Highest Theoretical Science." *Divan: Disiplinlerarasi Calismalar Dergisi* 16:30 (2011): 32, where he asserts al-Ghazali's influence as derived from his reliance on Ibn Sina's philosophical metaphysics; Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); also see

Muslim understanding of poverty as a theological idea, we must compare his work from the *Ihyā'* to that of some of the key sources upon which he draws and authorities to which he refers. This helps determine not only his influence but also the specific intellectual tradition in which he stands; namely, al-Ghazali, while important to the development of Islamic religious thought in general, still operates within a particular tradition descending from the earlier, sober tradition of mysticism as opposed to the 'intoxicated' Sufism of Hallaj and Abu Yazid al-Bistami. This more sober tradition was characterized by a continuity with the study and practice of traditional Islamic materials, while the intoxicated forms of Sufism that arose tended to push the boundaries of acceptable religious practice.

Comparing al-Ghazali's works to their sources is a daunting task, for many reasons: the sporadic and haphazard nature of passing down medieval texts, al-Ghazali's particularly scattered method of citation and record, the sheer complexity of al-Ghazali's thought, the massive scope of the *Ihyā'* as a whole, and the scant attention paid to *faqr* as a theological concept in the secondary literature of Islamic studies to date, represent a few of the difficulties involved in the project. Furthermore, while he does provide the reader some help in determining his sources, al-Ghazali rarely mentions any of his contemporary interlocutors by name, making that portion of the investigation even more problematic. The intellectual fault lines of al-Ghazali's day are possible to trace in a general way, but it is immensely difficult to pinpoint specific scholars with whom al-Ghazali takes issue on the subject of poverty. Given these

Karamustafa, Ahmet T., *Sufism: The Formative Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, 106-108, at the end of which he describes al-Ghazali's thought as "singularly influential."

limitations, we begin with several of the most well known influences on al-Ghazali's thought and then move towards his own time, at which point his thought is situated generally in relation to the major intellectual disciplines of his period.

Considering the significant attention already paid to al-Ghazali's philosophical sources, this chapter avoids commenting on them, acting instead as a complement to the body of research that does so by focusing primarily on source material written by those who have generally been considered mystical thinkers. This is an effort to address an imbalance in the secondary literature and to build upon inquiries made concerning which aspects of al-Ghazali's thought may have been drawn from mystical rather than philosophical sources. For although many have researched the connections between al-Ghazali's thought and that of earlier Islamic philosophers, and although many have pointed out that al-Ghazali's works are related to those of mystics and ascetics, few have delved into the specific details of the connections between the texts of al-Ghazali and those mystics.

Categorizing the Source Materials: Authorities, Conceptual Sources, and Literary Sources

In order to better analyze the individual source materials used by al-Ghazali in the *Ihyā'*, and particularly in Book XXXIV, we have established three categories into which they fit based upon how he uses them and how they function within his writings. The first of these categories we call authorities; into this fit both sacred Islamic texts, such as the Qur'an and hadith, and the sayings passed down from the Prophet's Companions and other significant early thinkers listed below. The second category consists of conceptual sources, which do not carry the same weight of authority as writings from the first group but offer al-Ghazali important insights into key

concepts he incorporates into his own thought. The third category is made up of literary sources, which al-Ghazali uses in such a way as to suggest that he considers them neither spiritually authoritative nor conceptually original, but from which he draws significant portions of his own text, at times copying entire pages. Each of these types of source material functions differently, both in al-Ghazali's composition of Book XXXIV and in the development of his thought concerning poverty, and an analysis of each type further enriches our understanding of his text.

The question of which sources al-Ghazali actually used is a complicated one, which has received much attention among al-Ghazali scholars, but we will allow the author himself to guide our search. In the autobiographical *munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, al-Ghazali aids his readers by naming those scholars to whose works he turned in order to learn about Sufi teachings. He states, "I began to learn their lore from the perusal of their books, such as *The Nourishment of Hearts* by Abu Talib al-Makki (God's mercy be upon him!) and the writings of al-Harith al-Muhasibi, and the miscellaneous items handed down from al-Junayd and al-Shibli and Abu Yazid al-Bistami (God hallow their spirits!) and others of their masters."² While many aspects of the *munqidh* have recently been called into question, there is no reason to doubt al-Ghazali's list of influences here, since it does little but name some of the major figures of early Islamic mystical and ascetical thought and practice. In addition, al-Ghazali quotes several of these thinkers by name in the *Iḥyā'*, and many scholars have documented his clear reliance upon even those he does not mention by name in that text.

² Most of this translation is taken from R. J. McCarthy's translation of the *munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, with some alterations of my own: R. J. McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of al-munqidh min al-ḍalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazali* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1980), 77.

Every one of the names listed above is familiar as belonging to prominent figures of the first few generations of Islamic mystical thought. Although institutionalized Sufism had barely begun to form by al-Ghazali's time, and had certainly not formed during the times of those mentioned, their thought and sayings fall within the early ascetical movements in Islam that would eventually crystallize into what came to be called Sufism. Not every one of these names appears explicitly in the *Book on Poverty and Renunciation*, and in fact, those he does not mention within the body of its text seem to have had the greatest literary impact on his writing. Therefore, this chapter will focus primarily on the influences of al-Muhasibi, al-Makki, and al-Qushayri on al-Ghazali's thinking about the importance of *faqr* as a mystical state.

Al-Ghazali's Appeal to Authority:

It is first important to recognize the influence on al-Ghazali of what he considers religious authorities; into this category fall many texts, which fit there for a variety of reasons. Primary among these are the foundational Islamic sources of authority, the Qur'an and hadith, which al-Ghazali (like almost every Muslim theologian of the pre-modern era) uses to undergird his own thinking about any particular issue. In the context of Book XXXIV, he references the Qur'an 78 times and prophetic hadith more than 150 times.³ These universally recognized authorities provide the theological roots for much of al-Ghazali's thought concerning poverty,

³ Not only does al-Ghazali refer to hadith of Muhammad 136 times, but he also mentions Christ 13 times, Moses 4 times, general prophetic quotations 3 times, and Noah, John the Baptist, Isma'il, Abraham, and Adam once each. He rarely provides an *isnād* for hadith, but for those he does he quotes al-Hasan al-Basri 4 times, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab 3 times, 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, Abi Rifa', 'Ata' al-Khurasani, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Zayb ibn Aslam, Jabir, Ibn 'Abbas, and 'A'isha 2 times, and 'Imran ibn Husayn, Anas ibn Malik, Ibn Mas'ud, Ibn al-Musayyib, Abu Dharr, Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, Khudhayfa, 'Ubayd ibn 'Umayr, al-Fudhayl, Sinan ibn Sa'd, and Abu Sulayman al-Darani once each.

including Q 47:38, which he identifies as the defining Qur'anic quote about poverty. Utilizing such sources in the construction of Book XXXIV not only represents the common practice among Muslim thinkers of the time, but also allows him to claim orthodoxy in the face of criticism.

Al-Ghazali also utilizes other major sources of authority in this text: the sayings of esteemed religious ancestors, whether the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad, the Followers, or other significant teachers. He refers to such hadith-like utterances approximately 170 times throughout Book XXXIV, on a variety of points about poverty.⁴ The primary lesson to be drawn from his use of these materials is that al-Ghazali clearly places himself into a particular line of thought concerning poverty. He favors the sayings of Abu Sulayman al-Darani, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, al-Hasan al-Basri, Sufyan al-Thawri, and Yahya ibn Mu'adh, all of whom he quotes 8 or more times. Other significant figures include al-Junayd, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, al-Fudhayl, Abu al-Darda', and Bishr al-Harith, to whom he appeals for authority at least four times. These authorities provide al-Ghazali with quotations that relate more precisely to individual subjects, in

⁴ Al-Ghazali refers to scholars according to the following count. Direct quotations: Abu Sulayman al-Darani 15 times; 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, al-Hasan al-Basri, and Sufyan al-Thawri 11 times; Yahya ibn Mu'adh 8 times; al-Junayd and 'Ali ibn Abi Talib 6 times; al-Fudhayl 5 times; Abu al-Darda' and Bishr al-Harith 4 times; Ibrahim ibn Adham, Ibn Mas'ud, Abu Dharr, Sahl al-Tustari, and Sari al-Saqti 3 times; 'A'isha, Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari, Muhammad ibn Wasi', Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Shaqiq, Ibn Shubrumah, 'Uways, Ibn Khafif, and Yusuf ibn Asbat 2 times; Abu Hurayra, al-Mu'ammal, Ibn 'Abbas, 'Amir ibn 'Abd al-Qays, Dhu al-Nun, al-Dhahak, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, Fath al-Musli, Ibrahim al-Taymi, Ibn al-Mubarak, Ibn Abi Layla, al-Nasrabadi, al-Khawwas, Salman al-Farsi, al-Awza'i, Abu Burdah, Abu Hazm, Masruq, 'Amr ibn Dinar, Qutayba ibn Muslim, Rafi's ibn Khadij, Qasim al-Khu'i, Abu Musa' 'Abdul Rahman, Bilal ibn Sa'd, Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna, Fudhala ibn 'Ubayd, 'Amr ibn al-Aswad, Malik ibn Anas, Khalid ibn Walid, Abu Yazid al-Bistami, and Wahb ibn Munabbih once. He also refers to but does not quote several figures, whom he considers exemplars of poverty and renunciation: 'A'isha 4 times, Dawud al-Ta'i 3 times, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, Sufyan al-Thawri, Sari al-Saqti, and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz 2 times, and Abu Sulayman al-Darani, Ibrahim ibn Adham, Shaqiq, Abu Ishaq al-Nuri, al-Fudhayl, al-Khawwas, Abu Ma'awiya al-Aswad, and Sufyan ibn Muhriz once each.

this case poverty, and he uses them principally to support his own thinking and his interpretations of the primary authorities of the Qur'an and hadith.

The importance of these religious authorities must not be ignored, but this chapter demonstrates that their influences on the *Ihyā*'s thirty-fourth book have been mediated almost entirely through the much longer and detailed texts of the thinkers analyzed below. Although this is certainly more accurate in reference to the non-prophetic sayings, this chapter shows that even al-Ghazali's use of the Qur'an and hadith in reference to poverty (and likely other subjects as well) was influenced by the conceptual and literary sources he used. This seems to be the case due to the piecemeal and fragmented nature of most sayings collected from very early ascetic teachers and practitioners; their sayings were passed on as collections of wise utterings, rather than formal theological or mystical treatises, in which these utterings appeared frequently. So, while it is important to understand al-Ghazali's use of the Qur'an and hadith, as well as the influence of men such as 'Umar, al-Junayd, and Abu Sulayman al-Darani on al-Ghazali, all of this may best be understood through the study of the texts in which these authorities appeared to him.

Al-Muhasibi as Early Conceptual Source

The oldest and perhaps most prolific of the men al-Ghazali mentioned in the *munqidh* is al-Muhasibi; living in the early 9th century, his thought impacted not only al-Ghazali but also al-Makki, al-Junayd, and most others who came after him.⁵ In fact, he was perhaps the earliest

⁵ For the most influential works on the thought and legacy of al-Muhasibi see Margaret Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad: A Study of the Life and Teaching of Harith b. Asad al-Muhasibi A.D. 781–857* (1935; reprinted London:

Muslim thinker to write significant treatises about spirituality, particularly on the subjects of ascetic practice, the purification of the heart, and the acquisition of knowledge of God. Although he was a contemporary of Abu Yazid al-Bistami, al-Muhasibi differed from his coreligionist in that he advocated for what would come to be called a ‘sober’ Sufism, rooted in a more traditional approach to which al-Makki and al-Ghazali both evidently ascribed. Also unlike Abu Yazid, al-Muhasibi left behind long treatises, rather than third-party collections of short utterances; for the purposes of this dissertation, the most pertinent writings of al-Muhasibi are his *Kitāb al-Ri‘āya li-Huqūq Allāh*, which contains an exposition of al-Muhasibi’s esoteric thinking about self-purification and the soul’s progression towards God, and his *Kitāb al-Waṣāya*, which is his major treatise on the soul and deals extensively with the sins of loving this world and loving wealth.⁶

Scholars have already drawn attention to al-Ghazali’s reliance upon al-Muhasibi; Margaret Smith, the earliest modern scholar to do so, states, “much that has been attributed to al-Ghazali as representing his original ideas, is in fact based upon the earlier teaching of al-Muhasibi and, in many instances, is directly borrowed from him.”⁷ Although she indicates al-

Sheldon Press, 1977); Josef van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Harith al-Muhasibi, Theologie* (vol. 4, Bonn, Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Bonn, 1961); Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York: St. Paulist Press, 1996): 171-95; Gavin Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam: the Life and Works of al-Muhasibi* (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁶ I have used the following sources to research al-Muhasibi’s texts: al-Muhasibi, Abu ‘Abdallah Harith ibn Asad, *Kitāb al-Ri‘āya li-Huqūq Allāh*, translated and edited by Margaret Smith (London: Luzac & Co, 1940); al-Muhasibi, Abu ‘Abdallah Harith ibn Asad, *al-Waṣāya aw al-nasā’ha al-dīnīyya wa’l-nafahāt al-qudsīyya wa’l-īlīyya al-qaṣad wa-l-rajū’a ila allāh wa bud’ min ’anāb ila allāh* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), 35-138.

⁷ Margaret Smith, “The Forerunner of al-Ghazali,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1 (Jan 1936): 65.

Ghazali utilized al-Muhasibi throughout his works, she claims, “it is in his ascetical and mystical teaching that al-Ghazali has built most obviously upon the foundations laid by al-Muhasibi ... often by the simple appropriation of al-Muhasibi’s definitions, doctrines, and illustrations, to serve his own purposes.”⁸ In the same article, Smith draws many comparisons between the works of al-Muhasibi and al-Ghazali’s *Iḥyā’*, especially regarding what she calls “the things which corrupt the heart” and “the things which are wholesome for the heart,” which make up the contents of the third and fourth quarters of al-Ghazali’s major work.⁹

Of greatest importance to this dissertation are the similarities concerning these two thinkers’ approaches to poverty, wealth, and renunciation. While Smith briefly discusses their overlap on the sins of avarice and the love of wealth, she does not provide a similar comparison of their remedies, poverty and renunciation.¹⁰ With the aid of her and others’ works, however, as well as a close reading of the pertinent sections of al-Muhasibi’s *Ri’āya* and *al-Wasāya*, we can determine several things. Al-Muhasibi’s influence upon both al-Makki and al-Ghazali points toward a possible chain of transmission of mystical thinking about poverty across several centuries, as has been noted by Michael Sells.¹¹ With this chain of transmission identified, the contours become clearer concerning the historical development of one branch of Islamic thinking about poverty’s role in the process of self-purification. This helps to place al-Ghazali within a

⁸ Smith, “The Forerunner of al-Ghazali,” 65.

⁹ Smith, “The Forerunner of al-Ghazali,” 66. Smith’s translations of these quarters of the *Iḥyā’* differ from my own, displaying her more pragmatic approach to interpreting that text. In my translations, I have tried to incorporate both the practical and theological elements of al-Ghazali’s ethics.

¹⁰ Smith, “The Forerunner of al-Ghazali,” 71-72.

¹¹ Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 347-48, n. 2.

particular branch of Islamic spiritual thought, rather than continuing to think of him as utterly unique or as primarily influenced by philosophers. Placing al-Ghazali within such an intellectual tradition allows us to identify his unique contribution to Islamic thinking about poverty.

Analysis of Relationship between *Ri'āya*, *Wasāya*, and *Ihyā'* on Poverty

Al-Muhasibi's most famous and most significant writing is the *Kitāb al-Ri'āya li-Huqūq Allāh*, the *Book on the Observance of the Rights of God*, in which he performs the earliest known exploration of the process of self-purification. Kermit Schoonover states, "In this treatise al-Muhasibi gives a detailed discussion of the use of introspection to examine with severity the workings of the mind ... Here is the real source of sainthood; not in outward observances – asceticism, good works and the like – but in the removal of all falsehood from the inner sanctuary of the soul."¹² Thus this text is the source for the majority of Sufi spiritual psychology, for concepts such as the self (*al-nafs*), the heart (*al-qalb*), the forms of egoism that ensnare them, and the methods by which one may eliminate these distractions from one's heart. In many ways, al-Muhasibi is the thinker who guided Islamic ascetic practice into the interior realm, so that the purification and renunciation of the heart and soul reached a level of importance equal to and for some even beyond the purification and renunciation related to the body through ritual obligations and ascetic practices.

In his introduction to a chapter devoted to al-Muhasibi, Michael Sells explains the primary subjects the scholar addresses in his *Ri'āya*:

¹² Kermit Schoonover, "Al-Muhasibi and His *Al-Ri'āya*," *The Muslim World* 39 no. 1 (1949): 26-35.

The major forms of egoism examined by Muhasibi include the following: (1) egoistic self-display or conceit (*riyā'*), what we might call in contemporary terms “narcissism”; (2) pride (*kibr*), defined by Muhasibi as the human godservant putting himself in the place of the master or lord, what we might call in contemporary terms the impulse toward megalomania in which a person sees himself as the center of reality; (3) vanity (*'ujb*), through which a person deludes himself into an exaggeration of the worth and value of his acts and a forgetting of his faults; and (4) self-delusion proper (*ghirra*), through which a person imagines that his own refusal to change his destructive behavior is justified by his hope in divine compassion.¹³

Sells provides a good introduction to the major points al-Muhasibi raises in that text, in which the Sufi devotes large portions to discussing their definitions, causes, and treatments as part of the process of self-purification. While al-Ghazali does not focus as intently as al-Muhasibi on these specific negative character traits, he does certainly mention them in the third quarter of the *Ihyā'*, in which he considers those traits that may keep one from achieving salvation.¹⁴

Furthermore, one finds in al-Muhasibi's *Ri'āya* a skeletal version of al-Ghazali's general ethical system, the treatment of negative qualities through the cultivation of their opposites in the soul. For example, in the *Ri'āya* al-Muhasibi asserts that sincerity (*ikhlas*) and blame (*malāma*) counter the sins of conceit (*riyā'*) and pride (*kibr*).¹⁵

Although very little of the *Ri'āya* resembles al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'* in terms of structure, style, and actual content, one clearly notices the conceptual inspiration al-Muhasibi was for al-Ghazali. In addition to the systemic similarities mentioned above, one finds in al-Muhasibi

¹³ Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 172.

¹⁴ Al-Ghazali discusses all of these in the third quarter of the *Ihyā'*: *riyā'* [*Ihyā'* 3:285-325 (*kitāb XXVIII, shaṭr 2*)], *kibr* [*Ihyā'* 3:327-358 (*kitāb XXVIII, shaṭr 1*)], *'ujb* [*Ihyā'* 3:358-366 (*kitāb XXVIII, shaṭr 2*)], *ghirra* [*Ihyā'* 3:367-402 (*kitāb XXX*)]. Among them he includes *al-jah*, which he discusses along with *riyā'*: *Ihyā'* 3:269-284 (*kitāb XXVIII, shaṭr 1*).

¹⁵ *Ri'āya*, 207-232 (on *'ujb*); 232-270 (on *kibr*).

references to certain important ideas such as the *nafs* as the lower soul,¹⁶ echoed and complicated by al-Ghazali. Al-Muhasibi also discusses piety (*taqwa*),¹⁷ fear (*khawf*),¹⁸ and repentance (*tawba*)¹⁹ as fundamental aspects of the process of self-purification, and we have already seen in prior chapters their importance to al-Ghazali's thought. Furthermore, al-Muhasibi emphasizes the dual categories of 'actions of the body' (*a 'māl al-jawāriḥ*) and 'actions of the heart' (*a 'māl al-qulūb*),²⁰ which bear striking resemblance to al-Ghazali's own organization of the *Iḥyā'*, the first two quarters of which consider the bodily actions, and the final two quarters of which address the acquisition of knowledge of the heart. These two sets of classifications are similar in their attempts to arrange the process of self-purification according to its duality in relation to the exterior and interior levels of the human being.²¹

Despite these significant conceptual correspondences, in relation to poverty and renunciation al-Muhasibi's *Ri'āya* does not contain much of substance with which to compare this text to Book XXXIV of al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā'*. He does mention *zuhd* in the *Ri'āya*, however, expanding the concept beyond the ways it was normally considered at that time; for al-Muhasibi, *zuhd* is more than ascetic practice, it is the beginning of detachment from those things to which the heart clings instead of God. He does not discuss *zuhd* in depth in the *Ri'āya*, nor does he

¹⁶ *Ri'āya*, 12-18; 133-134; 141-43; 207-10.

¹⁷ *Ri'āya*, 5.

¹⁸ *Ri'āya*, 5.

¹⁹ *Ri'āya*, 19-62.

²⁰ *Ri'āya*, 13.

²¹ *Ri'āya*, 171-75; 332-35.

place the emphasis on it al-Ghazali does by making it one of the stations of the heart. In fact, al-Muhasibi's work does not contain such a systematized mode of categorization in relation to the positive and negative characteristics of the human being, as the concepts of states (*ahwāl*) and stations (*maqāmāt*) would not develop until later in the history of Islamic spiritual thought.

In contrast with the *Ri'āya*, al-Muhasibi's *al-Wasāya* (The Guidance/Precepts) contains much more material related to wealth, poverty, and renunciation. The third chapter of the text is titled, "On wealth as the greatest source of depravity," and in it al-Muhasibi details the lure wealth has for believers to pursue this world rather than God.²² He refers to the love of wealth as "contrary to the hereafter," and the "source of affliction and chief among sins."²³ Those who pursue wealth "turn towards a variety of forbidden things and sins ... they disparage much from the commands and prohibitions of God ... they contest God's magnificence, and they persist in great sin, and they destroy themselves and they do not have knowledge."²⁴ Therefore, we see that the love of wealth plays a critical role in al-Muhasibi's ethics as the source or root of other sins, just as in al-Ghazali's the love of wealth is instrumental to the other sins available in this world. So for al-Muhasibi as for al-Ghazali, the love of wealth relates directly to the love of this world more generally, although al-Ghazali more clearly separates them and explores their individual qualities in greater detail.

²² *Wasāya*, 45.

²³ *Wasāya*, 45.

²⁴ *Wasāya*, 45.

In some sections of the *Waṣāya* concerning wealth and poverty, al-Muhasibi references several hadith and other sayings found also in Book XXXIV. For instance, he quotes Christ as saying that rich men will not enter the kingdom of heaven, and he tells the story of Moses being corrected for imploring the Lord to help a weeping man who has left the world behind.²⁵ He also holds up ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Auf as a key example of one whose wealth affects his fate after death, since he is delayed by accounting for his wealth.²⁶ The other Companions he depicts as pious ancestors, who “were satisfied by the amount they had and they did not hope for this world,” and who “were patient with its difficulties ... swallowed its bitterness ... [and] renounced its comfort and beauty.”²⁷

All of these elements of the *Ri‘āya* and the *Waṣāya* demonstrate the significance of al-Muhasibi’s conceptual influence, not only on al-Ghazali but also on the vast majority of ascetic and mystical thinkers who came between them. Even in relation to poverty, a concept al-Muhasibi did not develop in any significant way, he provides an early touchstone al-Ghazali clearly found important. So not only do the works of al-Muhasibi provide the conceptual framework for al-Ghazali’s later writings generally, but also in reference to the subjects of poverty, renunciation, and wealth. Al-Muhasibi should not be considered a direct conceptual source of al-Ghazali’s, however, as much as he should be thought of as a spiritual ancestor for all mystically-oriented Islamic thinkers of the 9th to 11th centuries. Therefore, al-Muhasibi falls

²⁵ *Waṣāya*, 46.

²⁶ *Waṣāya*, 50-1.

²⁷ *Waṣāya*, 53.

somewhere between an authority and a conceptual source for al-Ghazali, bridging the gap between the distance of the Qur'an, hadith, and the Companions and the ascetic practitioners and mystical thinkers of a time more immediate to al-Ghazali's own. Al-Ghazali relies upon his predecessor's thought as a framework for what he discusses in the *Ihyā'*, even on the underdeveloped concept of poverty.

A Second Conceptual Source: al-Qushayri's *al-Risāla fī 'Ilm al-Tasawwuf* and al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'*

While al-Muhasibi provides a very early and significant conceptual source for al-Ghazali's thought, both generally and in relation to poverty, he lived too long before al-Ghazali to account for the important intellectual and structural developments that occurred between their lifetimes. Two works by a scholar much closer to al-Ghazali in time, Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1072), do reflect these developments. In both his *Risāla fī 'Ilm al-Tasawwuf* and his *Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusna*, al-Qushayri devotes space to discussing poverty, wealth, and God's name *al-Mughnī*, the enricher.²⁸ Although al-Ghazali does not mention al-Qushayri by name when discussing his sources in *al-munqidh*, as he does al-Makki and al-Muhasibi, he shares several connections to al-Qushayri that warrant a comparison of their works. Al-Qushayri stands within a tradition of Sufi thinkers tracing back through al-Makki, al-Junayd, and al-Muhasibi, demonstrating a connection similar to al-Ghazali's with the early collection of ascetics and

²⁸ We have used two sources for our analysis of the first text: al-Qushayri, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fī 'Ilm al-Tasawwuf*, ed. By Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mar'ashali (Beirut: Dar Ihyā' al-turath al-'arabi, 1998) and al-Qushayri, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism*, translated by Alexander D. Knysh (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 2007). For the second, we have relied on *Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusna* (Beirut: Dar Azal, 1986).

mystics congregating primarily in the vicinity of Baghdad.²⁹ And although al-Ghazali was born in Tūs, he received a large portion of his education in al-Qushayri's native Khurasān only a few decades after al-Qushayri, in fact learning directly from a student of al-Qushayri's, Abu 'Ali Farmadhi.³⁰ Therefore, it can be assumed al-Ghazali's thought was influenced at least in part by his spiritual 'grandfather' al-Qushayri.

As a source closer in time to al-Ghazali, the *Risāla fī 'Ilm al-Tasawwuf* contains elements not present in al-Muhasibi's earlier works, but which influenced al-Ghazali conceptually, both in general and in relation to poverty. While some of these concepts may not have originated with al-Qushayri, his *Risāla* is representative of Sufi literature in the generation just before al-Ghazali's; this representativeness, when added to the spiritual lineage leading from al-Qushayri to al-Ghazali, justifies the analysis of his text for its use as a conceptual source for al-Ghazali. Most notably, in contrast with many earlier thinkers, al-Qushayri includes *faqr* among the states (*aḥwāl*) and stations (*maqāmāt*) of self-purification.³¹ The *Risāla* refers to poverty in only a handful of places, all but one of which come from the Qur'an, the sayings of other Sufis, or al-Qushayri's own brief commentary. Although al-Qushayri conceives of poverty in both material and spiritual terms, he does not share with al-Ghazali the understanding of poverty as absolute; therefore, one does not find in his work any reference to the poverty of existence, nor the embodiment of divine attributes as a way to overcome it.

²⁹ See Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: the Formative Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), especially pages 1-37.

³⁰ See Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, 116n3 and Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 106-8.

³¹ *Epistle on Sufism*, 280-88.

Interestingly, al-Qushayri places his section on poverty as a spiritual station (*maqām*) towards the end of his list of stations, just before his chapters on Sufism (*tasawwuf*), good manners (*adab*), divine unity (*tawhīd*), divine gnosis (*ma'rifa*), love (*maḥabba*), and passionate longing (*shawq*). It is far from the section on renunciation (*zuhd*), in which al-Qushayri references poverty only once, a major difference between his text and that of al-Ghazali. Locating poverty at this stage in what seems to be a spiritual itinerary signals to the reader al-Qushayri's emphasis on poverty as an advanced state of spiritual development and as a key to the attainment of knowledge and love of God.

Al-Qushayri relies primarily on a single Qur'anic verse in reference to his discussion of poverty throughout the *Risāla*: "Those who entered the city and the faith before them love those who flee unto them for refuge, and they find in their breasts no need for that which hath been given to [the fugitives], but they prefer [the fugitives] above themselves even though poverty become their lot. And whoever is saved from his own avarice, they are the successful ones."³² Al-Qushayri quotes this verse four separate times, in sections on scrupulousness (*warā'*), hunger (*jū'*) and the abandonment of [carnal] desire (*shahwa*), freedom (*ḥurrīya*), and munificence (*jud*) and generosity (*sakhā'*). In this verse, and in each of these places, poverty appears as an affliction to be endured and overcome spiritually. The difficulties inherent to material poverty generally lead people to prefer themselves to others, but those in the verse have conquered this desire and managed to exhibit generosity even in the face of crippling poverty.³³ He identifies

³² Q 59:9

³³ *Epistle on Sufism*, 229.

poverty's natural relationship with hunger and desire, but for him poverty must be endured with patience, as must hunger, in order for the poor man to benefit from his poverty.³⁴

Besides this single *āya*, al-Qushayri depicts poverty not only as an affliction on the believer but also as, through its defeat, something contributing to the believer's spiritual purification. For instance, he quotes Ibrahim b. Adham, "Know that you will not attain the rank of the righteous until you have climbed six mountain peaks ... fifth, you must shut the door of wealth and open the door of poverty."³⁵ Later, he quotes Sahl b. 'Abdallah al-Tustari, "One can never achieve true servanthood without enduring four things: hunger, nakedness, poverty, and humiliation."³⁶ Furthermore, poverty is not something to be feared, but God is to be feared in poverty, even in the smallest details of one's possessions.³⁷ Finally, the novice may be particularly susceptible to the temptations of poverty, so "the master must also establish a pact with him [demanding] that he should not depart from this path despite any harm, humiliation, poverty, illness or pain that may afflict him."³⁸

So far, al-Qushayri's treatment of poverty remains within the realm of material poverty and material wealth, although some interesting correlations between his text and al-Ghazali's begin to emerge. On the one hand, al-Qushayri views poverty as an external affliction on the believer, and overcoming it may lead to the enhancement of one's spiritual state. On the other

³⁴ *Epistle on Sufism*, 159.

³⁵ *Epistle on Sufism*, 19.

³⁶ *Epistle on Sufism*, 211.

³⁷ *Epistle on Sufism*, 402.

³⁸ *Epistle on Sufism*, 407.

hand, al-Qushayri seems to advocate for the pursuit of poverty, especially as a way of combatting the temptation of wealth, a prominent idea in the *Iḥyā'* as well. In fact, poverty sits alongside hunger, nakedness, and humiliation as critical afflictions because they counter the major sins of the belly, sexual desire, and pride mentioned by al-Ghazali in the *Iḥyā'*. Furthermore, we find poverty related to fear, as it was earlier related to patience, within al-Qushayri's text, constituting another similarity to al-Ghazali's treatment of poverty in the *Iḥyā'*, in which *faqr* is intimately related to *khawf* and *ṣabr*.

Within the longer chapter on poverty, al-Qushayri offers an extended introduction to his understanding of poverty:

Poverty is the hallmark of the friends of God (*awlīyā'*), a decoration of the pure (*asfīyā'*), and the special feature with which God – praise be to Him – distinguishes His elect ones from among the righteous and the prophets. The poor are the elect servants of God – may He be glorified and exalted – and the carriers of His secrets among His creatures. By means of them God protects His creatures and due to their blessings He bestows livelihood upon them. The poor are the patient ones, who will sit next to God Most High on the Day of Judgment...³⁹

This passage reveals the importance al-Qushayri places upon poverty: first, it appears as a distinguishing mark of already highly esteemed religious figures; second, they are the ones who invite God to protect the rest of creation; third, they build up patience as ones who endure affliction and who will be rewarded for it in the hereafter with a seat next to God.

Al-Ghazali emphasizes similar qualities of the poor, such as the special nature of poor prophets and saints over others: “there are in paradise rooms that appear to the people of paradise as the stars of the heavens appear to the people of earth. No one enters them but a poor prophet,

³⁹ *Epistle on Sufism*, 281.

or a poor martyr, or a poor believer.”⁴⁰ At the same time he asserts the trouble particularly wealthy prophets and saints will have in reaching the hereafter: “The last of the prophets to enter paradise will be Solomon son of David (peace upon them both), due to the greatness of his wealth, and the last of my companions to enter paradise will be ‘Abd al-Rahman bin ‘Auf on account of his riches.”⁴¹ As has already been shown in earlier chapters of this dissertation, al-Ghazali also associates poverty with patience and focuses on the blessings with which the patient poor man will be rewarded.

Besides the extensive explanation quoted above, al-Qushayri continues in this chapter to discuss poverty through the transmission of hadith and the sayings of other Sufis. Through these various narrations we can identify a number of principles about poverty similar to the ones al-Ghazali describes in the *Ihyā’*. The poor man should disguise his poverty from the public, to the point that others may even think he is wealthy; he quotes ‘Abdallah b. al-Mubarak, “To appear rich while being poor is better than poverty itself.”⁴² Al-Qushayri prefers poverty to wealth, again quoting a shaykh, Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq, “People dispute what is better: poverty or wealth. In my opinion, it is best when one is given enough to sustain himself (*kifāyāta*), whereupon one perseveres with this [for the rest of one’s life].”⁴³

Al-Qushayri also includes narrations indicating he thinks of poverty as both material and spiritual, although he never comes close to al-Ghazali’s depth in defining poverty as inherent to

⁴⁰ *Ihyā’* 4:197 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 4, maqām 1*).

⁴¹ *Ihyā’* 4:191 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 2*).

⁴² *Epistle on Sufism*, 284.

⁴³ *Epistle on Sufism*, 283.

human existence or related to God's divine attribute of Needlessness. First, he quotes an anonymous source, "True poverty is that the poor one in his poverty is not satisfied with anything, except for He for Whom he has [true] need."⁴⁴ Here al-Qushayri indicates a level of poverty extending beyond mere material poverty, one that may only be satisfied with the acquisition of God, rather than the accumulation of material wealth. It also identifies God as the only thing of which human beings truly have need; not only will material things not satisfy the truly poor but also these people recognize their true need as consisting solely of an attainment of the divine.

Next, al-Qushayri hints at the method by which one may achieve such a goal when he cites Ibn Khafif, "Poverty means a lack of any property and the abandonment of the attributes of one's own self."⁴⁵ Poverty has two meanings, one material and one spiritual; the meaning of the former is clear while the latter is more difficult to understand and to undertake. Like al-Ghazali, al-Qushayri asserts that the poor man should do more than merely lack property; he should also work towards a detachment from the self's attributes. This means disciplining the self, which could be interpreted here as the lower and desirous soul, in order to abandon one's creaturely attributes and move towards God, the only thing which will truly satisfy one's need.

We obtain a better understanding of al-Qushayri's theological approach to poverty by turning to his *Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusna*, in which he discusses the names of God in a way similar to the treatment of these same names by al-Ghazali in his own *al-Maqṣad al-Asna' fī*

⁴⁴ *Epistle on Sufism*, 284.

⁴⁵ *Epistle on Sufism*, 286.

sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusna. Whereas al-Ghazali pairs *al-Ghanī* with *al-Mughnī* in his work on the divine names, al-Qushayri discusses *al-Mughnī* with *al-Manī*, or “the Protector.”⁴⁶ As al-Ghazali’s treatment of the divine name *al-Ghanī* has been essential to the argument put forward in this dissertation, it seems pertinent to analyze al-Qushayri’s assessment of *al-Mughnī*, as a way of highlighting further al-Ghazali’s unique theological and mystical interpretation of the interplay between divine self-subsistence and the contingent nature of human existence in the created world.

At the beginning of his brief chapter on *al-Mughnī* al-Qushayri states, “The Enricher gives wealth to his servants, which means he provides the sufficient amount, so the wealth is what is sufficient.”⁴⁷ From the very beginning we notice al-Qushayri referring to the role of *al-Mughnī* in purely material terms; he persists in this interpretation throughout the chapter, as he describes the ways in which God provides material rewards for those who deserve them. For instance, he continues, “It is said that the creature is attached to creation as the prisoners are attached to the prison, and it is said that the one who looks to God but then returns for his necessities to other than God, God will afflict him with a neediness for creation but remove the mercy from the hearts of those who witness, so that he will be in need of God and return.”⁴⁸ Al-Qushayri clearly echoes the long-standing tradition of pitting the created world (*al-dunyā*) against God for the attention of human beings. He does not, however, employ the same depth of

⁴⁶ Al-Qushayri discusses these two terms in *Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusna* (Beirut: Dar Azal, 1986), 248-249.

⁴⁷ Al-Qushayri, *Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusna* (Beirut: Dar Azal, 1986), 248.

⁴⁸ Al-Qushayri, *Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusna* (Beirut: Dar Azal, 1986), 248.

meaning for the name *al-Mughnī* as does al-Ghazali in his own text. Rather, al-Qushayri represents this particular divine name as that which provides the gifts for pious Muslims, a theme al-Ghazali also uses throughout the *Ihyā'*, as he consistently reminds the reader that God is the ultimate source of all wealth, whether it be material or spiritual.

None of these aspects of the relationship between God, poverty, wealth, and creation are particularly unique to al-Qushayri, nor does he present them in any profound way. In fact, the *Risāla* and *Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusna* as conceptual sources offer little to al-Ghazali that does not appear in earlier texts, such as those written by al-Muhasibi and others. What an analysis of al-Qushayri's thought does offer to this study, however, is a snapshot of Sufi thought concerning poverty at a time nearer to al-Ghazali than most others, and from a thinker who stands clearly in the lineage of al-Ghazali's spiritual and intellectual training. Al-Qushayri places poverty among the highest of states and stations in the path to the knowledge and love of God, a development not reflected in the earlier mystical writers. This hints at a growing emphasis on poverty in mystical ethics, so that al-Ghazali's expansion of its role does not appear out of nowhere but rather as part of a trend within Islamic mystical thought.

Abu Talib al-Makki and the Literary Influence of His *Qūt al-Qulūb*:

Arguably the text most influential on al-Ghazali in writing the *Ihyā'*, Abu Talib al-Makki's *Qūt al-Qulūb* should be considered Book XXXIV's primary literary source.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ For al-Makki's influence on al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'*, see H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in Ghazzālī* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1975), 34-5; Kojiro Nakamura, "al-Makki and al-Ghazali on Mystical Practices," *Oriens* 20 (1984): 83-91; Mohamed Sherif, *al-Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1975), 105-7; many pertinent sections of *Muhammad al-Gazzālī's Lehre von den Stufen zur Göttesliebe*, trans. Richard Gramlich (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner,

Designating it as such, we differentiate it from both the authorities, to whom al-Ghazali appealed by name and generally in order to establish support for his own beliefs, and the conceptual sources, from which al-Ghazali clearly pulled inspiration for his ideas, despite not incorporating their texts directly into his writing. He uses al-Makki's *Qūt* in a very different manner; although we learn from the *munqidh* that al-Ghazali read the *Qūt* in pursuit of Sufi knowledge, he never mentions al-Makki in Book XXXIV, nor does he rely upon al-Makki's concepts in the same way he does al-Muhasibi's. Rather, an examination of the *Ihyā'*'s 34th book in conjunction with the pertinent sections of the *Qūt* reveals that al-Ghazali took large swaths of text and simply reproduced them, sometimes exactly as they appear in the earlier text and sometimes in a new order and format. For this reason, we have categorized al-Makki's *Qūt* as a *literary* source, and we compare these two writings more carefully in order to discover why al-Ghazali chose to use al-Makki's text in this way but seen as neither authoritative nor conceptually significant.

Most of the articles and monographs noting the connection between al-Makki and al-Ghazali do not perform in depth analyses; however, they make clear that al-Ghazali relied heavily on *Qūt al-Qulūb* throughout the *Ihyā'*, as Mohamed Amin points out in his dissertation:

It is worth emphasizing that large sections of al-Ghazali's chapter on repentance are copied word for word from al-Makki's *Qūt al-Qulūb*. Although al-Ghazali mentions his indebtedness to al-Makki only once explicitly in the chapter on *tawba*, it is quite clear from a close scrutiny of both works that al-Ghazali has leaned heavily on his predecessor in this section. This is true for al-Ghazali's citations from the Qur'an, the hadith, the

1984); *Die Nahrung der Herzen*, trans. Richard Gramlich (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1992); W. Mohamed Azam b. Mohamed Amin, *An Evaluation of the Qūt al-Qulūb of al-Makki with an Annotated Translation of his kitāb al-tawba*, (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1991), 190-222; Saeko Yazaki, *Islamic Mysticism and Abu Talib al-Makki: the Role of the Heart* (London: Routledge, 2013), 83-4, 99-100.

sayings of Sahl al-Tustari and of Abu Sulayman al-Darani, the stories of prophets, the story of the angel of death and numerous other examples.⁵⁰

This type of close reading will be necessary in order to determine the extent to which al-Ghazali relies on al-Makki for his understanding of *faqr*, as he clearly does for *tawba*. Such an analysis should begin with similarities between the two texts before moving on to the analysis of the differences, which are perhaps the more important aspects of any such comparison.

While the relationship between al-Ghazali and al-Makki deserves a study all its own, such a comprehensive comparison is far beyond the scope of the current dissertation. We must again content ourselves with only a partial study of that relationship, with the hope that others will continue to explore its various pieces until a complete picture has been constructed. This is an especially important task considering the relative neglect of al-Makki's influence, not only on al-Ghazali but also on the development of Islamic mysticism more broadly. Such a foundational text and thinker must be better understood in the future.

Before approaching the subject of poverty, we must point out that al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'* and al-Makki's *Qūt* share many general similarities, including those related to content, structure, and style. Both contain a significant portion of text dealing with the concept of knowledge; al-Ghazali opens the *Ihyā'* with his *Book of Knowledge*, in which he outlines his epistemological hierarchy and sets the tone for the rest of the 40-book text, while al-Makki places his treatise on knowledge in the center of the *Qūt*, where it serves as a sort of axle around which the entire text

⁵⁰ Amin, *An Evaluation of the Qūt al-Qulūb*, 204.

turns, surrounded by discussions of practical spiritual matters.⁵¹ Both al-Ghazali and al-Makki view knowledge as a way of knowing God, which in turn leads to achieving a closer proximity to the divine.

The *Ihyā'* and *Qūt* both include large sections detailing the various states and stations of the seekers after God. The fourth quarter of the *Ihyā'* provides a sort of spiritual itinerary according to which Muslims may perfect themselves by embodying certain of God's attributes and ultimately attain the love of God in the Hereafter. Al-Makki devotes the entire thirty-second part of the *Qūt* to his discussion of what he calls the stations of certainty (*maqāmāt al-yaqīn*).⁵² By far the longest section of the entire work, its list of stations contains many of the same ones included by al-Ghazali in the fourth quarter of the *Ihyā'*: repentance (*al-tawba*), patience (*al-ṣabr*), thankfulness (*al-shukr*), hope (*al-rajā'*), fear (*al-khawf*), renunciation (*al-zuhd*), God-Reliance (*al-tawakkul*), satisfaction (*al-riḍā'*), and love (*al-maḥabba*).⁵³

Despite the similarities between these two lists, al-Makki's version again occurs towards the middle of his text and is followed by a long discussion of more practical matters, such as the five pillars, the foundational aspects of Islamic belief, and habitual actions related to such concerns as food, travel, and marriage. In the *Ihyā'*, these states appear in a number of books in the fourth quarter, at the end of the treatise and after the more practical considerations of quarters one and two; he discusses them as a set of advanced spiritual states, after which he continues by

⁵¹ Abu Talib al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, ed. Asim Ibrahim al-Kayyali, vol. 1 (Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya: Beirut, 2009), 224-241.

⁵² Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 302-449 and vol. 2, 3-135.

⁵³ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, 302.

addressing the results of these states, such as intention and sincerity, meditation, and the remembrance of death. These could be interpreted as the methods of practice one would be obligated to perform after achieving the state of *maḥabba*, and by which one could maintain one's elevated spiritual state while still alive.

Al-Ghazali's inclusion of two more items than al-Makki stands out as the major difference between the two lists, as poverty (*al-faqr*) and Divine Unity (*al-tawḥīd*) do not appear among al-Makki's stations. As discussed in chapters one and three, *tawḥīd* for al-Ghazali (as for al-Makki) is the ultimate goal of the spiritual quest, an overarching theological framework within which to understand the extent to which a seeker has achieved proximity to God. While the love of God (*maḥabba*) is the form such proximity takes, *tawḥīd* is the defining principle of the Islamic theological conception of God and His relation to creation, and so it could not properly be considered a station for any human being. Rather, the states themselves are representations of the level of *tawḥīd* achieved. Therefore, we will leave *tawḥīd* aside for now and focus on the one station, *faqr*, al-Ghazali chose to add to the list found in al-Makki's text.

Poverty in both *Qūt al-Qulūb* and *Ihyā'*

Poverty, therefore, becomes the most glaring difference between al-Ghazali's and al-Makki's lists of states and stations. Al-Ghazali's pairing of *faqr* with *zuhd* in the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation* leads us to examine those similar sections of al-Makki's *Qūt*; al-Makki mentions renunciation among the stations of certainty,⁵⁴ and he treats poverty later in the text,

⁵⁴ Al-al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 403-449.

along with the more practical matters of habitual action.⁵⁵ A detailed analysis of these two portions of the *Qūt* reveals the great extent to which al-Ghazali relied on that text for the writing of his *Ihyā'*, while at the same time illuminating some significant places at which al-Ghazali departs from al-Makki's text in order to build his own system of mystical ethics.

Specifically, al-Ghazali relies heavily on al-Makki for his use of traditional materials such as the Qur'an, hadith, and stories of saints, as well as in reference to the very practical questions raised by al-Makki concerning poverty, such as the permissibility of begging, hiding one's poverty, and the question of what amount makes one poor. Al-Ghazali deviates from al-Makki, however, in two significant ways. First, he organizes the material he finds in al-Makki's text in a much more systematic manner; al-Ghazali tends to follow a progression of literary types (the *haqīqa* and *faḍīla* sections discussed in chapter 2), and so doing leads him to group sayings according to thematic grounds. Second, al-Ghazali's emphasis on *'ilm tarīqa al-ākhira*, with its twin components of *'ilm al-mu'āmalā* and *'ilm al-mukāshafa*, leads both to his departure from al-Makki's primarily practical text and to his conceptualization of poverty in line with his own mystical ethics.

The clearest evidence for al-Ghazali's borrowing from al-Makki emerges from the remarkable congruence of the texts' references to the Qur'an, hadith, and sayings of Companions and saints. In general, there is much greater overlap between the sections on *zuhd* than there is on *faqr*; this makes sense, given the greater number of resources referring to renunciation early in the Islamic tradition. This should not be taken to mean that poverty is insignificant, however, as

⁵⁵ Al-al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 323-342.

it still receives extensive treatment by both scholars. Rather, it reinforces the idea that al-Ghazali brings poverty closer to the forefront, while his predecessors chose to focus on the closely related *zuhd*. The material aspect of poverty may have contributed to its early consignment to a secondary status as a virtuous character trait. As we have and will continue to see, al-Ghazali changes this by recasting poverty in absolute and ontological terms.

The Qur'an in *Ihyā'* and *Qūt*

The first and most important task is to report and trace al-Ghazali's use of certain traditional Islamic sources, before moving on to a more general comparison between al-Makki's and al-Ghazali's texts. The *Book of Poverty and Renunciation* contains 78 references to the Qur'an, 47 of which appear as direct quotations by al-Ghazali, while eight of the other 31 are quoted within the context of other people's sayings and the remaining 23 occur as oblique references to Qur'anic material.⁵⁶ Very few of these oblique references appear in al-Makki's text, and this difference raises a question about their origins. The answer is, unfortunately, inconclusive and perhaps unsatisfying, but it seems likely these references result from al-Ghazali's personal style. He tends to allude to Qur'anic material without quotation, as if it has become so internalized to his thinking that he can conceive of no better way to express his beliefs. This kind of oblique referencing of revelatory texts is not uncommon in much medieval

⁵⁶ Besides my own research, Richard Gramlich's translation of Book XXXIV into German has been invaluable in helping to identify some of these oblique references. See note 49 in the Introduction to this dissertation.

writing, and it is very possible that a more thorough examination of al-Makki's own text would reveal similar references to those made by al-Ghazali.

Those oblique references that *are* shared between the two texts are perhaps more revealing for their rarity; there are only four, and they illustrate some of the major points al-Ghazali emphasizes throughout the second half of Book XXXIV, since all of them occur in the sections on renunciation. The first (Q 87:17) in order of appearance states, "The hereafter is better and more lasting," which al-Ghazali holds up as the defining knowledge of the state of renunciation; this is all one needs to know in order to master this particular state.⁵⁷ The second (Q 9:111) refers to God's purchasing of believers' souls and possessions in exchange for paradise and martyrdom. This strikes at the heart of renunciation for al-Ghazali, the exchange of this world for the next, and it alludes to the willingness of the renunciant to fight in the cause of God.⁵⁸ The third (Q 12:8) illustrates the reason Joseph's brothers are not renunciants until they actually remove him from their hands.⁵⁹ The fourth and final verse (Q 61:4) declares God's love for those who fight in His cause.⁶⁰ Each of these sheds light on the most important aspects of renunciation for al-Ghazali, so it makes sense that he would utilize them, although he adds to them with a significant number of other traditional Islamic materials.

Three of the eight *āyāt* quoted in the sayings of earlier thinkers come from one story by Bishr b. al-Harith al-Hafi (d. c. 850), explaining the different kinds of poverty, and they are

⁵⁷ *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 425; *Ihyā'* 4:212 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 1*).

⁵⁸ *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 410, 412, and 413; *Ihyā'* 4:212 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 1*).

⁵⁹ *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 414; *Ihyā'* 4:213 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 1*).

⁶⁰ *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 411; *Ihyā'* 4:222 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 3, faṣl 3*).

themselves oblique references (Q 18:107, Q 56:27, Q 83:18-19).⁶¹ Two of them (Q 80:1-6 and Q 46:35) appear in hadith not found in al-Makki's text,⁶² while the other three (Q 12:18, Q 28:38, Q 26:89) come from stories of the Companions and Followers of the Prophet Muhammad shared in both al-Makki's and al-Ghazali's texts.⁶³ These references reveal very little beyond what was found concerning the sharing of hadith, which will be discussed below.

Of the 47 quoted *āyāt*, 36 of them can be found directly in al-Makki's *Qūt al-Qulūb*; of the remaining eleven, only three are unrelated to other *āyāt* used by al-Makki. Four of them (Q 18:29, Q 2:268, Q 28:79, Q 51:22-23) occur either just before or just after verses quoted by al-Makki himself,⁶⁴ two (Q 14:3, Q 57:21) occur as members of groups of other verses that do appear in al-Makki's text,⁶⁵ and two (Q 46:20, Q 93:5) refer to the lowness of *al-dunyā* as explanations for hadith.⁶⁶ Al-Ghazali uses two others to support statements he makes regarding hypocrites fearing martyrdom (Q 62:8) and the different forms of punishment possible for those who do not achieve salvation (Q 83:15-16).⁶⁷ All of these additions to the materials found in al-

⁶¹ *Ihyā'* 4:210 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 9*).

⁶² *Ihyā'* 4:192 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 2*); *Ihyā'* 4:216 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 2*).

⁶³ *Ihyā'* 4:211 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 9*), *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 337; *Ihyā'* 4:231 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 4, muhimm 3*), *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 433; *Ihyā'* 4:223 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 3, faṣl 3*), *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 420.

⁶⁴ *Ihyā'* 4:192 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 2*), al-Makki quotes Q 18:28 at *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 425; *Ihyā'* 4:210 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 9*), al-Makki quotes Q 2:269 at *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 405 and Q 2: 267 at *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 336; *Ihyā'* 4:214 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 2*), al-Makki quotes Q 28:80 at *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 403; *Ihyā'* 4:196 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 3*), al-Makki quotes Q 51:21 at *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 408.

⁶⁵ *Ihyā'* 4:214 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 2*); *Ihyā'* 4:197 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 4, maqām 1*).

⁶⁶ *Ihyā'* 4:214 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 1*); *Ihyā'* 4:228 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 4, muhimm 2*).

⁶⁷ *Ihyā'* 4:223 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 3, faṣl 3*); *Ihyā'* 4:235 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 4, muhimm 6*).

Makki can be explained by al-Ghazali's extensive knowledge of the Qur'an and his desire to provide more context than did his predecessor.

This leaves only Q 47:38, which reads, "God is the Rich and you are poor."⁶⁸ Truly, the addition of this verse could also be explained in the same ways as the others, but its location and content mark an important divergence from al-Makki's text. Al-Ghazali places this verse at the very beginning of the 'section on the true meaning of poverty,' using it to establish what he calls "poverty in an absolute sense" in reference to created beings.⁶⁹ As argued in chapter two, this is central to the concept of ontological poverty, which can only be countered through the pursuit of material poverty. Therefore, the inclusion of this new verse indicates al-Ghazali's shift to a higher level of discussion concerning poverty than that in which al-Makki engaged in his own text. This can be read, in a sense, as an allusion to future "flashes" of *mukāshafa* in Book XXXIV, as al-Ghazali foreshadowing future illuminative sections of text.

Al-Ghazali's use of Qur'anic materials in the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation* is clearly influenced by al-Makki's *Qūt al-Qulūb*. More than 75% of the *āyāt* directly quoted in Book XXXIV also appear in al-Makki's text, and those oblique references to Qur'anic verses that do appear in both places are theologically significant for al-Ghazali's argument about renunciation. Even more important, the main point at which al-Ghazali diverges from al-Makki in terms of the Qur'an is the 'section on the true meaning of poverty,' since al-Makki clearly envisions poverty as a primarily material phenomenon, albeit a worthy one which aids ascetic practice, and al-

⁶⁸ *Iḥyā'* 4:186 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 1*).

⁶⁹ *Iḥyā'* 4:186 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 1*).

Ghazali wishes to raise poverty to the height of a spiritual state and place it among others in the progression towards the love of God (*maḥabba*). Al-Ghazali finds this possible not because of something he has found in al-Makki or others like him but because of something he derives from revelation itself, as shown by his emphasis on Q 47:38 in the *Ihyā'*.

Hadith and Stories of the Saints in *Ihyā'* and *Qūt*

The task of compiling and collating every hadith and other story used by al-Ghazali and al-Makki is a much more daunting one than doing so for Qur'anic *āyāt*. The *Book of Poverty and Renunciation* alone contains more than 300 such reports, close to 60% of which correspond to those reported in the pertinent sections of al-Makki's *Qūt*. Performing this comparison is perhaps the more rewarding task, however, as both thinkers utilize hadith and other accounts much more consistently throughout their respective texts, and thus it is through these accounts one may most effectively track any overlap between them. In fact, all of the assertions made based upon our analysis of the Qur'anic materials may be reinforced through a more detailed look at the texts' similar hadith and stories of the saints.

To begin, it is through an examination of the hadith that one notices that the degree to which al-Ghazali's text mirrors al-Makki's varies according to the different genres of writing utilized, whether in reference to poverty or renunciation. The sections of Book XXXIV concerned with *adab*, or accepted behavioral norms, correspond most closely to the *Qūt*, with certain sections of the *Ihyā'*, as pointed out by Amin in reference to *tawba*, appearing as direct copies of the earlier work. This is most clearly seen in several notable places: the 'section on the behavior of the poor man with respect to his poverty,' the 'section on the behavior of the poor

man in accepting gifts without begging,’ the sections on the amount of wealth allowed to beggars, and especially the ‘section on the detailed explanation of renunciation in reference to life’s necessities.’

Such a close correspondence in these areas, where entire pages of the *Qūt*, including both references to traditional sources and al-Makki’s own thought, are simply reproduced in al-Ghazali’s text, indicates that in reference to poverty at least, al-Makki’s thinking was most influential on al-Ghazali as a manual for behavior. Moreover, this correspondence likely indicates al-Ghazali’s attitude towards the *Qūt* as a comprehensive compilation of traditional *bayānāt*; therefore, it makes sense that al-Ghazali would rely more heavily on al-Makki in these areas, where al-Ghazali did not wish to add more. Instead, al-Ghazali seems to have focused his effort where his strengths lay, in bringing these traditional materials together with more abstract philosophical doctrines to create his own system of mystical ethics.

Since these behavioral sections contain the most significant correspondences, it will be worthwhile to spend some more space on their similarities, particularly in reference to those concerned with poverty. For instance, in the sections mentioned above, al-Ghazali presents many of the same ideas as al-Makki without alteration. Notably, al-Ghazali recycles al-Makki’s levels of “hoarding,” so that one may secure possessions sufficient for three lengths of time: one day, forty days, or one year.⁷⁰ These represent descending levels of poverty, and anything beyond this places one outside the realm of poverty. Al-Ghazali also spends a significant amount of space discussing the question of begging, identifying the need to consider the permissibility of the gift,

⁷⁰ Al-al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 325-26; *Iḥyā’* 4:225 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 2, bayān 4, muhim 1*).

the intention of and impact on the giver, and the intention of the beggar in taking the gift.⁷¹ Each of these things also receives due consideration in al-Makki's text. In fact, the only portions of the first half of Book XXXIV, comprised by the sections on poverty, that do not entirely reproduce al-Makki's material are the 'section on the true meaning of poverty' and the 'section on the states of those who beg.' One could also include the preface to the book in this account, since it in no way corresponds to anything found in al-Makki's text, and it provides an important preview to al-Ghazali's thinking about poverty. Each of these sections will be discussed in detail below.

The next closest equivalence between the two texts occurs in those sections of Book XXXIV detailing the "excellences" of the two character traits. These *faḍīla* sections, as we have already mentioned, serve as the places where al-Ghazali marshals evidence from the traditional materials in support of his argument. Whereas the materials found in the *adab* sections appear as wholly copied sections of the *Qūt*, the corresponding material in the *faḍīla* sections derives from a variety of locations in the *Qūt*. Although the Qur'anic verses, hadith, and other reports overlap significantly, this difference in organization reveals something about al-Ghazali's method. Al-Makki's *Qūt* is on the one hand a meandering labyrinth containing flashes of insight into which he inserts materials whenever they reinforce his point. It spirals around the middle of the text, so what comes before and after serves as support for what is at its center. Al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'*, on the other hand, reflects a clear and logical structure: four quarters, forty books, each containing within it a similar progression of argumentation, and each of which leads to the climactic conclusion of perfecting the soul and achieving *maḥabba*. So al-Ghazali has

⁷¹ Al-al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 334-41; *Ihyā'* 4:201-10 (*kitāb* XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 5-8).

taken the disparate materials found in the *Qūt* and organized them into large sections composed solely of hadith and other important reports.

The sections in which there is very little overlap between al-Ghazali's and al-Makki's texts are those considered *haqīqa* sections, where al-Ghazali determines the 'true meaning' of *faqr* and *zuhd*. The 'section on the true meaning of renunciation,' however, corresponds much more closely to al-Makki's text than does the 'section on the true meaning of poverty.' In fact, while light on matching hadith references, the renunciation *haqīqa* section contains a number of similar Qur'anic verses, whereas the poverty *haqīqa* section only has two such verses and no hadith whatsoever matching al-Makki's text. One should expect a lower level of correlation of traditional materials in these sections, since, as has already been noted in chapter two, al-Ghazali located those materials primarily within the confines of the *faḍīla* sections. And al-Ghazali does share with al-Makki the use of certain examples, such as the story of Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery, as vehicles through which to discuss renunciation, in order to illustrate the 'true meanings' of these concepts; however, there is still strikingly little equivalence between the two thinkers on the 'true meaning' of poverty.

Similarities between al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'* and al-Makki's *Qūt*

Rather than present a detailed list of the hadith and reports, as we did with the *āyāt*, it is more beneficial to analyze specific sections of convergence and divergence between the two texts in question, beginning with the former and ending with the latter, which demonstrate the primary differences between al-Ghazali's and al-Makki's treatments of poverty. Although many of their corresponding sections emerge from practical or behavioral matters, certain significant

portions of the texts also coalesce around concerns that are more mystical in nature. As the focus of this study is on poverty, the sections analyzed will be limited to the first half of Book XXXIV, although some of the corresponding material from al-Makki's *Qūt* may come from his discussion of renunciation.

A close reading of these two texts in conjunction with one another reveals several features about al-Ghazali's and al-Makki's similar attitudes to poverty. Not only does al-Ghazali rely heavily on al-Makki in reference to traditional Islamic sources, but also al-Ghazali agrees with many aspects of al-Makki's argument about poverty. Al-Makki provides clear statutes of poverty, among which is the connection of poverty with one's patience for the suffering poverty brings; like al-Makki, al-Ghazali frequently connects poverty with patience as twin virtues combining to contribute to the journey towards God-reliance.⁷² Al-Makki also connects poverty with other positive character traits: satisfaction (*raḍīy*), contentment (*qanā'a*), fear (*khawf*), and hope (*rajā'*), all of which play significant roles in al-Ghazali's assessment of the virtue of poverty.⁷³ In fact, one recognizes satisfaction and contentment as appearing among al-Ghazali's five levels of poverty, while patience, fear, and hope make up the contents of Books XXXII and XXXIII of the *Ihyā'*, respectively. For both thinkers, poverty is not something endured in a vacuum; rather, it is intimately connected to the other stages of one's spiritual development.

⁷² See especially al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 331; al-Ghazali's references to patience in Book XXXIV are numerous, and we have discussed its connection to poverty in chapter three.

⁷³ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 326, 336, 418, 441 are all representative of al-Makki's more numerous references to these terms. We have discussed al-Ghazali's relation of poverty to them in chapter three of this dissertation.

Al-Makki also includes among the statutes of poverty the idea that poverty consists in having a certain amount of wealth (40 dirhams) or enough subsistence for a certain amount of time (40 days).⁷⁴ Al-Ghazali utilizes similar criteria in his own work, even basing his assessment on the same *āya* (Q 2:51) about Moses used by al-Makki to justify this particular time limit. Both agree the poor man may hoard wealth for at least forty days, if his hope is to live this long, although it is better to shorten both his hope and his cache of wealth or food to the amount needed for one day and one night.⁷⁵ Also among al-Makki's statutes is the excellence of the poor man who does not concern himself with what he will eat the next day, relying instead upon God's blessing.⁷⁶ Al-Ghazali agrees with this assessment, but with reservations; al-Makki seems more comfortable with begging than does al-Ghazali, although they both argue in favor of its permissibility and spend significant portions of their texts describing the proper way to beg.

While both scholars present very practical treatments of poverty, al-Makki and al-Ghazali seem to be practical in very different ways. Al-Makki, for instance, appears to address his text to a small community of ascetic practitioners who already have some familiarity with the concepts and practices to which he refers. His tone is more direct and forceful, and his organization is more lacking, so that the truths contained in his text are more difficult to find. Al-Ghazali, on the other hand, clearly speaks to a broader audience. He takes a more practical tone, guiding the reader through a well-organized process of self-purification. His practicality stems from his

⁷⁴ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 325-26.

⁷⁵ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 326.

⁷⁶ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 326.

desire for as many people as possible to advance to a high degree of purity, while al-Makki seems to care only for those already on such an ascetic path. These differences may emerge from the context in which the two men lived, and they may only reflect their different attitudes towards giving the ‘common believer’ access to esoteric knowledge. Either way, it represents a significant divergence in tone and audience that affects how one reads each text, and this difference becomes even clearer when comparing the scholars’ two levels of poverty.

Al-Makki’s and al-Ghazali’s Levels of Poverty

In addition to these statutes, which correspond to some degree with al-Ghazali’s own understanding of poverty’s excellences, al-Makki also describes three levels of poverty according to which poor men may be ranked. These three levels, the poor of the rich, the poor of the poor, and the rich of the poor, do not directly parallel those found in the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation*, but they share some similar characteristics. Al-Ghazali certainly draws from al-Makki’s tripartite typology of poverty when describing his five levels of poverty, so it is useful to examine this portion of the text in detail. It will reveal both interesting points of convergence and elements of difference that reveal the primary divergence between al-Ghazali and al-Makki.

Al-Makki’s first level, the poor of the rich, contains those who “beg when necessary,” and whose “selves (*nufūs*) are satisfied by what is sufficient.”⁷⁷ They are “the pure of the rich men,” for whom “God makes as a portion the wealth of rich men;” among them is “the beggar

⁷⁷ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 327.

and the destitute one, the content and the miserable one.”⁷⁸ This is the poor man who, while he is content with a subsistence level of wealth, still pursues wealth through begging. He does not have certainty about God’s provision for him, although what he needs is always provided. He is contented by what he is given but not with what he holds.

This level seems to correspond most closely to al-Ghazali’s third level of poverty, “the contented one,” for whom “the presence of possessions is more beloved ... than their absence because he desires them.”⁷⁹ It does not match perfectly, however, because while al-Makki’s poor of the rich begs when necessary, al-Ghazali’s contented man “does not act upon his desire by rising to pursue [things].”⁸⁰ Yet al-Makki’s poor of the rich is not quite al-Ghazali’s “greedy man” either; although the latter will actively pursue wealth, he does so out of a strong desire for it and he will be distracted by it from God, while al-Makki’s poor of the rich begs only out of necessity.⁸¹ Although al-Ghazali’s contented man does not beg, he does accept gifts if they are given to him “with clear intent and spontaneously.”⁸² Perhaps this reveals a difference in al-Ghazali’s and al-Makki’s attitudes towards begging itself, so that al-Makki finds it more acceptable than does al-Ghazali. For al-Ghazali, begging is best accomplished subtly and ideally without asking at all, so that gifts are given freely and out of the desire in a generous man’s heart

⁷⁸ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 327.

⁷⁹ *Iḥyā’* 4:186 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 1*).

⁸⁰ *Iḥyā’* 4:186 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 1*).

⁸¹ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 326.

⁸² *Iḥyā’* 4:186 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 1*).

to provide for a needy man.⁸³ For al-Makki, on the other hand, poor men can and sometimes must beg, although this seems to reveal a deficiency in their character and their certainty about poverty.

Al-Makki's second level of poverty, the poor of the poor, refers to those who are "certain of their poverty, the ones who choose it voluntarily, the ones who act for it over wealth."⁸⁴ These men "do not lower themselves to begging, nor do they turn their attention to the exchange."⁸⁵ Among these people is "the disadvantaged, forbidden from the pursuit of this world," and "the one diverted, departing from the means of subsistence," and "the man contented by what comes upon him without asking and without pursuing it," and "the miserable one, satisfied by whatever God presents to him."⁸⁶ Here we find those who have left even begging behind because begging constitutes a form of complaint against God and a violation of one's certainty. Here are those content with what is given to them despite their refusal to beg, as well as those satisfied by what God has given them as their lots in life. They are so certain of their poverty that "the ignorant man will reckon them as rich men because they leave behind begging and complaint."⁸⁷

Here we find an even stronger correlation to al-Ghazali's third level of poverty, as well as his second level, the "satisfied one." Al-Ghazali's "contented one" does not beg but accepts what is given "with clear intent and spontaneously," while al-Makki's poor of the poor is contented by

⁸³ *Iḥyā'* 4:204 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 6*).

⁸⁴ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 327.

⁸⁵ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 327.

⁸⁶ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 327.

⁸⁷ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 327.

“what comes upon him without asking and without pursuing it.”⁸⁸ Al-Ghazali’s “satisfied one” does not beg either, so that he “does not crave with a desire that would be happy about the acquisition of a thing ... [he] rejects a thing if it is given to him.”⁸⁹ This resembles al-Makki’s poor of the poor, among whom is the man who is “satisfied by whatever God presents to him.”⁹⁰ Therefore, while al-Ghazali separates this into two distinct levels of poverty, they clearly resemble al-Makki’s earlier levels.

Al-Makki’s third and highest level of poverty, the rich of the poor, indicates “the generous, the lavish, the people of spending and giving.”⁹¹ These people “take [wealth] and send [it] out, they are not increased, nor do they hoard.”⁹² If these people are given wealth, “they spend it and pass it along; they are the renunciants of this world because they are the ones who are certain and certainty is sufficient for them as wealth.”⁹³ So al-Makki’s highest level of poverty corresponds to renunciation of this world, as does al-Ghazali’s, according to whom the first level of poverty “is such that if one is given material wealth it disgusts him and he is troubled by it and he flees from taking it, hateful of it and careful of its evil and its distraction [from God].”⁹⁴ The renunciants described by these two thinkers differ in important ways,

⁸⁸ *Ihyā’* 4:186 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 1*); Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 327.

⁸⁹ *Ihyā’* 4:186 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 1*).

⁹⁰ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 327.

⁹¹ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 328.

⁹² Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 328.

⁹³ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 2, 328.

⁹⁴ *Ihyā’* 4:186 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 1*).

however, as al-Ghazali's renunciant is one who hates this world openly and rejects it outright in favor of the hereafter.

Al-Makki's renunciant also rejects this world, but not in such a hateful way as al-Ghazali's. For al-Makki, the renunciant does not automatically reject what is given to him but accepts it and spends it generously for others who may be in need. Al-Ghazali addresses this practice later in his text, perhaps in direct response to al-Makki, when he says, "If you take [wealth] and spend it for those in need, this is the extreme limit of renunciation, and it is not possible except for the honest."⁹⁵ Only a select few will be able to accomplish what al-Makki suggests for the renunciants, and al-Ghazali creates room for those who may renounce this world without achieving such great heights of spiritual development.

While the two typologies of poor men offered by al-Ghazali and al-Makki resemble one another in many ways, they differ significantly enough that one notices the ways in which al-Ghazali moves beyond al-Makki in the refinement of his understanding of this character trait. Not only does al-Ghazali identify a greater number of distinct levels of poverty, but also he describes them in greater detail, allowing for more diversity in relation to the human struggle with poverty as a virtue contributing to salvation. This divergence by the later scholar, as with the ones noted above, relates to the different audiences for these scholars. On the one hand, al-Ghazali appeals to a larger swath of humanity, from the one of blind faith to the most advanced Sufi saint. On the other hand, al-Makki's more limited scope concerning poverty may be attributed to his similarly limited audience; if he addresses primarily those who have progressed

⁹⁵ *Iḥyā'* 4:204 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 6*).

in self-purification to some extent, it makes sense that he would not include the needy or the greedy, and that he would have a higher standard for the renunciants in relation to generosity. Despite these differences, it is clear that al-Ghazali has drawn from al-Makki even in this section, which contains few overlapping traditional sources, and in which al-Ghazali presents his primary (albeit preliminary) definition of poverty itself.

The Primary Difference: the “one without need,” *al-Ghanī*, and the Poverty of Existence

Analyzing the levels of poverty illuminates the most important difference between al-Makki and al-Ghazali, however, as the latter actually moves beyond renunciation to what could be called a sixth level of poverty, the “one without need.” As has been argued in Chapter 2, the designation *mustaghni* indicates a person who has fully detached his self from this world, effectively treating poverty and wealth equally. Through his acceptance of poverty and renunciation of this world, this man transcends his own poverty of existence as he cultivates the divine attribute of Needlessness (*al-Ghanī*) in his self. Al-Ghazali introduces and illustrates this through his use of Q 47:38: “God is the Rich (*al-Ghanī*) and you are the poor ones.” Al-Makki makes no mention of this verse, nor does he refer to the “one without need” a designation which is so important to al-Ghazali’s understanding of the importance of poverty. The absence of these key concepts in the earlier text indicates al-Ghazali’s primary point of departure from al-Makki because al-Makki is more directly practical, without the metaphysical undergirding al-Ghazali has drawn from philosophical thinkers and blended with earlier ascetic practice.

Al-Ghazali’s addition of *mustaghni* to the levels of poverty establishes the foundation for his argument regarding the human identification with divine attributes, an ability he ascribes to

human beings within his discussion about Ibn ‘Ata’ in the section on the excellence of poverty over wealth.⁹⁶ He states, “Some shaykh was heard saying, ‘When one follows the path of God Almighty, before he traverses the path the ninety-nine Names appear as attributes for him’ meaning that he receives from each of them a share.”⁹⁷ Al-Ghazali clearly believes men can share in the attributes of God in some way, as part of the process of self-purification and what we have called his mystical ethics. Poverty is one of the character traits leading to salvation because it contributes to this process by freeing one from the attachment to wealth and allowing one to overcome the poverty of existence and attain to the spiritual wealth inherent in the state of needlessness, absolute in divinity and manifested as detachment from this world in the human being.

Al-Ghazali’s insistence that human beings can share in the divine attributes seems to be in direct contradiction to al-Makki’s own argument, which states, “One must concede the attributes of God to God and not dispute them, nor share in them.”⁹⁸ Soon after, al-Makki states, “Poverty is more preferred [than wealth] because it is an attribute of servanthood. And whoever makes [poverty] his attribute, truly he is vindicated by the attributes of servanthood ... And the attributes of Lordliness afflict the hearts of [God’s] enemies, the tyrants and the proud...”⁹⁹ Al-Makki places wealth among the attributes of Lordliness based upon the divine name *al-Ghanī*, arguing that human beings can not take part in this attribute because it is for God alone, so

⁹⁶ *Iḥyā’* 4:196-200 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 4, maqām 1*).

⁹⁷ *Iḥyā’* 4:199 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 4, maqām 1*).

⁹⁸ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 439.

⁹⁹ Al-Makki, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, 439.

poverty is preferred for them. Poverty is good because it demonstrates a humility before the absolute wealth of God's being, and any human pretension to wealth would be considered a violation of that humility, an act of pride and vanity, and a complaint against God about one's station in the world.

Al-Ghazali argues against this as well, when he states, "So what is mentioned of the reply (to Ibn 'Ata') that God is not needless by property or means is correct concerning the censure of the rich man who desires the remaining of wealth. But what is mentioned about the attributes of God not being fit for the servant is not correct; rather, the knowledge of His attributes is an excellent thing for the servant, for the highest degree of servant has been shaped according to the nature of God Almighty."¹⁰⁰ Al-Ghazali draws the first objection, that God may not be wealthy according to means or property, from a conversation referred to in the text of al-Makki, but the second objection is the one al-Makki himself makes. Al-Makki does not refer to it in the *Qūt* as coming from anywhere else, nor does al-Ghazali reference al-Makki in the *Ihyā'*, so it is logical to conclude that al-Ghazali responds directly to his predecessor here.

This exchange demonstrates al-Ghazali's desire to move beyond al-Makki in relation to the understanding of poverty's role in spiritual development. Al-Makki classifies it as a positive character trait, one that illustrates a servant's appropriate behavior, in line with such characteristics as humility and modesty. Poverty is not an attribute of God, and this fact contributes to its benefits for human beings, since they should not try to pursue divine attributes. Al-Ghazali agrees with al-Makki in many places, but he transforms the argument, shifting it

¹⁰⁰ *Ihyā'* 4:199 (*kitāb XXXIV, shaṭr 1, bayān 4, maqām 1*).

towards one emphasizing his own conceptualization of mystical ethics. Al-Ghazali does not satisfy himself merely with the discussion of material poverty, as does al-Makki. Rather, al-Ghazali explores the relationships between material poverty, the poverty of existence, renunciation, and the divine attribute of *al-Ghanī*.

According to these relationships, the human being should aspire to the needlessness encompassed by this divine attribute by accepting poverty, even pursuing it through the renunciation of any wealth coming into his possession, until he reaches a state such that wealth and poverty are equal to him, that of *mustaghni*. Therefore, for al-Ghazali, unlike al-Makki, a man's desire to be like God is the guiding teleology of his spiritual transformation and his cultivation of protective character traits such as poverty.¹⁰¹ Ultimately, these end in an intimate knowledge (*ma'rifa*) and love (*mahabba*) of God, both of which translate into the witnessing (*mushāhada*) of God in the hereafter, which itself produces felicity (*sa'āda*). The concepts at the very heart of al-Ghazali's theological argument about poverty are the ones we find to be most original in relation to al-Makki's text.

Al-Ghazali's Contemporary Intellectual Climate:

Al-Ghazali's espousal of Sufi and philosophical beliefs and practices has been well documented, and this dissertation has so far argued that his understanding of poverty reinforces a reading of the *Ihyā'* as a text which brings together Sufi ascetic practices with philosophical

¹⁰¹ For al-Ghazali's explanation of the ways in which human beings may pursue and embody the divine attributes, see the first part of his *al-maqṣad al-'asnā fī sharḥ ma'āni 'asmā' Allāhu al-ḥusnā*, edited by Fadlou A. Shehadi (Beyrouth: Dar al-Machreq, 1971): 15-60.

metaphysics. Al-Ghazali did not rely upon the works of members from other intellectual groups of his time, however, as he openly critiques legal scholars and theologians and demotes their positions as intellectual pursuits below his own Science of the Path of the Hereafter. This relatively radical treatment of these groups, termed his ‘revivalist’ agenda by Ken Garden, did not win him any favors among certain factions of his day. As part of al-Ghazali’s many contested teachings, his beliefs about poverty found both supporters and detractors among his contemporaries. Identifying and briefly discussing some of these other positions helps establish a context for al-Ghazali’s own views.

As has been shown in this chapter, al-Ghazali’s teaching on poverty stands within a particular lineage of Sufis comprised of relatively moderate and traditional thinkers such as al-Muhasibi and al-Makki.¹⁰² His teachings did not line up with certain other groups related to Sufism, however, and after his return to Tus in 1097 he openly worked to combat these more radical forms of Sufi thought and practice.¹⁰³ Although not perfectly clear, the primary opponent in this regard seems to have been the Karrāmiyya, who claimed God had forbidden earning a living (*kasb*).¹⁰⁴ While only loosely connected to other, more formal Sufi movements, the asceticism of the Karrāmiyya frequently led to their being identified as Sufis. They flaunted their poverty and challenged the predominant legal rulings regarding poverty and wealth by practicing

¹⁰² Others have also identified such a lineage. See Sabra, *Poverty and Charity*, 17-20; Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 106-8.

¹⁰³ Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 133-34. Garden calls these people *ibāhiyya*, the ‘permissive ones.’

¹⁰⁴ C. E. Bosworth, “The Rise of the Karrāmiyya in Khurasan,” *Muslim World* 50, no. 1 (Jan. 1960): 5-14; for a brief discussion of this in relation to *kasb* see Michael Bonner, “The Kitab al-kasb Attributed to al-Shaybani: Poverty, Surplus, and the Circulation of Wealth,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121, no. 3 (Jul. – Sep. 2001): 423-25.

extreme asceticism. Al-Ghazali clearly disagrees with these teachings in the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation*, as well as throughout the *Ihyā'* as a whole, as he teaches the necessity of earning one's living and the dangers of begging others for money and food. This and other antinomian groups in Khurāsān offer a more radical interpretation of poverty, both in practice and in theory, against which to view al-Ghazali's more moderate approach.

As for philosophy, al-Ghazali's reliance on Ibn Sina is by now clearly established; he drew heavily from Ibn Sina's metaphysics especially in developing his own thought and in writing many of his most important texts. Despite his incorporation of some of his most important concepts from the philosophers, al-Ghazali also argued against many of their conclusions. Therefore, in relation to Book XXXIV of the *Ihyā'*, it is difficult to find specific engagement with *falāsifa* on the subject of poverty, as this work is primarily one of an ethical nature, for which al-Ghazali leans more heavily on his Sufi predecessors, rather than the philosophers. One could perhaps read his critique of Ibn Sina's position on the necessity and pre-ternity of the created world as connected to his understanding of the poverty of existence and the pursuit of renunciation. However, it is overall a difficult task to identify any specific debate surrounding poverty within the philosophical world at that time, as poverty was seen as a social and spiritual ideal, not as a philosophical one.¹⁰⁵

Al-Ghazali had a much more straightforward position on *kalām*, the most common mode of theological expression at his time. Although his devotion to Ash'arism has unjustly been

¹⁰⁵ In fact, the Islamic philosophical tradition largely followed Aristotle in naming magnificence (*karām*) as one of the virtues, which was for Aristotle especially related to religion. For a discussion on how al-Ghazali differs from this by emphasizing poverty over wealth, see Mohamed Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1975), 47-9.

called into question, al-Ghazali took little issue with the doctrinal elements of theology.¹⁰⁶ What he criticized instead were the ways in which theological opinions were expressed, so that he thought of the public debates and disputations that passed for theology in his day as opportunities for theologians to gain prestige and power, rather than as serious examinations of theological positions.¹⁰⁷ Al-Ghazali decried the fancy prose and convoluted logic of these public arguments, and he claimed *kalām* had little use beyond defending the faith from outside attacks. As perhaps his greatest critique of that discipline, he asserted that anything found in the works of the *mutakallimun* could be found in the Qur'an and hadith, effectively claiming the futility, and even the danger, of the exercise of *kalām*, since it was at best a pale imitation of the Qur'an's verses and at worst a means to feeding the pride and vanity of the human soul.

While there is no readily available evidence that the philosophers and *mutakallimun* offered al-Ghazali any direct opposition concerning poverty, he also criticized the elite legal scholars of his day for pursuing worldly prestige and wealth. These were perhaps his greatest targets when writing the *Ihyā'*, given his stated project of reclaiming the original and appropriate conception of *'ilm* as the full content of Islam as opposed to its more limited understanding as legal knowledge. He did the same with *fiqh*, defining it broadly as 'understanding,' rather than jurisprudence. Although in his own time he had a seemingly positive relationship with Ibn 'Aqil, then the most prominent legal scholar in Baghdad, al-Ghazali was criticized after his death by

¹⁰⁶ Richard M. Frank questioned al-Ghazali's connection to Ash'arite theology in both his *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazali and Avicenna* (1992) and his *Al-Ghazali and the Ash'arite School* (1994). More recently, Frank Griffel has convincingly argued for al-Ghazali's orthodoxy in relation to Ash'arism in his *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (2009).

¹⁰⁷ *Ihyā'* 1:26 (*kitāb* I, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 3).

none other than Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201), a Hanbalite scholar whose legacy was carried on in later centuries by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1356).¹⁰⁸

Ibn al-Jawzi took issue with al-Ghazali's interpretation of poverty as a positive character trait, and with al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'* in general; in his *Talbis Iblis* he claims al-Ghazali filled his magnum opus with "false hadiths ... discusses unveiling (*'ilm al-mukāshafa*) and transgressed the rules of jurisprudence (*fiqh*)."¹⁰⁹ He classifies al-Ghazali's writings as Sufi texts, to which he devotes a large part of his criticism in the *Talbis Iblis*; he says the devil "persuaded some to the point that the purpose of their system was complete abandonment of the world; hence they discarded what was good for their bodies; compared wealth to scorpions, forgetting that it was ordained for useful purposes."¹¹⁰ He even claims "some Sufis were caused by extreme hunger to hallucinate. They imagined that they saw Allah in the form of a beautiful form and fell in love with him. These were something between *kufr* and *bid'ah* ... some of them adopted the doctrine of incarnation (*al-hulūl*), others of union (*al-ittihād*)."¹¹¹

In relation to poverty, he states, "what is objectionable is for a person to give away all of his wealth and then beg others for their money, including oppressors and those with doubtful incomes, and to leave his children poor."¹¹² He defends wealth, asserting, "Allah has honoured wealth and ordered us to preserve it, for it is the source of human sustenance. Therefore, it is

¹⁰⁸ Sabra, *Poverty and Charity*, 23-4.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn al-Jawzi, *The Devil's Deceptions* (Dar al-Sunnah: Birmingham, 2014): 276.

¹¹⁰ Ibn al-Jawzi, *The Devil's Deceptions*, 272.

¹¹¹ Ibn al-Jawzi, *The Devil's Deceptions*, 273.

¹¹² Ibn al-Jawzi, *The Devil's Deceptions*, 290-91.

honourable.”¹¹³ He admits wealth should not be collected beyond the point of sustenance to excess, but he says, “poverty (*al-faqr*) is an illness ... wealth, on the other hand, is a blessing in need of thanks.”¹¹⁴ Ibn al-Jawzi’s Hanbalite approach depicts this world and its wealth as necessary to satisfy one’s communal and ritual obligations, such as giving *zakāh* and other forms of charity, a position which runs entirely counter to al-Ghazali’s teachings as we find them in the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation*. Ibn al-Jawzi understands poverty entirely in its external, material form, as something solely negative; thus, he describes wealth rather than poverty as instrumental to the protective character traits that will keep a person from entering the hellfire in the afterlife. This strict understanding of poverty as useless in terms of spiritual development stands on the opposite side of al-Ghazali’s thought from the radically poor Karrāmiyya, helping to establish al-Ghazali firmly in the middle of this debate, between those who completely reject poverty’s role in spiritual development and those who mistakenly make poverty the goal of ascetic practice, rather than a means to a higher end.

Al-Ghazali had many targets in mind when writing and distributing the *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*; in relation to poverty, however, his primary opponents consisted of radical antinomian groups only tangentially related to Sufism and legally conservative scholars who questioned his orthodoxy in all things, and poverty in particular. Al-Ghazali thus emerges from this contextual analysis as a moderate voice on the role of poverty in the process of self-purification. His thought may be positioned within a specific Islamic spiritual tradition extending from the earliest

¹¹³ Ibn al-Jawzi, *The Devil’s Deceptions*, 294.

¹¹⁴ Ibn al-Jawzi, *The Devil’s Deceptions*, 299.

Baghdadi ascetics, and his thought on poverty viewed as an extension and elaboration upon the works of those same men. Al-Ghazali continues, and perhaps completes, the transformation of poverty from an external ascetic response to material goods to a protective character trait providing the groundwork for one to separate from this world and begin one's progression towards attaining the love of God.

Conclusion

Establishing connections between medieval scholars of different periods presents many challenges to the modern reader. The analysis of the three earlier mystical scholars discussed here, however, clearly demonstrates al-Ghazali's reliance upon them in writing the *Iḥyā'*. They all share and draw upon a common collection of traditional sources, including the Qur'an, the hadith, and sayings of notable early thinkers, but the three scholars investigated in this chapter became part of that collection of sources for al-Ghazali, as his works would for those who came after him. To some extent, this illustrates the complicated process of the creation of a broad Islamic intellectual tradition, with its various facets and lineages.

The powerful connections between al-Ghazali and these particular scholars, however, point towards the possibility of one such tradition of thought in Islam of which al-Ghazali was a part. Al-Muhasibi may be said to have influenced every thinker after him, but not every thinker incorporated into his thought al-Muhasibi's spiritual psychology of the heart or his emphasis on ascetic practice as part of the purification of the self (*tazkīyat al-naḥs*), as did al-Ghazali. The conceptual links between al-Ghazali and al-Qushayri reinforce their shared spiritual lineage, as well as the similarities found between their texts that can be attributed to contemporary

developments in Sufi thought and practice. In addition, Al-Ghazali's adoption of entire passages from al-Makki's *Qūt* into the *Ihyā'* announces a close relationship, so that al-Makki must be interpreted as the most significant literary source utilized by al-Ghazali in writing the *Ihyā'*.

Despite his clear use of the works of these earlier thinkers, however, al-Ghazali moved beyond their thought to expand his understanding of both the meaning and the significance of poverty within the context of his mystical ethics. Although these three scholars alluded to the idea of spiritual poverty, al-Ghazali made this explicit, relying on the notion of the poverty of existence to support his assertion about the ability of human beings to assimilate the divine attributes through the acceptance of poverty, the pursuit of ascetic practice, and the embodiment of needlessness.

Establishing this understanding of poverty within historical context allows for two forms of comparison: one within the boundaries of Islam and one across that boundary with a similar tradition in Christianity. Al-Ghazali's views on poverty coincided with certain other intellectual trends of his time, and they conflicted with others. Placing his thought between that of more radical ascetical movements and more conservative Hanbalite scholars provides further reinforcement of the view of al-Ghazali as a moderate thinker who attempted to bring together many seemingly disparate intellectual trends in his time. The next chapter establishes a similar typology within the world of medieval Christianity, specifically surrounding the debates about the poverty of Christ held between the Franciscans and others, as well as among the Franciscans themselves. This heuristic will then provide a useful ground for an inter-religious comparison of poverty as it was understood by al-Ghazali, now seen as representative of a specific strain of

thought on poverty within Islam, and as it was understood within Christianity during a similar time period.

Chapter Five: Scholastics, Spirituals, and Seculars: Establishing a Comparative

Heuristic Device

Up to now, this dissertation has worked to interpret the various levels at which al-Ghazali understood and incorporated poverty into his broader system of thought concerning the process of spiritual self-purification. One of the chief goals of this dissertation, however, has been to perform a comparative analysis of medieval Muslim and Christian treatments of poverty as a spiritual concept, so it is that to which we now turn. In seeking out historical subjects for comparison across religious boundaries, one must be wary of choosing arbitrary partners; rather, there must be logical reasons for bringing two thinkers or texts or movements into conversation with one another, so that the reader may gain something substantive from the comparison. For this reason, I have chosen to place al-Ghazali into conversation with thinkers from the Christian world of the thirteenth century.

Just as al-Ghazali and his contemporaries had done two hundred years earlier in Baghdad and Khurasan, scholars such as Bonaventure (d. 1274) and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) articulated new Christian interpretations of poverty's role in the perfection of the Christian life, especially as they viewed it within the context of the new mendicant orders, the Franciscans and the Dominicans. Their thought about poverty, along with that of their interlocutors both more radical and more tentative about poverty, comprises a large body of material to which al-Ghazali's thought may be compared. Furthermore, the secondary literature on the topic stretches back almost as far as the controversy surrounding poverty itself, as academics in the newly formed universities began commenting on the influences of saints such as Francis and Dominic, as well as on their two great successors, Bonaventure and Aquinas. Therefore, this vast body of

literature, both primary and secondary, allows us to identify certain ‘currents’ of thought about poverty, forming the basis of a heuristic device with which to analyze the differences and similarities found as a result of a comparison between these particular Muslim and Christian treatments of poverty.

In order to compare and contrast these two lines of thought, some preliminary work must be done; we will therefore justify the use of the thought about poverty emerging in the thirteenth century and offer a brief summary of the poverty controversy of which much of that thought was a significant part. Then, this chapter proceeds to discuss the difficulties inherent to any comparison of this kind, and especially to this particular comparison. The doctrinal, temporal, structural, and textual differences between al-Ghazali’s writing and that of the Christian thinkers under review all require attention, although they in no way invalidate the comparison itself, as will be shown. This leads to drawing out the similarities between the Muslim and Christian thought on poverty presented here; despite the many disparities mentioned above, al-Ghazali and his Christian counterparts arrive at strikingly similar understandings of poverty in many ways, viewing it as instrumental to perfection, as part of the journey towards the love of God, as both spiritual and material, as more powerfully represented by a detachment of the heart than by material need, as a vital component of the process of purging one’s self of evil, and perhaps most strikingly, as perfectly represented by Christ.

I have not performed this comparative analysis merely for the sake of comparison, however, as I have always intended to glean whatever lessons possible for the sake of contemporary inter-religious dialogue. What can historical comparisons such as this one demonstrate to those who wish to encounter religious ‘others’ in the 21st century? To that end, I

extract from this contrast and comparison specific conclusions regarding inter-religious dialogue today; namely, that through radically divergent interpretations of the same religious figure of Christ, some Muslims and Christians in history have arrived at similar conceptions of the theological idea of poverty. This perhaps opens the door for finding other locations of mutual enrichment or understanding, not by glossing over theological differences concerning Christ, nor by focusing too heavily on the doctrinal differences inherent to the Muslim and Christian interpretations of his person, but instead by focusing on the ways in which Christ is and has been an exemplar for those who believe he is the Son of God and those who believe he is a Prophet. These lessons are considered in the conclusion of the dissertation.

The Emergence of Mendicant Orders and the Debates over Poverty

Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Europe underwent significant economic changes, what Lester K. Little describes as a transition from a gift economy to a profit economy; this shift led to the emergence of a new and wealthy middle class and of a growing population of urban poor people.¹ In moving to the cities from the countryside, more and more people were divorced from the traditional feudal system, according to which people were poor but not destitute. While they could not move up the social and economic ladders, they could at least, for the most part, provide for themselves, and when they could not their lords were under an obligation to do so. The urban poor lacked both this ability of self-subsistence through farming and communal sharing and this reliance upon a lordly benefactor when drought or famine hit.

¹ Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983): 3-18.

Thus, poverty became a social problem in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in a way never before seen, and the religious responses to this new difficulty varied from retreat to support to identification.²

It is in this context that one must understand the sprouting of the various mendicant religious movements, of which the Franciscan and Dominican orders would eventually become the most popular, powerful, and long-lasting. Early versions of this sentiment, such as the Waldensians, Cathars, Humiliati, and the Beguines failed for various reasons, some of them condemned for fostering heretical beliefs concerning elements of theology both related and unrelated to poverty.³ These early movements represent important precursors for the appearances of Saint Dominic de Guzman (d. 1221) and Saint Francis of Assisi (d. 1226) in the earliest part of the thirteenth century. These two men founded what came to be called the mendicant orders of the Church, beginning a process of wrestling with poverty's role in all aspects of Christian life, in the religious life of the orders, the secular life of priests and bishops, and the everyday lives of lay people.⁴

Despite the insistence by both Dominic and Francis on poverty's importance to Christian perfection, the controversy surrounding poverty coalesced especially within and around the Franciscan order throughout the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Francis himself

² Little, *Religious Poverty*, 59-170. Little discusses in great detail the many ways in which different members of the Church community dealt with the issue of the poor.

³ Little, *Religious Poverty*, 113-45.

⁴ On the earliest manifestations of mendicancy and the institutionalization of mendicancy in the religious orders, see Augustine Thompson, "The Origins of Religious Mendicancy in Medieval Europe," in *The Origin, Development and Refinement of Medieval Religious Mendicancies*, ed. Donald S. Prudlo (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3-30.

practiced a radical form of poverty, for which he became famous even in his own time, and his followers eventually interpreted his life and teachings in various ways. While he did not leave many texts authored by his own hand, as he was not a trained theologian by any means, those texts he did leave behind provide important clues as to how he understood poverty. His life and thought have been studied exhaustively, and it seems clear that Francis viewed poverty as both spiritual and material, and as a necessary foundation for perfectly following and imitating Christ. As the founder of the religious order embodying poverty as its charism, his perspective holds great influence over how we should enter into our discussion of Christian poverty in the thirteenth century.

While Francis's relative lack of formal theological education precluded the possibility of his leaving behind any systematic presentation of his thought, one of his most influential successors, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, developed his own thought within the context of the University of Paris, which at that time was reaching the peak of its early development.⁵ Bonaventure successfully defended the Franciscan way of life from two separate but related attacks: the first occurred throughout the 1250s, when William of Saint Amour gave voice to the secular critique of the mendicant orders' places in the University, as well as to the legality of their preaching and hearing confessions; the second attack came from Gerard of Abbeville, who in 1269 published his *Contra adversarium perfectionis christianae*.⁶ Although these attacks

⁵ For more information about the development of this university, see Ian Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University, c. 1100-1330* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), especially pp. 124-43 on Bonaventure's development there.

⁶ There are many sources for this dispute. See among the many studies D. L. Douie, "The Conflict between the Seculars and the Mendicants at the University of Paris in the Thirteenth Century," a paper read to the Aquinas Society of London on June 22, 1949, London: Blackfriars, 1954; Andrew Traver, "The Forging of an Intellectual

appeared fifteen years apart, research has shown that Abbeville's text was rooted in Saint Amour's earlier work, and that it was likely even written in the 1250s but withheld from publication until 1269.⁷

Bonaventure's responses to these attacks came in his *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, written at the height of the first dispute with the seculars, and his *Defense of the Mendicants*, published in 1269 and in direct response to Gerard of Abbeville's text. These two apologetic works, along with portions of his other writings, provide a clear picture of the systematic articulation of poverty that would come to be accepted as the official perspective of the Franciscan order. Therefore, Bonaventure's thought on poverty, especially in these two texts, serves as a better comparative tool with al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā'* than does the thought of St. Francis, since both Bonaventure and al-Ghazali created orthodox and widely-accepted interpretations of poverty as an operative stage in the process of self-purification and for the sake of loving God. While they each to some extent made original theological contributions, these two thinkers also functioned similarly as codifiers of earlier thought and mediators between their respective contemporaries.

Bonaventure was not the only thinker in this time period to defend poverty, however, as his contemporary St. Thomas Aquinas also weighed in on the subject, during the same periods of

Defense of Mendicancy in the Medieval University," in *The Origin, Development and Refinement of Medieval Religious Mendicancies*, ed. Donald S. Prudlo (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 157-95; Malcolm Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty: the Doctrine of the Absolute Poverty of Christ and the Apostles in the Franciscan Order, 1210-1323* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1998): 138-155.

⁷ Traver, "The Forging of an Intellectual Defense," 181.

conflict at the University of Paris, and in response to the same anti-mendicant rhetoric.⁸

Although the Dominican order of which Aquinas was a part has not come to be associated with poverty to the same degree as has Bonaventure's Franciscan order, poverty formed a significant part of the life of its founder, St. Dominic de Guzman. Furthermore, earlier in his career Aquinas presents an understanding of poverty that seems to align with Bonaventure's, but to diverge from him later, in the 1260s and 1270s, especially as found in his masterwork the *Summa Theologiae*.⁹ Relying on recent scholarly interpretations of Aquinas's view of poverty, particularly that of Jan van den Eijnden, we identify a current of thought that incorporates the complementary Franciscan and Dominican views on poverty, as represented by their greatest 13th century expositors.

Others grappled with the importance of poverty as well, from within and without the mendicant orders; in fact, the debates surrounding poverty were quite heated, ultimately leading to the condemnation of the doctrine of Christ's absolute poverty and what some consider the destruction of the original Franciscan ideal of poverty.¹⁰ So, alongside the systematic treatments of poverty found in Bonaventure and Aquinas, both of whom reply directly to the seculars who took the most limited view of the positive role of poverty in spiritual life, it is important to include the more radical interpretation of poverty found among the Spirituels, perhaps best articulated by Peter John Olivi in its nascent form and Ubertino of Casale in its later

⁸ Douie, 24-25; Traver, "The Forging of an Intellectual Defense," 164-74; Jan G. J. van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God: Thomas Aquinas on Evangelical Perfection* (Leuven: Peeters, 1994): 20-26.

⁹ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 31-68.

¹⁰ Malcolm Lambert advances this idea throughout his *Franciscan Poverty*.

manifestation.¹¹ These men and their followers refused to abandon what they viewed as the original intent of St. Francis, and their protests against not only the possession but also the use of wealth raised important questions that became impossible to resolve in any effective way. The split between these Spirituals and the Conventual Franciscans eventually caused so much strife that Pope John XXII effectively denounced the doctrine of Christ's absolute poverty and forced the Franciscan order to accept ownership of goods in common.¹² This led to a final determination on the Franciscan relationship to poverty, so that the order ultimately came to look like many other orders in the church, living in community with a communal source of wealth for sustenance, rather than the itinerant lifestyle of St. Francis and his earliest followers.

The Franciscan 'Ideal' of Poverty:

Before presenting the three currents of thought concerning poverty mentioned above, we must deal with the source of the controversy, which does not originate with but finds its most provocative manifestation in the life and teachings of St. Francis of Assisi. In fact, the majority of the controversy that produced the three currents discussed below emerges out of different groups' interpretations of St. Francis's teaching on poverty. Questions surrounding the depth of Christ's poverty in his lifetime, the level of poverty appropriate for members of religious orders, the distinctions between ownership of goods and use of goods, the differences in allowances for ownership proper to religious and secular members of the church, and the relationship between

¹¹ On the Spiritual-Conventual controversy, see the work of David Burr, especially *The Spiritual Franciscans: from Protest to Persecution in the Century after St. Francis* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2001).

¹² Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 221-70.

poverty and the perfection of Christian life generated a vast array of responses, which led to increased tensions both within the Franciscan order itself and between the order and the secular clergy, eventually bringing the papacy into the controversy as well.

The content of these various positions concerning poverty will be discussed in more detail in the sections pertaining to the individual currents of thought. Before turning to the medieval interpretations of Francis's life, however, we must rely on recent scholarship to determine the current scholarly consensus regarding its details. These most recent scholarly opinions rely upon St. Francis's own documents, his Rules and Testament as well as his letters to friends and followers, and upon those stories told about him during his life and shortly after his death. What we find is a man devoted to living a radical form of poverty rooted not only in the renunciation of material possessions but also in the imitation of Christ's poverty of spirit.

Again, Francis must be understood within his context; although the popularity of his order leads many people to assume his message was radically new and discordant with his own time, recent research has suggested that "the closer one looks at aspects of Francis' life in the context of an on-going tradition of asceticism and preaching stretching back to the hermit-preachers, the more striking the continuity."¹³ As early as 1100, proto-mendicant groups had been sprouting up in France and northern Italy, but they were not able to establish themselves within the wider body of the church community. These movements, including Francis's very popular one, began a long process of determining the role of poverty within religious life; the

¹³ Augustine Thompson, "The Origins of Religious Mendicancy in Medieval Europe," in *The Origin, Development, and Refinement of Medieval Religious Mendicancies*, edited by Donald Prudlo (Leiden: Brill, 2011): 15.

concept of absolute poverty, communal as well as individual poverty, for those initiated in the religious life was new and took time to work out. So, we must be careful to read Francis as a radical innovator in terms of his reliance on poverty, but his movement's success must be at least partially attributed to other contextual factors.

For many, this comes from his exemplification of the perfection of the religious life. While later Franciscans would engage in theological discussions concerning the importance of poverty, Francis merely wished to determine a way of life he saw as imitating Christ's. It seems clear from the sources that Francis may have preferred not to have established an order; at the very least, "Francis was a supreme spiritual master of small groups: but he was unable to provide the impersonal organization required to maintain a world-wide order."¹⁴ The rapid growth of his new order during his own lifetime already presented a tension between the wishes of the founder and the practicalities of living such a life within the confines of a large, institutionalized setting.

Francis himself preferred a life of radical poverty: "the more radical the version of poverty that is presented to us, the more likely it is to reflect the true wishes of Francis."¹⁵ The primary sources for our understanding of his preference for poverty are his two Rules and his Testament, which is a sort of exhortation to his followers at the end of his life. The Later Rule (1223) was essentially a re-working and refocusing of the Earlier Rule (1209-1221), and "contrary to the common misconception, the Later Rule is stricter on poverty than the 1221

¹⁴ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 38.

¹⁵ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 40.

draft.”¹⁶ In the Later Rule, which Pope Honorius III approved as official, Francis writes, “I strictly command all my brothers not to receive coins or money in any form, either personally or through intermediaries.”¹⁷ This is a strong condemnation of currency, which Francis viewed as intimately related to the avarice he wished his followers to avoid.

Shortly thereafter, Francis exhorts his followers to avoid other kinds of wealth, and he expands on the importance of poverty to his vision:

Let the brothers not make anything their own, neither house, nor place, nor anything at all. As pilgrim and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go seeking alms with confidence, and they should not be ashamed because, for our sakes, our Lord made Himself poor in this world. This is that sublime height of most exalted poverty which has made you, my most beloved brothers, heirs and kings of the Kingdom of Heaven, poor in temporal things but exalted in virtue.¹⁸

In this passage Francis clearly forbids his followers from claiming any possessions as their own, not only as individuals, but also as a community. He instructs them to beg for alms as a means of subsistence, and to do so confident in the provision of the Lord for their well-being. He relates poverty to humility, and models his instructions on the life of Christ, who “made Himself poor in this world.”¹⁹ This is a strong statement of Francis’s belief in the power of material poverty to

¹⁶ Augustine Thompson, *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012): 106.

¹⁷ “The Later Rule,” in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, *The Saint*, eds. Regis J. Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999): 102. Chapter IV, Sentence 1. The editors of these volumes of Francis’ works and works about Francis give the following note in the general introduction at the beginning of volume 1 about their numbering system: “In all instances, the numbering found in the Latin critical editions of the paragraphs and, where appropriate, of the sentences is indicated. In this way references to the *Corpus des Sources Franciscaines* will be possible.” (p. 26). We have indicated both the page numbers in these volumes and the numbering of paragraphs and sentences in our references to these texts.

¹⁸ “The Later Rule,” 103. Chapter VI, Sentences 1-4.

¹⁹ “The Later Rule,” 103. Chapter VI, Sentence 3.

bring one into conformity with Christ, as well as a declaration of his belief in the example Christ set by living his own life in poverty.

Francis reinforces this message in the Testament, recorded in the last days of his life by those who were with him. There, he exhorts his brothers to remember the Rule, and to “give themselves to honest work,” or to resort to begging when necessary.²⁰ Then, he states, “Let the brothers be careful not to receive in any way churches or poor dwellings or anything else built for them unless they are according to the holy poverty we have promised in the Rule. *As pilgrims and strangers*, let them always be guests there.”²¹ Thus, even on his deathbed Francis remained true to his vision of absolute poverty, despite the changing circumstances of his order, to which these quotes allude. Whereas from his writings we observe “Francis’s horror of the order owning valuable property,” the reality of the order was that tensions had already begun forming between this admonition against property of any kind and the practicalities of minorite life in the context of the thirteenth century church.²²

Much of this tension developed while Francis was in Egypt, seeking to witness to the Sultan and possibly martyrdom. Upon his return, he found his order altered, his Rule adapted to challenging economic circumstances, and his brothers in need of a leader. He immediately began working to correct what he perceived as the ways in which his order had been led astray. He turned to the papacy for support, he confronted those who had altered his earlier Rule and

²⁰ “The Testament,” in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, *The Saint*, eds. Regis J. Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999): 125. Sentence 20.

²¹ “The Testament,” 126. Sentence 24.

²² Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 47.

teachings, and he began work on the Later Rule, which was meant to clarify his thought. He also, in a stunning and symbolic move, resigned his leadership of the order, leading to what at most times was an awkward situation for the brothers.²³ Despite his resignation and his attempt to become an “exemplary brother, one who would give the brothers a model of humility and obedience,” Francis clearly remained in control of the order, deriving his power from the great awe and respect his brothers had for him.²⁴

One other significant way in which he addressed this crisis was to write letters and admonitions, to priests and others; the most important of these theologically is his “Later Admonition and Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance.”²⁵ In this text Francis demonstrates an understanding of poverty that goes far beyond its material dimension, despite the focus that dimension would receive in the later controversy. For instance, he “meditates on how the Word of the Father ... humbled himself to take flesh from the Virgin, an act which was ‘to choose poverty.’”²⁶ Furthermore, he “identifies this poverty with the very physicality of the human condition taken on by the Word,” a physicality inherent to all created beings by virtue of their having been created.²⁷ Here, Francis demonstrates the theological approach of discussing everything in relation to God, by investigating the ways in which human poverty is associated with God, especially through the Incarnation. The presence of this in Francis’ writings seems to

²³ Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 72-82.

²⁴ Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 80.

²⁵ Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 82-5.

²⁶ Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 85.

²⁷ Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 86.

open up the possibility of discussing an ontological component of poverty in Franciscan thought, which receives more attention in the next chapter of this dissertation, where the Ghazalian and Franciscan approaches to poverty are compared.

Francis continues by relating this physicality to Christ's exemplarity: "Jesus's act of self-giving is ... linked to his sacrifice and death on the Cross for sinners ... Jesus initiated the Eucharist so that, as victim on the altar of the Cross, he could 'give us an example, so that we might follow in his footsteps.'"²⁸ Thus, Francis emphasizes "the imitation of Christ's act of self-offering, which becomes real and tangible ... above all in the Eucharist sacrifice."²⁹ Finally, "To take into one's self the Living and Crucified Body during communion ... was to experience the true poverty that was embraced by the Word: human flesh, torn and suffering, bleeding and dying, for others."³⁰ Thus, Francis connects the act of self-sacrifice on the Cross to the act of self-giving at the Last Supper, an act in which the followers of Christ may participate in the Mass. Such participation allows one to imitate the suffering and death of Christ in a way physically impossible for most, although Francis himself sought to suffer even physically. Therefore, poverty for Francis was not merely material, despite the importance he placed on begging and renunciation of worldly goods, because poverty is at its heart a giving of the self, a self-humbling for the purpose of imitating Christ's humbling of himself, both in the Incarnation itself and, even more powerfully, on the Cross.

²⁸ Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 86.

²⁹ Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 86.

³⁰ Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 86.

Francis's theological interpretation of poverty would come to be overshadowed, however, in the dispute over the practical implications of material poverty for the monastic lifestyle. At first, the Franciscans received papal support, to go along with their vast popular support, against their detractors among the secular priests. As the dissatisfaction with the community's decisions continued to fester *within* certain circles of the Franciscan order, however, leading at times to violent confrontations between different factions, the papacy came more and more to resent the Franciscan doctrine of absolute poverty for the trouble it caused, in terms of canon law, theology, and the disruption to civil life. Those groups which participated in the debate over poverty will now be delineated as the different currents of thought concerning poverty in thirteenth century Christendom.

Establishing and Investigating the 'Currents' of Thought Concerning Poverty

Therefore, the poverty controversy produced three primary currents of thought concerning poverty with which this chapter deals. The first, represented by the secular masters at the University of Paris and many of the secular priests and bishops throughout the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, argues against the mendicant orders' claims that Christ's absolute poverty meant he and the apostles not only lacked individual wealth but also lived in communal poverty. The second, represented by the Spirituals, argues for the most radical interpretation of the doctrine, so that not only the possession but also the use of wealth should be limited. Finally, the third current of thought concerning poverty, represented in two aspects by Bonaventure and Aquinas, constitutes the middle ground, in that these men argued for the absolute poverty of Christ but for the necessity of the use of goods held in common. Bonaventure and Aquinas differ

significantly, however, concerning the extent to which poverty must be upheld, so that they appear on the same side against the seculars but against one another concerning certain specific aspects of poverty. In the end, as the most significant early Franciscan thinker, and as one whose thought came to be identified with poverty more than Aquinas, Bonaventure serves as the better source for a comparison with al-Ghazali.

Although these different currents are important to understanding how poverty was conceptualized at that time, they tend to form around the practical application of poverty to religious life. While this is valuable information in terms of context, it does not strike at the heart of poverty's importance. This chapter argues instead for the greater significance of the spiritual interpretation of poverty, especially as articulated by Bonaventure, because this offers a more profound and more productive ground for the comparison and contrast between the Muslim and Christian thought on this subject. The practical details differ greatly across these religious, cultural, temporal, doctrinal, and textual boundaries, but the theological and spiritual conclusions drawn by the authors being compared reveal striking similarities.

The First Current: the Secular Masters and Judas' Money Bag

The earliest attack on the Franciscan interpretation of poverty, as articulated and practiced by Francis as well as his early followers, originated among the secular clergy at the nascent University of Paris. Between the time of Francis's death in 1226 and the first major controversy of the 1250s, the mendicant orders, both Franciscan and Dominican alike, had achieved great strides in acquiring the support of both the papacy and the lay people. They had

also begun to consider the theological foundations of their beliefs in a more systematic way, and the University of Paris was the logical location for the training of new mendicant scholars.

More than a half-century ago, D. L. Douie described the growing conflict between the secular clergy and mendicant orders:

By the middle of the thirteenth century, the Friars Minor had abandoned the humility and meekness enjoined by St. Francis, and, relying on papal protection and lay support, were forcing themselves everywhere on the reluctant clergy, even holding their services at times when Mass was being celebrated at cathedrals and parish churches. Moreover, if they refrained from open denunciations of the ignorance, worldliness and other defects of the clergy, their own poverty and devotion was in itself a criticism.³¹

The secular clergy resented the increasing influence and implicit critique of secular life by the mendicant orders, which had encroached on clerical prestige and power through the widening of practices such as preaching and hearing of confession. In fact, “The University of Paris had initially welcomed the friars ... however, conflict soon emerged, as the seculars later claimed, when the Dominicans failed to observe the academic *cessation*, the university strike measure to seek amends for the violation of an academic privilege, during the Great Dispersion of 1229-1231.”³²

Furthermore, the mendicants began to pose a threat to the secular clergy not only as source of reconciliation and purification for the lay people, but also in terms of intellectual and theological influence. Soon after the cessation controversy, the conversion of the two masters of theology John of St. Giles and Alexander of Hales to the Dominican and Franciscan orders,

³¹ D. L. Douie, “The Conflict between the Seculars and the Mendicants at the University of Paris in the Thirteenth Century,” A paper read to the Aquinas Society of London on June 22, 1949, London: Blackfriars, 1954, 4-5.

³² Traver, “The Forging of an Intellectual Defense,” 158.

respectively, signaled the beginning of a shift against which the secular clergy responded with great fervor. Along with a second Dominican chair appropriated during the Great Dispersion, this meant the mendicant orders now occupied three of twelve teaching chairs, and that the secular masters were limited to only six.³³

Papal support for the mendicant masters quelled the turmoil for a decade or two, but when the secular masters called for another suspension of classes in 1253, the mendicant masters again refused to join them. This led to their excommunication and expulsion from the university, as well as the eruption of the first intellectual controversy, which “brought the theoretical questions surrounding the mendicant orders into the spotlight,” especially through the debates between William of St. Amour and St. Bonaventure of 1254-1256.³⁴ This debate would continue through the 1260s as well, during which time Bonaventure wrote both his *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection* (1256) and his *Defense of the Mendicants* (1269) in response to the secular attacks. While Bonaventure’s responses will be discussed in more detail below, here the secular masters will be given the opportunity to present their own cases.

The first major opponent of the mendicant orders was William of St. Amour, who preached against their practices of poverty, preaching, and hearing confession, distributed pamphlets against their doctrines, and eventually published the work *De periculis novissimorum temporum* in 1256.³⁵ In his writings, William “utilizes the model of the common life of the

³³ Traver, “The Forging of an Intellectual Defense,” 158-60.

³⁴ Traver, “The Forging of an Intellectual Defense,” 163. The mendicants were later absolved of the punishment of excommunication by Pope Innocent IV.

³⁵ For a translation, see Guy Geltner, ed. and trans., *William of Saint Amour’s De Periculis Novissimorum* (Peeters: Leuven, 2008).

Apostles in Acts 4:32-34 as the scriptural basis for the apostolic life and emphasizes the canonical decrees that prohibit complete renunciation and begging.”³⁶ He also argues that the mendicants “belonged to an inferior order in the Church and should lead a life of retirement, prayer and penance, instead of which they arrogantly assumed the duties of preaching and the cure of souls, expressly reserved to the bishops and parochial clergy.”³⁷ William clearly tried to set the mendicant orders, and their masters at Paris, lower in the church’s hierarchy than the secular masters, whom he viewed as endowed both with more authority and more important functions within the church body.

In contrast to the mendicant poverty he viewed as so damaging to the life of the church, William presented an interpretation of poverty that may serve as representative of the secular position on the subject at his time. In the first of his disputed questions, *De quantitate elemosynae*, William criticizes Bonaventure’s defense of the mendicant practice of communal poverty. First of all, voluntary poverty leads to sin because relying on outside help for sustenance “subjects one to the dangers of flattery, lying, stealing, perjury, homicide, and suicide.”³⁸ Secondly, in addition to identifying these negative consequences of voluntary poverty, William advances a positive argument about the necessity of wealth to the religious life: “Basing his argument upon the practice of the primitive Church in Acts, William addresses the religious life in terms of the common ownership of property and depicts institutional monasticism as the

³⁶ Traver, “The Forging of an Intellectual Defense,” 164.

³⁷ Douie, “Conflict,” 9.

³⁸ Andrew Traver, *The Opuscula of William of Saint-Amour: The Minor Works of 1255-1256* (Munster: Aschendorff, 2003): 9.

inheritor of the apostolic life. William finds further scriptural justification for the common ownership of property through the interlinear gloss on John 12:6, which considers Christ's purse."³⁹ Poverty, then, should only be voluntary when entering a monastery or when one has the ability to produce one's sustenance through manual labor; even Christ, in William's mind, held material wealth in common with his Apostles, setting the model for the later church. Using these scriptural foundations, William constructs an argument for the holding of wealth in common as both a defense of his own life and an outright critique of the mendicant orders' way of life.

Therefore, William attacked the mendicants on scriptural, legal, theological, and practical grounds, opening up a debate that would rage for decades.⁴⁰ He took issue not only with their encroachment on the offices previously performed exclusively by the secular clergy but also with their rights to live in absolute poverty and to beg for subsistence, criticisms which struck more directly at the core of the mendicant way of life.⁴¹ He laid the foundation for the later controversy centered on the differences between the ownership and use of goods, a controversy that eventually tore apart the Franciscan order and led to the rejection of the doctrine of Christ's absolute poverty. These critiques required a masterful answer and St. Bonaventure provided just that in his *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, which covers the topics of humility, obedience, poverty, and chastity, but which deals most extensively with poverty in its pages.

³⁹ Traver, *The Opuscula of William of Saint-Amour*, 9.

⁴⁰ William of Saint Amour not only argued against the mendicant approach to poverty but also asserted their heterodoxy more generally. A major influence on his thinking in this direction was the writing of the Joachimite Gerard of San Borgo Donnino, the *Introductorium in Evangelium Aeternum*, which displayed the author's apocalyptic beliefs about the Roman Catholic Church of his time.

⁴¹ For more detail on the role of William of Saint Amour in the poverty disputes in Paris at this time, see M. M. Dufeil, *Guillaume de Saint Amour et la polémique universitaire parisienne 1250-1259* (Paris: Editions A. and J. Picard, 1972).

Pope Alexander IV condemned *De periculis* and excommunicated William in October 1256, effectively ending the debate in favor of the mendicants. While the discontent between the two major parties would continue, the debate remained relatively quiet until a later secular master, Gerard of Abbeville, took on his predecessor's mantle and again challenged the mendicant orders' rights to exist. He renewed many of William's old arguments, and a document of his youth, most likely written during the earlier part of this controversy, *Contra adversarium perfectionis christianae*, emerged publicly in 1269, sparking the controversy anew via pamphlet warfare at the University of Paris.

Gerard argued that the mendicants, "instead of preaching the justice of Christ and urging others to imitate Him, rather urge others to go astray by imitating them ... they fail to copy the example given by Christ, who owned property in common with His disciples."⁴² In the same manner as William before him, Gerard tried to argue against Bonaventure on scriptural grounds, simultaneously advancing a positive vision of communal property and offering a critique of the mendicant way of life. He attempts to twist their poverty from a virtue based in humility into evidence of their pride and desire to replace Christ as exemplar. Outside of the mendicant encroachment on seculars' livelihoods and prestige, at primary issue was the concept of the renunciation of goods held in common; all who entered the clergy renounced individual property, but the mendicant orders claimed that poverty should extend also to common property.

⁴² Aidan Carr, "Poverty in Perfection According to St. Bonaventure, Part Two," *Franciscan Studies* 7 (Dec. 1947): 415.

Thus, Bonaventure distinguished between dominion and use, so that the “total renunciation of dominion ... acts as a distinguishing mark, separating the poverty of Christ from other, lesser forms described in Scripture.”⁴³ While this did not preclude the Franciscans from using the property of others, as Christ and the apostles accepted food and housing from benefactors, it disallowed them from owning anything, even in common. No other religious body embodied this supreme form of poverty more than the Franciscans, a notion that rankled many others at that time, especially the secular clergy, who viewed this claim of Bonaventure’s as an implicit critique of the holiness of their way of life. In conjunction with the power struggle among the theological faculty at the University of Paris, this implicit critique of secular life induced a spirited response from the secular masters, and especially from Gerard of Abbeville, against the mendicants’ way of life.

Gerard adopted three primary arguments against the Franciscan practice of absolute and communal poverty. The first was the reference in the Gospels to Judas’s keeping of a money bag; this example, “it was believed, exploded the Franciscan thesis of the absolute poverty of Christ and the apostles.”⁴⁴ Since Judas, one of the disciples, carried a purse full of money with which to execute certain transactions, it could be claimed definitively that Christ and his apostles owned wealth as a group. The other two objections to Franciscan poverty were legal in nature; the first claimed “use could not be separated from dominion in things consumable by use,” while the second asserted that since the “Popes gained no temporal benefit from Franciscan goods, they

⁴³ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 138.

⁴⁴ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 140.

had no true dominion over them.”⁴⁵ Each of these issues posed a threat to the Franciscan way of life, for each of them represented a legitimate critique of the foundational characteristic of the Franciscan order, its absolute poverty.

Bonaventure would respond to Gerard’s document in late 1269 with the publication of his *Apologia Pauperum*, the *Defense of the Mendicants*, which took a much more Christological approach to the interpretation of poverty, focusing not on the Christ who owned property but on the Christ Crucified.⁴⁶ He would respond to each of the three examples given above, and these responses will be addressed later in this chapter. While Bonaventure’s defense of the mendicant life had great influence in establishing a bulwark against the secular attacks, “the election of Pope Gregory X in September 1271 ended public discussion of the theoretical aspects of the mendicant orders. Gerard and William died the following year.”⁴⁷ The end of the popeless period that had begun in November of 1268 brought the mendicant orders back under the protective wing of the papacy, and the death of the two leaders of the anti-mendicant movement silenced the most vocal critics of the friars. Controversy would emerge again, but this time from within the Franciscan order itself; this early period of apology and formation carried within it the seeds of the later fracture, as well as the separation of the Dominican and Franciscan orders on the doctrine of poverty.

⁴⁵ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 145-46.

⁴⁶ Although the Latin translates more literally as “the defense of the poor ones,” I have chosen to remain with the title used in the recent translation of the text: Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, introduction and notes by Robert J. Karris, translation by Jose de Vinck and Robert J. Karris (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2010).

⁴⁷ Traver, “The Forging of an Intellectual Defense,” 193.

The Second Current: the Spirituals and the Radical Poverty of Christ:

The mendicant, and especially the Franciscan, debate with the secular clergy at the University of Paris holds within it the origins of a much greater and more damaging disagreement between what came to be called the Spiritual Franciscans and the Conventual Franciscans.⁴⁸ The Papal accommodations provided to the Franciscan Order throughout its dispute with the secular clergy, in the view of the Spirituals, created a way of life that did not reflect St. Francis's original vision of a life of radical poverty in the imitation of Christ. Rather, these accommodations created circumstances in which the Franciscan order displayed no discernible difference from other religious bodies or orders. They built large church complexes in order to support the growing needs of their studies and their pastoral duties, they acquired large amounts of money through intermediaries for the purpose of constructing those churches and supporting their functions, they transitioned from a small group of poor, itinerant friars into an international order that showed solidarity with the poor primarily through the giving of alms and services. The Spirituals correctly noted that the Franciscan order of the late thirteenth century no longer resembled the band of followers Francis led only a few decades earlier; they responded to these changes by advocating for rigorous policies pertaining not only to the dominion over material goods but also to their use.

⁴⁸ For treatments of the Spiritual controversy and its ideological founder Peter John Olivi, see David Burr, *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty: The Origins of the "Usus Pauper" Controversy* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989); David Burr, *Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis*, (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2001).

The Conventuals argued in turn that accommodations for the use of goods were necessary in order to fulfill the apostolic duties required by the Franciscan way of life. They wished to emphasize the good done by the order as an apostolate, and to move away from the more rigorous practice of poverty of the founder and his first followers. In fact, by the end of the thirteenth century, for the majority of Franciscans the mendicancy of Francis “became a personal privilege and a mark of exceptionalism (as opposed to exemplarity).”⁴⁹ As time went on, Francis’s achievements were viewed as unique and non-transferable to those who wished to imitate him. Thus, while “poverty was still central to Franciscan identity...it was restrained, whereas begging began increasingly to look like something that pertained only to Francis.”⁵⁰ The Conventuals, who made up the vast majority of Franciscans at that time, were comfortable with these changes because they saw what good they could do given the power and influence of a large order; the Spirituals vehemently rejected these changes, and their violent opposition eventually proved fatal to the practice of absolute poverty they so dearly cherished.

The history of the accommodations given by the papacy to the Franciscans is too long to recount in full here, but the events following the second controversy at Paris provide an accurate picture of the second current of thought concerning poverty, represented by the Spiritual belief in radical and absolute poverty, both individual and in common. In August of 1279 Pope Nicholas III issued the Bull *Exiit quo seminat*, which intended to put an end “to attacks from outside upon

⁴⁹ Donald Prudlo, “Mendicancy among the Early Saints of the Begging Orders,” in *The Origin, Development and Refinement of Medieval Religious Mendicancies*, ed. Donald S. Prudlo (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 86.

⁵⁰ Prudlo, “Mendicancy among the Early Saints,” 97.

the Franciscan way of life.”⁵¹ While earlier Bulls *Quo elongati* (1230), *Ordinem vestrum* (1245), and *Quanto studiosius* (1247) had all “dealt with the administration of Franciscan life; this one dealt also with its doctrinal basis.”⁵² In *Exiit qui seminat* “are several propositions: that Christ, when showing to men the way of perfection, renounced common dominion, that his apostles did likewise, and that their example was to be imitated by those who wished to follow the way of perfection . . . these are exactly the propositions defended by Bonaventura against Gerard of Abbeville in his *Apologia pauperum*.”⁵³ This document has been interpreted by some as the “apogee of absolute poverty” as a doctrine in the thirteenth century; the papacy’s open support and effective declaration of Bonaventure’s treatment of the issue as the official position of the church would seemingly end the debate and establish a period of calm for the mendicant orders.⁵⁴

In fact, for the Franciscan order, the opposite occurred. Although the attacks from outside came to a close, from 1279 to 1309 internal disagreement on the degree of poverty to which Franciscans were called tore the order apart.⁵⁵ The relatively small but vigorous group of Spirituals argued for a much stricter observance of poverty for the community than that advocated by both Bonaventure and the papacy. They were met not with the moderate consideration of men like Bonaventure but with persecution and suppression by the larger

⁵¹ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 150.

⁵² Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 150.

⁵³ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 151.

⁵⁴ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 155.

⁵⁵ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 159-78; 213-60.

constituency of the Franciscan order, which desired even more accommodations for their lives than Bonaventure and *Exiit qui seminat* provided. The ensuing cycle of violence both in revolt and suppression led to a hardening of positions on both sides, and eventually to the outright condemnation of the doctrine of absolute poverty by Pope John XXII.

At issue again in this dispute was the distinction between the use and ownership of goods held in common. The compromise arrived at delineated use and ownership as two different ways of interacting with material goods, and claimed the Franciscans should not own any of these goods but were allowed to use them to the extent necessary. The Spirituals, however, disagreed; “through the hands of their leader, Olivi, they assumed a new weapon, that of the doctrine of the *usus pauper*, which claimed that restriction in use was as integral a part of Franciscan poverty as the renunciation of dominion.”⁵⁶ This more radical position amounted to not only regulating what the members of the order could own in common but also what they could use and still remain in compliance with their vows of poverty. Olivi poked holes in the legal fiction set up by the papacy to allow the Franciscan order to expand and still claim to bear some resemblance to St. Francis’s model and life. He pointed out, in a fashion similar to that of the secular clergy, that the ownership and use of certain consumable goods amounted to the same thing, and that the papacy could not possibly exist as the true owner of goods from which it derived no benefit.

Although Olivi was the source of Spiritualist thought, its later manifestation came in the writings of Ubertino of Casale, a student of Olivi’s and the primary intellectual leader of the

⁵⁶ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 157.

Spirituals from 1309 and beyond.⁵⁷ He presented his case as standing in line with the Conventuals on most points, but he diverged at a critical juncture regarding the accommodations given by the Popes. While he admitted their good intentions in providing such accommodations to protect the order, Ubertino wished to return to Francis's original vision now that the crisis had been settled. Thus, Ubertino distinguished "two ways of life, that permitted by the Papal privileges, from *Quo elongati* onwards, and the literal observance, which is that envisaged by St. Francis and practiced, when the community permitted, by the Spirituals."⁵⁸ While the first life is not inherently sinful in his estimation, it is inferior to the literal observance; furthermore, the friars had begun to abuse the accommodations given them, and so the only acceptable remedy would be to declare the Spiritual way of life as the primary form of Franciscan observance.

For a time, the Spirituals enjoyed moderate support from the Papacy in their critique of the larger community of Franciscans. Pope Clement V seemed to support them, or at least to protect them from suppression by the Conventuals, and he released several Bulls in an attempt to adjudicate the matter. One of them, *Exivi de paradiso*, clarified many points of obligation in following the rule of the order, such that "its decision on this matter is to this day the foundation of the order's observance."⁵⁹ It was not, however, a clear win for either party, and when John XXII acceded to the papal throne in 1316, he seemingly had several options left to him. He chose the most extreme position against the Spiritualists, eventually taking several steps to dismantle

⁵⁷ Burr, 261-78; Lambert, 197-214.

⁵⁸ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 200.

⁵⁹ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 214.

the legal fiction created by Nicholas III, that the papacy owned all Franciscan goods, before finally rejecting the doctrine of the absolute poverty of Christ in his Bull *Cum inter nonnullus*. This decision forever altered the Franciscan observance of poverty, and settled the dispute among the Franciscans through force of office.⁶⁰

Thus the Spiritualist position on poverty, the most radical at the time and that called for a return to the itinerant and mendicant life of the founder St. Francis, proved too volatile and threatening for the church as a whole. While the papacy at first supported this way of life and its implicit critique of those who did not practice communal poverty, the more radical version put forward by the Spirituals once again raised the question not only for the Franciscans but also for the entire church. Pope John XXII apparently feared the violence within the Franciscan order would spill over into other parts of the church, so he took measures to contain this threat by forcing the Franciscans to adopt more uniformly the accommodations provided to them by the earlier Popes. The radical opposition of the Spirituals eventually led to the loss of even the moderate form of absolute poverty advocated by Bonaventure at the University of Paris.

The Third Current: the Moderate Mendicant Masters and the Absolute Poverty of Christ

Having examined the two polar opposites of the debate surrounding poverty in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, it remains to present and analyze the moderate vision advocated by Bonaventure and his contemporary Aquinas. These two scholars dealt with poverty to varying degrees in their works, with Bonaventure focusing on it more pointedly as a byproduct

⁶⁰ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 221-70.

of his association with the Franciscan order; Aquinas addresses poverty, but the Dominican never places the emphasis on poverty as a virtue that Bonaventure does in his writings.

What emerges from an analysis of these systematic intellectual approaches to poverty is a depth to the discussion obscured by the legalistic debates of the controversies. The secular clergy and the Spiritualist Franciscans, while certainly motivated by theological concerns, focused their critiques and demands on the validity and particularities of living a life of absolute poverty. Bonaventure and Aquinas, on the other hand, demonstrated a greater concern with the significance of poverty as a manifestation of imitating the life of Christ, and as a means of conforming to Christ's example through such imitation.⁶¹ This led to their casting the issue in terms of the State of Perfection, the ultimate goal in the life of any Christian; however, they mistakenly believed this Christological focus would settle the debates in perpetuity.

Although here we place them together under the category of systematic approaches to poverty, Bonaventure and Aquinas have traditionally been interpreted as holding divergent views on poverty's degree of importance to the life of perfection inherent to the religious life of the mendicant orders of which they were intellectual leaders in the thirteenth century. This dissertation takes the position that they do not differ as drastically as has been assumed; however, the differences between them in reference to poverty demonstrate the variety of ways in which poverty was incorporated into religious life at that time.

Therefore, since Bonaventure addressed the topic more directly, and since he was a part of the Franciscan order in which poverty remained an issue for much longer than it did in the

⁶¹ Interestingly, this was also a major emphasis of St. Francis in his life and works, despite his intentional decision not to express it in the systematic terms of these later scholars.

Dominican order, his ideas on poverty will take precedence here. Aquinas's alternate interpretation of poverty both complements and deepens our understanding of Bonaventure's theological interpretation of poverty, while at the same time bringing to light the significant differences in the practical application of poverty in the Franciscan and Dominican orders. Furthermore, since Bonaventure was and has consistently been viewed throughout history as the more authoritative and systematic thinker in relation to poverty, his work will serve as our primary point of comparison with that of al-Ghazali, as we showed in chapter four that it represented a similarly moderate position in his own historical and theological contexts.

The Mendicant Defense of Absolute Poverty

Although the more significant contribution of these scholastic mendicants was their theological interpretation of poverty, they did not ignore the legal and practical aspects of the debate. In fact, the attacks from William of St. Amour and Gerard of Abbeville served as catalysts to their development of mature theological positions on poverty's importance. Both Bonaventure and Aquinas were concerned primarily with how poverty contributed to the mendicant pursuit of evangelical perfection, the state in which all members of religious orders sought to live their lives. Therefore, any defense of the practicalities of living in absolute poverty, defined as communal poverty in addition to individual poverty, were always influenced by the desire to ensure the continuation of their mendicant orders.

In answer to those who attacked Franciscan poverty, Bonaventure produced two important texts, his *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection* in 1256 and his *Defense of the*

Mendicants in 1269.⁶² Together, these provide his most important treatments of poverty, while portions of his other writings reinforce the material found in them. Although he wrote these texts at different points in his career, his ideas remain consistent over that time, with certain differences of emphasis appearing depending on the purpose and audience of each text. After reviewing his answers to the specific arguments made above, this chapter turns first to the perspective taken by Aquinas before then moving to the more important aspect of Bonaventure's thought concerning poverty, namely, its theological significance and its role in the perfect imitation of Christ's own life of poverty. It is in the latter that we find the most profound points of comparison and contrast with al-Ghazali's work.

Bonaventure did not shy away from answering the critics of the Franciscans. As part of his broader argument, he systematically addressed each of the more legalistic aspects of William's and Gerard's protestations. These are not the strongest parts of his treatises, however, as "a certain unease is reflected in the variety of arguments which he employs" to combat their legal objections.⁶³ Bonaventure assures his readers of the possibility of separating dominion over worldly goods from the use of those goods, indicating the legitimacy of Franciscan communal poverty. He states towards the end of *Defense of the Mendicants*, "four matters must be considered in dealing with temporal goods, namely, ownership, possession, usufruct, and simple

⁶² When referencing these, we have relied on the translations performed by the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University: Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, translated by Robert J. Karris (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Saint Bonaventure University, 2008); Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, introduction and notes by Robert J. Karris, translation by Jose de Vinck and Robert J. Karris (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2010).

⁶³ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 145.

use. Now the life of mortals can lack the first three, but necessarily needs the last one.”⁶⁴ The simple use of goods indicates that the Franciscans must come into contact with both movable and immovable goods, but that they can do so without possessing or owning them because they have no intention of doing either of those things.⁶⁵ This seems to suffice for him as an answer to this objection, as he similarly argues that while the Popes received no temporal benefits from certain goods they supposedly owned, they gained a spiritual rather than a temporal benefit.⁶⁶

His response to the seemingly fatal scriptural critique, based on Judas’s holding of a money bag, lands more convincingly, as it is more theological in nature and thus within the scope of Bonaventure’s training and specialty. Here, operating in his own area of expertise, Bonaventure argues that Christ had a money bag “to care for other poor people,” and “to condescend to be with the weak ... the Lord so condescended to our weakness and necessity that the essence of poverty was maintained and he provided an example which he had especially come to show to human beings.”⁶⁷ Christ lived a life of absolute poverty, but knowing that his followers may not be able to reach that standard, he dispensed the standard of life for the sake of charity, both to other poor people, and to the weak, so that this latter group would not sin by owning wealth, but neither would they be perfect. Thus, by employing such a theological

⁶⁴ *Defense of the Mendicants*, 307-8. Chapter XI, Paragraph 5.

⁶⁵ The distinction between movable and immovable goods is a legal one: immovable goods are such that they cannot be transported from place to place, as in buildings and land; movable goods are everything else, such as clothing, furniture, books, and other possessions.

⁶⁶ Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 146.

⁶⁷ *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, 77-79. There is, perhaps some significance to the fact that Judas is the disciple carrying the bag. Lambert has made just this observation in *Franciscan Poverty*, 68 by contrasting the image of the crucified Christ and the image of Judas holding the money bag. Question II, Article 1, 2nd reply to the arguments for the negative position. (section 4, n. 2).

argument rooted in Christ's charity, Bonaventure accomplished his goal of explaining the presence of a money bag among the apostles; this was certainly a possible way to live, but it was not the way Christ intended for himself or for his most perfect followers.

The theological argument utilized by Bonaventure to defend against the objection based on the money bag points to his broader theological argument concerning poverty's role in the process of self-purification through the pursuit of evangelical perfection. This broader argument often gets lost among the legal specificities of papal Bulls and debates over *usus pauper* and disputes over the separation of dominion and simple use. Bonaventure was not a trained legal scholar, however, so an analysis of his understanding of poverty should more properly be oriented towards his theological interpretation of it. While these different aspects of the argument are inter-related for Bonaventure, he clearly emphasizes the Christological aspect of poverty over any specific legal prescriptions, as will be demonstrated below. First, it will be helpful to see the ways in which Aquinas defended poverty during these early disputes with the secular masters, as a contemporary complement to Bonaventure's thought on the subject.

St. Thomas Aquinas on Poverty: An Instrument but Not Only an Instrument

Bonaventure was not the only scholar to respond to the secular attacks on mendicant poverty; among the many others, perhaps the greatest was St. Thomas Aquinas, whose life in the Dominican Order mirrors Bonaventure's Franciscan one. In the same years as the works of William of St. Amour and Gerard of Abbeville appeared, Aquinas produced *Contra Impugnantes Dei Cultum et Religionem* (1256) and *De Perfectione Spiritualis Vitae* (1269), in which he treats poverty as part of the religious life and the pursuit of evangelical perfection. As the primary

example held up in counter argument to Bonaventure's understanding of poverty, the work of Aquinas is generally characterized as taking a more instrumental view of poverty than Bonaventure's, even to the extent that the lack of controversy in the Dominican order in the years following the mendicant-secular disputes has been attributed to this more moderate position.⁶⁸

In the following paragraphs we present an argument that has been made against this traditional interpretation; although St. Thomas certainly views poverty as instrumental, rather than foundational, to perfection, the difference between his and St. Bonaventure's positions has been exaggerated. While they clearly say very different things about poverty, the deviations are matters of emphasis and degree, not of fundamental disagreements about the role of poverty in the pursuit of evangelical perfection. A brief analysis of Thomas's position on poverty, explored in a slightly different manner than that of Bonaventure, provides both a complement to the Franciscan view and a wider spectrum with which to complete a comparison to al-Ghazali's thought on poverty.

As Jan van den Eijnden points out in his dissertation, the standard interpretation of Thomas's approach to poverty tends to lead to the perception of a dichotomy in his thought; "at the beginning, Aquinas seems to think that voluntary Poverty belongs to Christian Perfection itself. It is impossible to be perfect without being poor ... Later, at the end of his career, in the *STh*, he would appear to say that Poverty is only the instrument of Perfection, which man is free

⁶⁸ For example, see Ulrich Horst, OP, *Evangelische Armut und Kirche: Thomas von Aquin und die Armutskontroversen des 13. und beginnenden 14. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1992). This also persists to more recent works: Traver, "The Forging of an Intellectual Defense," 194.

to use or not.”⁶⁹ This appears to signal a shift in his thinking from the earlier period of his life, when he wrote against the secular masters in defense of mendicant poverty, to the later period of his life, when he was free to discuss poverty outside of the context of disputation. This reading of the progression of his thought assumes that he either chose to harden his stance on poverty’s necessity as an apologetic device early in his career, or that he actually shifted in his opinion about the nature of poverty’s role in evangelical perfection. Either way, Thomas seems to have moved from a position closer to that of Bonaventure to one farther away, so that his final word on poverty depicts it as a mere instrument to perfection, rather than as something inherent to perfection itself.

Van den Eijnden’s careful analysis of the texts written in different periods of his life, however, reveals this dichotomy to be false, so that one may conclude “the life in Poverty of the Mendicants may include what is necessary for daily subsistence but not the possession of movable or immovable goods from which revenues are derived.”⁷⁰ This resembles Bonaventure’s separation of dominion from the simple use of goods; both scholars wish to defend the necessity of possessing those things which are necessary for human survival, such as food, clothing, and water. They differ significantly in this regard, however, when it comes to money, as in Aquinas’ text, “the possession of money is mentioned in addition to other possessions. It is part of what is necessary for future subsistence, but it may also be abandoned

⁶⁹ Jan G. J. van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God: Thomas Aquinas on Evangelical Poverty* (Leuven: Peeters, 1994): 33.

⁷⁰ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 49.

when no longer required.”⁷¹ Aquinas is concerned with the ability of the mendicants to survive from day to day, without the need to create revenues or hoard wealth; Bonaventure also holds this concern, although his presence in the tradition of St. Francis does not allow for the inclusion of money among permissible possessions.

Therefore, it seems the position found in the *Summa Theologiae*, that “Poverty is an instrument of Perfection,” persisted from his earlier works; it did not simply appear in his later works, after he worked out his thought more fully.⁷² The apparent differences come in the manner in which Aquinas presents the issue, so that “what is meant by collective Poverty and by the most minimal form of collective property has to be interpreted as meaning one and the same thing. No reasons are found to interpret these notions as being different, not to mention that they might be contradictory.”⁷³ In other words, early in his career, in the midst of the secular attack, he emphasizes the notion of collective poverty, while in his later years, at a distance from those attacks, he is free to cast the question in terms of what kinds of *property* might be acceptable to possess, and in what quantities.

Thus, only a cursory reading of his works produces the idea that Thomas presents two contradictory opinions on poverty. A more nuanced interpretation emerges from the *Summa*:

Hence it is evident that to have excessive riches in common, whether in movable or immovable property, is an obstacle to perfection, though not absolutely incompatible with it; while it is not an obstacle to religious perfection to have enough external things, whether movables or immovables, as suffice for a livelihood, if we consider poverty in relation to the common end of religious orders, which is to devote oneself to the service

⁷¹ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 44.

⁷² Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 66.

⁷³ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 58.

of God. But if we consider poverty in relation to the special end of any religious order, then this end being presupposed, a greater or lesser degree of poverty is adapted to that religious order; and each religious order will be the more perfect in respect of poverty, according as it professes a poverty more adapted to its end.⁷⁴

In this passage, Thomas points to the idea that poverty pertains to “two different levels: the level of Perfection towards which all Christians are striving and the level of Religious Life.”⁷⁵

Furthermore, within the confines of religious life itself, poverty pertains to two different goals, the common goal of serving God and the goals particular to each order.

To the first issue, poverty is not absolutely necessary for every human being to achieve perfection, as this would suppose the failure of much of the historical apostolate of the Church. Rather, voluntary poverty belongs to the Counsels, “external instruments which men are free to use or not,” since not every person is called to enter a religious or mendicant order.⁷⁶ Poverty “is good in so far as it frees man from that which hinders him from directing himself to spiritual things.”⁷⁷ It is not good in itself, and it can in fact become a burden for many people, who drudge through poverty desiring the world even more. In this case, he depicts poverty as an instrument to perfection because these Counsels are different from the Commandments; the vows “are not necessary to reach Perfection but they are necessary to live in the State of Perfection.”⁷⁸ Poverty,

⁷⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 4, Secundi of the Secundi, QQ 149-189 to the Third Part, QQ 1-73 (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981): 1994-95.

⁷⁵ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 69.

⁷⁶ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 86.

⁷⁷ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 104.

⁷⁸ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 114.

as one of these vows, only pertains to those seeking to live in this State of Perfection, which “does not necessarily include man’s simple Perfection,” so that those who do not take vows still utilize poverty as an instrument to perfection.⁷⁹

As for the second issue, related to the goals of individual orders, Thomas characterizes poverty as having “more modalities, depending on the type of religious Order in which it is lived, than the instruments of chastity and obedience. It is possible to shape life according to the Vow of Poverty in multiple ways.”⁸⁰ Using this logic, Thomas accounts for the differences among the religious orders in their emphasis on poverty in their vows and daily lives; “it therefore shall never be said that the Perfection of Religious Life depends on the degree of Poverty and so we understand Aquinas’ modest speaking of Evangelical Poverty as just an instrument of Perfection.”⁸¹ The taking of religious vows obliges one to live in poverty, but the degree of that poverty is relative to the order into which one enters; this derives from the externality of poverty, its relation to the world itself. Poverty is an expression of one’s internal attitude towards the world and God, so that as long as the interior relationship is properly oriented, the outward expression of that attitude may vary.

Thus Aquinas, like Bonaventure, draws attention to the importance of understanding poverty theologically, and not only materially, as so many of their detractors and contemporaries did. Thomas relates mendicant poverty to the poverty of Jesus, but again in a theological sense,

⁷⁹ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 117.

⁸⁰ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 118.

⁸¹ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 155.

“because for him the Poverty of the Mendicants is an imitation of God’s poverty in its being an imitation of the Poverty of Christ ... the Poverty of God who, by being poor in the Son, manifests his love and, at the same time, gives an example for the manifestation of our love as an answer to His.”⁸² The poverty modeled by God, therefore, is “a consequence of His *kenosis* which finds its fulfillment in His nudity on the cross.”⁸³ The dual exemplarity of Christ’s poverty means that “the Incarnation of the Son is understood as a kind of humiliation: compared to the divine state of the Son his human state is thought to be poor,” so that “the social Poverty of Jesus appears to be a prefiguration and preparation of ... his total abandonment” of the world in the crucifixion.”⁸⁴ Thus, “Mendicant Poverty is ... a commemoration of the totality of Jesus’ self-offering and also a participation in the sacramentality thereof.”⁸⁵ The humiliation required to live in poverty, the abasement of self, resembles the incarnation, while the abandonment of the world reflects Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

To live in absolute poverty, then, both as an individual and communally, means to partake in the sacramental nature of Christ’s sacrifice and abandonment of the world through his willing death on the cross. For this reason, for Aquinas “Evangelical Poverty cannot be said to be ‘just’ an instrument ... but a welcome gift of God, which enables them to fulfill their longing for God. It sets them free for God’s Providence by which all creatures are led to their end, thanks to Jesus Christ, in whose poor life a perfect example is given for our human response to God’s love

⁸² Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 190.

⁸³ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 191.

⁸⁴ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 192, 244.

⁸⁵ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 192.

in this same Poverty of Christ.”⁸⁶ More than an instrument, poverty “is a counter-image of God’s wealth,” demonstrating God’s nature as the “Giver of our existence; of all that is necessary and indispensable for reaching the final Perfection of this existence.”⁸⁷ God is not poor because God lacks nothing; God chose to experience poverty through Christ, both in order to serve as an exemplar to human beings, and to demonstrate an abundant and overflowing love for the world.

In the work of St. Thomas, therefore, we find an understanding of poverty that does not deviate significantly from that of St. Bonaventure. Poverty is indeed instrumental, in the sense that it is not the final goal, but poverty is not *merely* instrumental, as it is also foundational and fundamental to spiritual purification and living in the State of Perfection. Poverty has strong correlations with humiliation, modeled by Christ in both his incarnation and his crucifixion, so that the material poverty of his life serves as both a reminder of the first and a prelude to the second. Just as Aquinas emphasizes the importance of the cross, so does Bonaventure find here the ultimate expression of Christ’s poverty in his willingness to abandon the world and its wealth. While Aquinas is more direct about poverty’s role in leading to humility and a reliance upon God’s providence, Bonaventure inclines more towards the importance of practicing material poverty as a way to remain true to the founder of his order and to the imitation of Christ. This difference is a matter of degree, however, and Aquinas’ work provides the means of explaining it through the different charisms of the orders, so that the Franciscans use poverty to embody their lives in a way the Dominicans do not.

⁸⁶ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 197.

⁸⁷ Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 243.

Bonaventure and the Absolute Poverty of Christ

The previous discussion of Aquinas' thought about poverty serves as an introduction to our analysis of Bonaventure's thought on the subject. While Aquinas may be viewed as the more influential thinker in general, in reference to poverty his work does not contain the depth of consideration, nor the painstaking theological reflection, as does the work of Bonaventure. What Aquinas hints at or mentions once or twice, Bonaventure expounds upon and defends in detail. The length at which Bonaventure reflects upon poverty in writing is vast, in both his *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Poverty* and his *Defense of the Mendicants*; this extensive treatment of poverty alone demonstrates the necessity of engaging with Bonaventure's work in this chapter. But the sophistication of his thought on the subject also moves me to assert Bonaventure's greater suitability than Aquinas for a comparison in the next chapter with al-Ghazali's work.

As seen earlier, Bonaventure responded to the legal aspects of the debate, but his greater contribution came through his theological interpretation of poverty. To begin, it has been argued that for Bonaventure the poverty of man "is rooted in his existence as a creature ... His is the poverty of radical dependency as he does not exist in and of himself."⁸⁸ Human beings are contingent beings, since God is the only self-sufficient being. Therefore, the created world relies upon God as the source of its being, and creatures "remain dependent on the continual generosity of the Creator" to sustain their existence, since it does not originate in themselves but in God.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Wayne Hellmann, "Poverty: the Franciscan Way to God," *Theology Digest* 22 (Winter 1974): 340.

⁸⁹ Timothy J. Johnson, *The Soul in Ascent: Bonaventure on Poverty, Prayer, and Union with God* (Quincy, Ill: Franciscan Press, 2000): 14.

Therefore, Bonaventure characterizes this contingency of created existence in terms of an inherent poverty, a consistent neediness of creation for God to sustain it. Within the broad scope of creation, human beings possess a special form of poverty by virtue of their status as rational creatures, which indicates a special relationship with God, who is the final end of every human being. Therefore, humans “experience ultimate happiness or beatitude only when the soul reaches this preordained end” in God.⁹⁰

Human beings then suffer not only from the poverty of existence inherent to all of creation, but also from the poverty incurred by sin. At the time of creation, human beings represented the culmination of the fullness of revelation; they were given the ability to read what Bonaventure called the ‘books’ of creation, “one written within, which is the Eternal Art and Wisdom of God; the other written without, which is the perceptible world.”⁹¹ Perfectly attuned to the Creator, human beings could perceive God’s truth “as long as [they] remained ordered to the Creator through the proper use of intelligence, will and power.”⁹² The human recognition of dependence on God bound them to God, so that “man in his relationship to God does not possess: he only receives. His poverty is his receptivity. God fills his emptiness. The richness and fullness of God fills his every need.”⁹³

⁹⁰ Johnson, *The Soul in Ascent*, 15.

⁹¹ Saint Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, translated by Dominic V. Monti (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Saint Bonaventure University, 2005): 94. Part II, Ch. 11, Paragraph 2.

⁹² Johnson, *The Soul in Ascent*, 12-13.

⁹³ Hellmann, “Poverty: The Franciscan Way to God,” 340.

But human beings did not retain properly ordered intelligences, wills and powers; they went astray, and this deepened their poverty. Given free will, Bonaventure explains that Eve, “listening to the serpent with her exterior perception, failed to read the inner book, which was legible to the right reason of judgment. She kept her mind on the outer book instead, and so she began to focus on the external good.”⁹⁴ The temptation offered by the serpent clouded her judgment and confused her ability to see the created world as a sign of God’s truth; rather, it became a good in itself, and something to be possessed as if an end in itself. Adam followed her “by too greatly loving and clinging to what he had,” so together they “were enticed by greed because both had risen up in pride.”⁹⁵ This greed and misreading of the external book, this confusing of the external world for a good in itself, led to the poverty of sin. It is ironic that “as long as man accepts his poverty as creature, he possesses all. He possesses God. Once he refuses that poverty before God in the desire to possess [the world] ... he ends up with nothing. In an attempt to possess, a grave ingratitude to the Divine Giver, he finds himself in a worse poverty of dejection and death.”⁹⁶ The poverty of existence, in which human beings were totally dependent on God for sustenance but wanted for nothing, is replaced by the poverty of sin, in which human beings attempt to become self-sufficient, rejecting their knowledge of their true natures as creatures, and lose God’s gift.

⁹⁴ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 105. Part III, Ch. 3, Paragraph 2.

⁹⁵ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 106. Part III, Ch. 3, Paragraph 4.

⁹⁶ Hellmann, “Poverty: The Franciscan Way of Life,” 340-41.

The key here is the turning away from God's sustenance and towards the external, created world for that livelihood. It is a sin of greed in that human beings, blinded by the world's beauty, wish to possess more than what God has given them. It is a sin of pride in that they presume they can ascend to God's level, to become owners, who are self-sufficient like God. Thus Bonaventure states, "every sin implies a movement away from the immutable good and towards a changeable good."⁹⁷ This is a corruption of the nature of human beings, who were created in the image of God and when properly ordered are oriented towards God as the final end. As part of this new poverty of sin, they are ordered to their own ends, towards the mutable and perishable goods of the created world, whether those goods be material, spiritual, or social.

Despite the human rejection of God's gifts, God does not cease to be the Giver, which means God continues to give his creatures ways to escape the poverty of sin. So, God entered the world as Christ, who serves as exemplar for human beings in two ways:

...eternal and temporal. He is eternal because he is 'the splendor of the Father's glory and the image of God the Father.' He is also 'the brightness of eternal life and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty.' In this mirror all things produced shine forth in their exemplarity, from the beginning of the creation of the world until the end to bring about the perfection of the universe both spiritually and materially. And consequently Christ, as the uncreated Word is the intellectual mirror and eternal exemplar of the entire worldly structure. Now in as far as he is the incarnate Word in the reality of his assumed humanity he is the exemplar and mirror of all graces, virtues, and merits.⁹⁸

As image of God and the eternal Word through which the world was created, Christ reflects the "entire worldly structure" in its entirety and from its beginning to its end.⁹⁹ Only as a reflection

⁹⁷ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 111. Part III, Ch. 5, Paragraph 4.

⁹⁸ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 61-2. Chapter II, Paragraph 12.

⁹⁹ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 62. Chapter II, Paragraph 12.

in the mirror of the eternal Christ does Creation as a whole participate in exemplarity, in this way achieving unity and representing the overabundance of goodness contained in Christ. Christ's eternal example thus spills into the world indirectly, as this reflection facilitates the perfection of the universe.

As the eternal exemplar, "by assuming human nature he became humble among us while remaining in himself," meaning that the Incarnation is the first location and example of the humility and poverty of Christ.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, as Timothy Johnson has noted, "this entrance of the Son into history as the gift of the Father reveals the depths of divine concern for the poor."¹⁰¹ Christ's incarnation is offered as a gift from the Father, as a way for human beings to rectify themselves by participating in the *kenosis* of the incarnation. The eternal exemplar is representative of all goodness and all things, but in Christ's decision to humble himself by becoming human there is an example of extreme humility in the acceptance of the poverty of existence. Therefore, not only did Christ condescend to human weakness by owning and using a money bag, but he also, and more importantly, participated in the ultimate condescension by taking on a human form in order to save human beings from their inherent poverty as created beings. This first and supreme act of condescension represents Christ's first great act of humility and thus exemplarity.

¹⁰⁰ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 46. Chapter I, Paragraph 10.

¹⁰¹ Johnson, *The Soul in Ascent*, 47.

As the incarnate Word, Christ also serves as an exemplar in his “graces, virtues, and merits;” his life offers human beings a perfect model to follow in their own behaviors.¹⁰² Thus, when calling Christ poor, “we refer to the humanity he assumed and by which he gave us an example of living perfectly,” not “to the might of his divinity.”¹⁰³ Bonaventure interprets this to mean above all a life of poverty, which he describes as “the principal counsel,” and “the fundamental beginning ... the root and beginning of perfection,” and the “sublime foundation” on which the life of perfection is built.¹⁰⁴ Thus, for Bonaventure it is clear that “to renounce absolutely everything in every way for the sake of Christ is ... to be praised as the heart of evangelical perfection.”¹⁰⁵ Since Christ “chose to assume poverty, showing us perfection through what he did, it follows that he set up the form of extreme poverty as an example to be observed by the holy apostles.”¹⁰⁶ Human beings must follow the example of Christ’s life, wrapped in poverty, accepting alms from others for subsistence, performing manual labor when necessary, and eschewing all forms of money; this is the only remedy for the root of evil, which is avarice for the world.

The temporal exemplarity of Christ operates as a sign of His eternal exemplarity; Christ’s life on earth should be taken as a behavioral model for human beings to follow, but the more important aspect of Christ’s exemplarity arises from His status as the eternal Word of God

¹⁰² Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 62. Chapter II, Paragraph 12.

¹⁰³ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 230. Chapter VIII, Paragraph 8.

¹⁰⁴ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, 70-77. Question II, Article 1, Conclusion.

¹⁰⁵ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, 74. Question II, Article 1, Conclusion.

¹⁰⁶ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 184. Ch. VII, Paragraph 9.

through which all created things derive their existence. As an incarnate being, Christ offers a perfect example of human behavior, one which could perhaps be perfectly emulated, as in the case of St. Francis. As the “brightness of eternal life and the unspotted mirror of God’s majesty,” however, Christ cannot be emulated; here, Christ’s exemplarity transcends the human experience and faculty.¹⁰⁷ In the case of poverty, Bonaventure has made this connection explicit, as the poverty in which Christ chose to live on earth serves as a sign of the existential poverty he accepted in the incarnation.

Both forms of Christ’s exemplarity, the eternal and the temporal, coalesce for Bonaventure on the Cross, which he emphasizes throughout all of his writings, not only those on poverty, as the location of Christ’s greatest poverty and power. He states, “the exemplar of perfect virtue is Christ on the cross where he was in the greatest abjection.”¹⁰⁸ The Father’s gift of His Son to the world takes place not merely in the Incarnation but also in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, so that “no one can find God except through the poverty of the cross.”¹⁰⁹ The renunciation of the created world extends in the Cross beyond turning away from material wealth to the sacrifice even of one’s life for the sake of God, meaning “poverty reaches the summit of perfection and ... through it a person more expressly and closely embraces the nakedness of the cross and imitates the naked crucified one.”¹¹⁰ Far from expecting every

¹⁰⁷ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 61-2. Chapter II, Paragraph 12.

¹⁰⁸ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, 36. Question I, Arguments for the Affirmative Position, n. 21.

¹⁰⁹ Hellmann, “Poverty: The Franciscan Way to God,” 341.

¹¹⁰ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 202. Ch. VII, Paragraph 23.

Franciscan to sacrifice his life literally, Bonaventure depicts poverty as the method by which one imitates Christ's extreme sacrifice as the exemplar on the Cross. As Christ rejected the world to the fullest extent possible, so must those seeking to live in perfection renounce the world fully by living in absolute poverty, both individually and communally.

This poverty constitutes more than material poverty, however, and encompasses the poverty of spirit to which Christ refers in the Sermon on the Mount. Bonaventure uses this excerpt from Matthew as a kind of template, relating the first three beatitudes to the evangelical counsels, the vows taken by the religious orders, while the remaining three beatitudes are matters of choice that carry with them increasing levels of perfection.¹¹¹ He also describes the poverty of spirit in particular as a “twofold abdication of the world and of its lusts ... the means by which the root of all evil is perfectly cut off,” and “the root and foundation of that evangelical perfection by which we are conformed to Christ, planted with him, and become his dwelling place.”¹¹² Therefore, poverty of spirit does not consist solely of the renunciation of one's material wealth, nor does it mean renouncing all claim to owning anything ever again; it means a more total rejection of the very desire for the world and its riches.

Indeed, Bonaventure later says, “the precise and principal reason for renouncing riches is not that they are my own, but because they are alluring.”¹¹³ He continues, “Although riches, both private and common, can be possessed without sin ... it is safe to flee from riches, and it is

¹¹¹ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 72-76. Ch. III, P. 5-9.

¹¹² Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 177. Ch. VII, P. 3.

¹¹³ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 251. Ch. IX, P. 3.

perfect to relinquish them entirely.”¹¹⁴ He also references Augustine, who shows “that a gesture of humiliation made externally in the body contributes very much to perfection of true humility in the heart,” so that “the external lack of goods, although it seems in itself to be useless, increases merits and is precious in many other ways when it is united with poverty of spirit.”¹¹⁵ Bonaventure clearly distinguishes between material poverty and a poverty of spirit reflected in the heart; in this way material poverty may be viewed as instrumental to the more perfect state of humility, which resides in the heart and of which external poverty is a bodily sign.

The human imitation of Christ, therefore, has much less to do with the rejection of material property than with the conformity of the heart to Christ’s poverty of spirit, which Bonaventure describes in terms of humility. For this reason he states, “no one is perfect in virtue unless he considers himself worthless and fruitless and wishes to be regarded as such by everyone.”¹¹⁶ The desire for humiliation in front of one’s peers is important to the disciplining of the soul, and he continues, “No one arrives at a complete notion of God except through a true and correct understanding of self, and the person who does not recognize his own nothingness does not understand himself correctly.”¹¹⁷ To achieve this self-knowledge of one’s nothingness, one must pursue true humility, which he describes as the “foundation of all Christian perfection,” and that in which “the summit of all evangelical perfection consists.”¹¹⁸ Poverty does not carry

¹¹⁴ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 252-53. Ch. IX, P. 4.

¹¹⁵ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, 261. Ch. IX, P. 12-13.

¹¹⁶ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, 36. Q. I, Arguments for the Affirmative Position, n. 22.

¹¹⁷ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, 42. Q. I, Conclusion.

¹¹⁸ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, 40, 44. Q. I, Conclusion.

goodness in itself inherently, but it humbles the practitioner, it frees one from the vice of avarice, and it paves the way for humility, which counters the ultimate vice of pride, to which Adam and Eve fell victim.

Thus, one's imitation of Christ relates more to the pursuit of humility and the recognition of one's nothingness, discussed earlier in terms of the poverty inherent to one's creaturely existence, than it does to one's actual material poverty. The renunciation of property, however, and the pursuit and endurance of poverty's hardships, contribute to this ultimate goal and are therefore required of anyone who seeks perfection in this world. St. Bonaventure's understanding of poverty, then, emerges from his predecessor's and founder's; when he emphasizes the theological significance of poverty, St. Bonaventure clearly relies on the figure of St. Francis that he had constructed in conjunction with earlier Franciscan thinkers, especially as that figure and poverty were reflected in Christ's crucifixion. Furthermore, St. Bonaventure incorporates the life of St. Francis into his interpretation of poverty as a virtue, demonstrating the extent to which the founder not only taught poverty as a way of life but also exemplified poverty in his very existence, most clearly in his reception of the stigmata.

St. Francis as Human Exemplar

Bonaventure's portrayal of St. Francis of Assisi provides a useful example of how the scholastic theologian perceived the importance of poverty in the spiritual life. Not only does Bonaventure's hagiography of St. Francis depict him as one who pursued and defended extreme material poverty, but it also portrays him as most perfect in his conformity to Christ on the cross and in his quest to humble himself below every other person. In this way, despite the frequent

claims that Bonaventure tempered Francis's earlier zeal for poverty, the later scholar manages to remain consistent with the founder's ideal while at the same time providing a compromise necessary at the time in which he wrote. His attempts to salvage absolute poverty and tread a middle path would ultimately prove unsuccessful, but this was due more to the extremity of the positions of his successors in the Franciscan order than it was to his own failure to create a coherent theological paradigm within which poverty played a significant role.

Bonaventure's *Major Legend* contains the most developed portrait of St. Francis; he wrote it at the request of the General Chapter, either of Rome (1257) or of Narbonne (1260), and it consists primarily of other, earlier hagiographies of the saint.¹¹⁹ Another Chapter, convened at Pisa in 1263, accepted this as the official life of St. Francis, and it has remained to this day in that position, generally revered as a great work of the genre and of theology. In it, Bonaventure presents Francis as a man who had, "growing with him from his infancy, a generous care for the poor divinely implanted in the heart."¹²⁰ He grew in this inclination, rejecting his father's life as a merchant, pursuing poverty, until it could be said that "no one coveted gold as he coveted poverty."¹²¹ St. Francis chose to pursue poverty above all because "he had learned from [Lady Poverty] to regard himself inferior to all," reinforcing the connection between poverty and

¹¹⁹ Although 1260 has been the traditionally accepted date of the request for the *Major Legend*, Jay Hammond has recently argued convincingly for an earlier date of 1257, at the General Chapter of Rome: Jay M. Hammond, "Bonaventure's *Legenda Major*," in *A Companion to Bonaventure*, ed. Jay M. Hammond, Wayne Hellmann, and Jared Goff (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 453-508. Regardless of the date of request, Bonaventure completed the text by 1261, and it was accepted at the General Chapter of Pisa in 1263.

¹²⁰ Bonaventure, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, translated by Regis J. Armstrong, in *Francis of Assisi: The Founder*, vol. 2 (New York: City Press, 2000): 530. Ch. I, P. 1.

¹²¹ Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, 577. Ch. VII, P. 1.

humility.¹²² In this work, St. Francis repeatedly appears to compete with poor people, even involuntarily poor people, in their poverty, because he views external poverty as an expression of internal humility.

The key element of St Francis's exemplarity for other Christians, then, is his humility in Christ, which Bonaventure describes here:

Humility, the guardian and embellishment of all the virtues, had filled the man of God with abundance. In his own opinion he was nothing but a sinner, though in truth he was a mirror and the splendor of every kind of holiness. As he had learned from Christ, he strove to build himself upon this *like a wise architect laying a foundation*. He used to say that it was for this reason that the Son of God came down from the height of his Father's bosom to our lowly estate so that our Lord and Teacher might teach humility in both example and word.¹²³

Here, he depicts Francis in terms similar to those he uses for Christ, as mirror and exemplar, but he also characterizes the true orientation of Francis's poverty, understood as "the material manifestation of the key virtue of *minoritas*, or humility."¹²⁴ Francis utilized material poverty as the basis on which to build his own spiritual perfection, so that the resulting humility "had filled the man of God with abundance."¹²⁵

Furthermore, some have argued that Bonaventure "sees Francis in the perfection of poverty, not as he strips himself before the bishop, not as he fasts or endures the cold, but rather as he is on *La Verna*, wrapped in contemplation of the goodness of God and sealed by the marks

¹²² Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, 581. Ch. VII, P. 6.

¹²³ Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, 569. Ch. VI, P. 1.

¹²⁴ Prudlo, "Mendicancy among the Early Saints," 101.

¹²⁵ Prudlo, "Mendicancy among the Early Saints," 101.

of the cross. Here, he says we see the poor Francis.”¹²⁶ Bonaventure describes Francis’ reaction to the vision he received, “he experienced more abundantly than usual an overflow of the sweetness of heavenly contemplation, was on fire with an ever intense flame of heavenly desires, and began to be aware more fully of the gifts of heavenly entries.”¹²⁷ Francis then realized that “he should be conformed to [Christ] in the affliction and sorrow of his passion, before he would pass out of this world.”¹²⁸ Therefore, Francis’ total identification with Christ’s humility and suffering presented itself as the physical marking of his body with the stigmata, for “as the vision was disappearing, it left in his heart a marvelous fire and imprinted in his flesh a likeness of signs no less marvelous.”¹²⁹ Just as Francis’ material poverty was an external habit of body that demonstrated his internal virtue of humility, the stigmata was an outward symbol of Francis’ inward conformity with the crucified Christ, a sign that Francis had achieved the “summit of Gospel perfection” through his identification with both Christ’s life and his suffering.¹³⁰

In Bonaventure’s depiction of Francis in *The Major Legend*, therefore, we find a perfect exemplar of what he means when he discusses the poverty of spirit that he relates to the renunciation of material things. This is the true form of poverty one should pursue, characterized more accurately as humility than as poverty *per se*, as it is the true meaning of Christ’s poverty, both as he practiced it in his life and as witnessed in his crucifixion. Christ’s sacrifice

¹²⁶ Hellmann, “Poverty: the Franciscan Way to God,” 342-43.

¹²⁷ Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, 631. Ch. XIII, P. 1.

¹²⁸ Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, 631. Ch. XIII, P. 2.

¹²⁹ Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, 632. Ch. XIII, P. 3.

¹³⁰ Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, 639. Ch. XIII, P. 10.

demonstrates for human beings seeking perfection the ultimate form of humiliation and suffering; it is only through the imitation of just such humiliation, as perfectly modeled by St. Francis, evidenced both by his love for material poverty and by the stigmata, that a human being can be fully conformed to Christ. This is the way in which one overcomes the poverty of sin, acquired by all human beings from the first, and stares face to face with one's poverty of existence, the recognition of which brings with it the acquisition of God's grace, a gift beyond compare in this world.

From this explanation, one could easily argue (as many have) that material poverty itself is not necessary to achieving humility, that one could be poor in spirit, or pure of heart, without living a life of absolute poverty. Bonaventure addresses this objection, as shown earlier, and it is important to remember that although material poverty is an instrument to higher virtue, it is not dispensable, for without it that higher virtue could not be achieved. Christ lived in poverty, and St. Francis chose poverty, for the very reason that wealth corrupts the human heart, without exception; material goods are not inherently evil, but they are enticing, and they require maintenance, and they lead to the hoarding of wealth and the attachment of the heart to this world. Just as St. Francis pointed out in his Rules and Letters, St. Bonaventure reinforces that the absolute poverty of Christ rests in working against these interior vices, of greed and pride, by cutting off their roots in wealth.

Conclusion

We find in these three currents of thought about poverty a spectrum with which to compare and contrast the similar spectrum found in al-Ghazali's world two centuries earlier.

Aquinas and Bonaventure clearly provide a locus of moderate thinking amidst the debates, in which the secular masters attempt to argue against the practice of absolute poverty in all forms and the Spiritualists wish to expand it to its greatest possible application to religious life.

Although these two great scholastic theologians disagree on some points of emphasis, they generally present complementary, and not contradictory, positions on the theological significance of poverty to the pursuit of evangelical perfection.

This third current serves, therefore, as the primary point of comparison and contrast with the thought of al-Ghazali on poverty. This is especially true of Bonaventure, in whose thought we have observed a depth of insight into poverty resembling that found in al-Ghazali's works. And while Bonaventure relies heavily on his depiction of St. Francis to build his case about poverty, St. Francis is himself only a human exemplar, who pales in comparison to the eternal exemplar Christ. It is on this figure that the next chapter will focus; both Bonaventure and al-Ghazali present visions of Christ as an exemplar, although they are vastly different. And while these many important differences place a barrier between the Muslim world of al-Ghazali's time and the Christian world of Bonaventure's, more striking are the many similarities between al-Ghazali and the Franciscan, as they reveal fascinating convergences of understanding regarding poverty. These correspondences point to a possible location of common ground between Islam and Christianity based upon the exemplarity of Christ, the very figure who so frequently forces these two religious traditions into conflict.

Chapter Six: Jesus, Poverty, and the Love of God: Theology of Poverty in Bonaventure and al-Ghazali

The previous chapter identified the different currents of thought concerning poverty in thirteenth century Christendom; the secular priests and Spiritual Franciscans formed two opposite poles concerning poverty, between which stood Bonaventure as a representative voice for the moderate belief about and practice of poverty in that time and place. My discussion of these three Christian currents by no means presents a comprehensive treatment of Christian thought on poverty, nor have those currents been analyzed in as much detail as was the work of al-Ghazali in prior chapters. My summary of their basic contours, debates, and relationships does, however, provide a representative understanding of the various attitudes toward poverty at that time, a set of voices with very different approaches to poverty's role in Christian spiritual life. My reading of these currents and their voices serves as a heuristic device, with which I deepen my understanding of al-Ghazali's own attitude toward poverty through the act of comparing these two distinct spiritual traditions.

In order to accomplish such a comparison between two vastly dissimilar traditions, it is necessary to understand precisely why such a comparison should be undertaken at all. The vast majority of this dissertation has been an effort to develop a deeper understanding of al-Ghazali's theology on poverty; as it has progressed, the dissertation has placed al-Ghazali's thought about poverty into an ever-broadening context. What he says about poverty in the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation* can only properly be understood if we know how this relatively small portion of al-Ghazali's thought relates to the rest of the *Ihyā'*, other pertinent works in al-Ghazali's corpus, and other Islamic thinkers who have written about poverty as an important part of their own

systems of thought. Each stage of this contextualization has revealed new aspects of al-Ghazali's approach to poverty by allowing us to see with increasing clarity its place in his thought, in all of its dimensions.

To further deepen this contextualization, I have also chosen to place al-Ghazali's interpretation of poverty into an inter-religious conversation with the theology about poverty expressed in thirteenth-century Christian thought, specifically as it was articulated within the framework of the disputes over poverty involving the Order of the Friars Minor. Even after limiting the options to a specific time period and academic topic, it is a difficult task to narrow down the thirteenth-century Christian thinkers who wrote about poverty to one representative whose thought would form a suitable comparison to that of al-Ghazali. Therefore, in the previous chapter I have tracked the predominant Christian currents of thought concerning poverty as a way to establish a heuristic device by which to determine characteristic positions on poverty within the context of a religious tradition.

Having identified the main currents surrounding the one espoused by Bonaventure, we come to understand his theological position in its context and the relationship of his thought to that of his contemporaries, which helps to further elucidate al-Ghazali's position in the Muslim conversation about poverty and spiritual development. This exercise reveals that al-Ghazali¹ and Bonaventure² both represent theological forces who stand between radical practitioners of

¹ Al-Ghazali was long considered a Sufi, sympathetic to the ascetic lifestyle. More recent scholarship has complicated this picture of his life, demonstrating his more moderate position. This is evident from a close analysis of the *Ihyā'*, in which he consistently challenges the authority of the *'ulama'* and criticizes the practices of more radical Sufis. He does this throughout the Book of Knowledge: *Ihyā'* 1:9-94 (Introduction and *kitāb* I).

² There is a long academic history of referring to Bonaventure as a moderate regarding poverty, such as in Malcolm Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty: the Doctrine of the Absolute Poverty of Christ and the Apostles in the Franciscan*

poverty on one side, those who confuse the pursuit of poverty with the pursuit of God, and more conservative traditionalists on the other side, those who speak out against poverty's usefulness to spirituality and emphasize its dangers over its positive qualities. While this chapter does not perform a direct comparison of one thinker's thought to another's, Bonaventure plays a more pronounced role in my analysis than do others because he has been established as the representative voice of the moderate Franciscan position on poverty, a position resembling the one al-Ghazali himself holds in his own temporal, geographical, and religious contexts.

Relative to their own broader religious traditions, then, al-Ghazali and Bonaventure occupy analogous spaces as "moderate" voices on poverty's role in the spiritual process of moving towards a meeting with God. And yet, the kind of moderation each scholar represents differs according to his particular context, as our comparison bears out. The comparison of these two particular traditions rests also, therefore, on the shared reference to Jesus as an exemplar for poverty in the works of the major thinkers al-Ghazali and Bonaventure.³ The appeal to a shared figure of authority provides us with a starting point from which to embark upon a detailed comparison and contrast of the theologies of poverty presented in these two specific spiritual lineages. And while they both stand between more radical and more traditional intellectual and

Order, 1210-1323 (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1998). This characterization has begun to shift in recent scholarship, in which David Burr especially has asserted Bonaventure's similarity to the Spiritualist Peter Olivi on the doctrine of poverty. See David Burr, *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty: The Origins of the "Usus Pauper" Controversy* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), and Kevin L. Hughes, "Bonaventure's Defense of Mendicancy," in *A Companion to Bonaventure*, eds. Jay M. Hammond, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and Jared Goff (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 512.

³ Other such studies include: David Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: an Interfaith Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Wilhelmus Valkenberg, *Sharing Lights on the Way to God: Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Theology in the Context of Abrahamic Partnership* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006). These and others tend to compare al-Ghazali with Thomas Aquinas. I am unaware of any other in-depth theological comparisons between al-Ghazali and Bonaventure.

spiritual forces, their sources for Jesus' life and teachings, and therefore their depictions of Jesus as a spiritual exemplar, differ greatly. This variance produces forms of moderation that resemble each other only when considered in relation to their temporal, geographical, textual, and theological contexts.

On the surface, we have been able to identify interesting points of congruence between these two scholars' interpretations of poverty. Both al-Ghazali and Bonaventure view poverty as essential to self-purification, Jesus as a perfect exemplar of poverty (and renunciation), human beings as both materially and ontologically needy, and intimacy with God as the ultimate goal of any adoption of voluntary poverty in spirit and practice. Although they understand Jesus and God differently, they share the idea that Jesus' self-sacrifice and devotion to God demonstrate something meaningful about the foundational roles of poverty and renunciation. While the substances of their ethical systems differ, including the states, virtues and reasons, the function of poverty within them looks very similar. It begins the journey of spiritual purification, and it leads through different paths to the love of God in both traditions.

These seemingly significant similarities pale in comparison, however, with the deeper-rooted theological differences between the thought of al-Ghazali and that of Bonaventure and his contemporary Christian brethren. There are many specious obstacles to this comparison, such as certain historical, institutional, and textual inconsistencies that raise questions and must be addressed; more importantly, deep and fundamental theological divergences exist between these two traditions that center on the person and nature of Jesus. Despite the similarity of references to his life and teachings as a religious authority, the Muslim and Christian versions of Jesus to which these two traditions appeal share very little in common beyond the surface level.

For while both Bonaventure and al-Ghazali appeal to Jesus as an exemplar for poverty and renunciation, they do so in very different ways, in accordance with their theological backgrounds as Christian and Muslim. Furthermore, each of these traditions offers up human exemplars of poverty and renunciation: St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan Order, and ‘A’isha, one of the Prophet Muhammad’s wives. These two figures embody their respective traditions’ interpretations of poverty’s perfection; an analysis of the differences between their depictions reveals the divergent ways in which Bonaventure and al-Ghazali interpret poverty theologically. Specifically, St. Francis’ perfect conformity to Christ through his reception of the stigmata differs greatly from ‘A’isha’s manifestation of the sacred indifference inherent to the state of *mustaghni*. The nature of this disparity points the way to the major theological issues on which these two traditions depart from one another: the interpretation of the nature and function of Jesus in spiritual purification; the implications one’s view of Jesus has on one’s understanding of the nature of God; and the ultimate human goals within the boundaries of poverty’s pursuit.

Emerging from the different religious backgrounds of the two primary thinkers discussed here, these theological disparities shape our comparison of their thought about poverty. For although on its surface poverty operates very similarly in both religious traditions, understood at a deeper level poverty reflects the more significant Muslim and Christian theologies about God, Jesus, the relationship between God and humans, and the nature of human spiritual progress towards God. Such a recognition of the doctrinal difference between these two traditions yields a meaningful mutual enrichment across religious boundaries without sacrificing the confessional integrity of each individual strain of theological thought. Furthermore, we ultimately arrive at an

eschatology according to which poverty transcends religious boundaries and serves as one location of overlapping horizons of the Franciscan and Ghazalian theological positions.

The Context and Boundaries of Comparison: Historical, Institutional, and Textual Differences

The ideas asserted by al-Ghazali and within the various currents of the Christian poverty debates emerged from their own unique contexts; therefore, certain differences between their positions must be recognized and dealt with before any in-depth comparison could begin. These differences stem from several inconsistencies in the comparison itself: the historical difference produced by the temporal distance between al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and the emergence of the Franciscan order (c. 1209); the divergent institutional contexts, religious, political, and economic, in which al-Ghazali and Bonaventure lived and wrote; the textual distinctions, including differences in style and genre, differences in sacred source material used by Bonaventure and al-Ghazali, and an imbalance in the quantity and depth of secondary literature available; and finally, the theological break, especially centered on Jesus, inherent to any comparison of Muslim and Christian thinkers. Each of the first three hurdles may be bridged without too much trouble, but this final difference demonstrates the fundamental gulf between the Christian and Muslim theologies of poverty.

The first issue is one of historical period, as these two strains of thought emerged in different times; al-Ghazali lived (and died) a full century before St. Francis began his reform movement in Northern Italy. In addition, his work is even farther removed from the more systematic reflection on poverty undertaken by Bonaventure (d. 1274). The absolute dates of our

subjects' lives are less important, however, than their positions in time in relation to certain social, economic, religious, and intellectual movements occurring in their individual periods and locations. For instance, eleventh century Baghdad was the epicenter of the translation movement of ancient Greek texts into Arabic, through the mediation of the Syriac Christian churches.⁴ Similarly, through the translation efforts of scholars of the Iberian Peninsula, Christian thinkers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, including Bonaventure and his contemporaries, developed their thought with direct reference to that of the ancient Greeks.⁵ The works of Aristotle carried great influence in both contexts, and its impact on both al-Ghazali and Bonaventure is apparent.⁶ Therefore, despite the difference in time period, al-Ghazali and Bonaventure worked in relatively similar intellectual traditions, both aiming to reconcile Greek philosophical ideas with their respective religious traditions.

Other similarities relative to historical development also suggest a closer correspondence between these thinkers than would be possible by focusing solely on the absolute dates of their lives and works. In terms of religious movements, both eleventh century Baghdad and thirteenth century Italy were only a few decades removed from an increased emphasis on open and socially

⁴ Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998).

⁵ Among the many articles and books on the translation and reception of specific texts and in specific communities, see the general introduction in C. Burnett, "Arabic into Latin: the reception of Arabic philosophy into Western Europe" in P. Adamson and R.C. Taylor, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 370–404.

⁶ For a brief summary of Aristotle's influence on Medieval Christian Scholasticism, and on Bonaventure's integration of it into his works, see Marianne Schlosser, "Bonaventure: Life and Works," in *A Companion to Bonaventure*, eds. Jay M. Hammond, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and Jared Goff (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 50-52. In reference to al-Ghazali, see Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford, 2009), in which the author refines our understanding of al-Ghazali's attitude towards Aristotle through an analysis of al-Ghazali's relationship to his immediate predecessor Ibn Sina.

active ascetic practice.⁷ Baghdad was one of the centers in which early Islamic ascetic movements crystallized into full-fledged religious orders, and as has been argued earlier in this dissertation al-Ghazali clearly sympathized with certain ascetic strains of thought in his time, even resigning from his high-profile teaching position and devoting his life to reflection and mystical practice.⁸ Similarly, St. Francis tapped into already present ascetic movements in Italy by renouncing his father and his father's business venture and embarking upon his famous campaign to pursue extreme poverty for the sake of Christ.⁹ Thus, the temporal difference does not impede our comparison; rather, we actually find some similarities in religious and intellectual development taking place in the times and places out of which these two authors emerged as representative and moderate voices about poverty.

A more significant obstacle relates to the vastly different institutional contexts in which al-Ghazali and Bonaventure lived; by this I refer to the contrasting political and religious institutions and systems that formed the backdrop against which these authors developed and expressed their ideas. The most immediate difference is marked by Bonaventure's belonging to the Franciscans, a monastic order the kind of which did not exist in the Islamic context 150 years

⁷ Christopher Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E." *Studia Islamica*, 83 (1996): 51-70; Augustine Thompson, "The Origins of Religious Mendicancy in Medieval Europe" in *The Origin, Development and Refinement of Medieval Religious Mendicancies*, ed. Donald S. Prudlo (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3-30.

⁸ See al-Ghazali's own account of this spiritual "crisis" in *Erreur et Deliverance*, Traduction Francaise, avec introduction et notes par Farid Jabre, a dual French/Arabic edition (Commission Libanaise Pour La Traduction des Chefs D'oeuvre: Beyrouth, 1969); and Richard J. McCarthy, S.J., *Deliverance from Error: An Annotated Translation of al-Munqidh min al-Dalal, and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazali* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1980).

⁹ Bonaventure, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, translated by Regis J. Armstrong, in *Francis of Assisi: The Founder*, vol. 2 (New York: City Press, 2000): II.3-4.

earlier. This shaped not only his conclusions about poverty but also the questions he chose to ask about it in the first place; for example, individual poverty was an assumed quality for Bonaventure and his audience of other monastics and priests, so his works try primarily to establish the legitimacy of communal poverty, or the lack of wealth held in common by the order of which he was a part.¹⁰ Therefore, at the time of Bonaventure's disputation with the secular priests and the resulting Spiritualist controversy, the thinking about poverty developed primarily in relation to its part in achieving the monastic goal of evangelical perfection, which made it applicable only to those living within the context of this immediate institutional setting.

The question of religious orders was more complicated in Islam during al-Ghazali's time; although it eventually came to be seen as something Muslims should avoid, monasticism is treated in two distinct ways in the Qur'an. On the one hand, in Sura al-Ma'ida, *āya* 82, the Christian community is praised for its monks and priests, who are those "nearest in friendship [*mawadda*] to those who believe," and "they are not arrogant."¹¹ This seems to connect the monastic life with humility and a piety deep enough to establish intimacy between the practitioner and God. On the other hand, Sura al-Hadid, *āya* 27, speaks directly about the monasticism practiced by Christians at that time, "the monasticism they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them."¹² It continues, however, to say they invented monasticism "only

¹⁰ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, introduction and notes by Robert J. Karris, translation by Jose de Vinck and Robert J. Karris (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2010), VII.3-4.

¹¹ Qur'an 5:82.

¹² Qur'an 57:27.

seeking Allah's pleasure, but they did not observe it with the right observance."¹³ This verse complicates the Qur'anic understanding of monasticism, since it opens up the possibility for a right observance, while at the same time referring to it as an innovation (*bid'a*), a human perversion of God's original intention and a grave sin in Islam.

As Muslim intellectual interest in this question progressed, however, the majority of scholars pointed to the many traditions from Muhammad and his Companions forbidding the celibacy that attended a monastic life.¹⁴ Perhaps the most damning is the report from the Prophet Muhammad that "There is no monasticism in Islam," seemingly eliminating all possibility for such practices to persist in the tradition.¹⁵ For the most part, Muslims did not separate themselves from the world so completely, nor did they practice celibacy.¹⁶ These things were maintained, however, within the ascetic strains of Islam with which al-Ghazali engaged and sympathized. The religious orders of Islam never became as institutionalized as the Christian monastic communities; the Sufi groups that began to crystallize into fully-fledged religious orders during and just after al-Ghazali's time were much more porous bodies. They consisted of a blend of the Muslim community, ranging from "professional" mystics who lived permanently in the orders'

¹³ Qur'an 57:27. For an interesting discussion of this verse and its exegetical history, see Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 260-84.

¹⁴ There are many such traditions. For instance, see Ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, 1:175; al-Bukhari, *Sahih, kitāb al-Nikah*, no. 8; Muslim, *Sahih, kitāb al-Nikah*, nos. 6-8.

¹⁵ For treatments of the history of this report, as well as its authenticity, see Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1954), 145-53.

¹⁶ This is an oversimplification, as it does not account for the vast diversity in Muslim lives, nor for the actual practice of celibacy by many Muslims. See Shahzad Bashir, "Islamic Tradition and Celibacy," in *Celibacy and Religious Traditions*, ed. Carl Olson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 133-150.

lodges (Ar: *zawiya*; Pers: *khanqah*) to regular attendees at various stages of spiritual development, and even to those only loosely associated with the order who came to the lodges for help with specific issues or for local religious holidays and celebrations.¹⁷

These lodges were only beginning to develop as social and religious institutions at al-Ghazali's time, when their seeds still lay in the charismatic ascetic and mystical masters with whom students studied and practiced intimately. Given this different institutional context, al-Ghazali dealt with poverty in a broader sense than did Bonaventure and his contemporaries. No kind of poverty, individual or communal, could be assumed in the Islamic context, and in fact al-Ghazali deals almost exclusively with individual voluntary poverty, since the institutional development of religious communities such as Sufi orders had not yet fully come to fruition.¹⁸ And with the more diverse body of possible ascetics in Islam, al-Ghazali wrote his work for a broader audience, taking care to include the common Muslim in his rubric of spirituality and self-purification, whereas in the poverty disputes of thirteenth-century Christendom the audience and scope was entirely contained within the context of ordained priests and monks.¹⁹ This significant institutional difference between the two traditions of thought on poverty impacts the

¹⁷ For two important studies of the socially active nature of Sufi Orders, see Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), and Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Middle Period, 1200-1550* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

¹⁸ This is apparent throughout *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation*, in which al-Ghazali makes no mention at all of Sufi orders or groups. In fact, the entire *Ihyā'* is written as a spiritual manual for individual Muslims, rather than as a kind of Sufi manual along the lines of Qushayri's *Risāla* and others. For instance, see al-Ghazali's discussion of the levels of poverty in *Ihyā'* 4:186 (XXXIV, *shāṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

¹⁹ Al-Ghazali is well known for shifting his rhetorical modes in accordance with his intended audience: Ken Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and His Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 68. In contrast, almost all of Bonaventure's writings on poverty must be placed within the context of the theological dispute among theologians of the thirteenth century: Kevin L. Hughes, "Bonaventure's Defense of Mendicancy," 509-41.

range of their thinking about it; however, this difference in scope does very little to constrain our comparison, since despite the division concerning individual and communal poverty, in both the Christian and Muslim traditions, we find thinking about poverty as voluntary, foundational, instrumental, and necessary to the purification of the soul.

Related to the institutional discrepancies, and especially the different audiences of the two authors, certain textual issues also complicate the comparison across medieval Christian and Muslim boundaries; the dissimilarities in style and genre, differences in the authors' sacred source materials, and the imbalance in the secondary literature about Christian and Muslim poverty all contribute to the difficulty of establishing connections between Bonaventure and al-Ghazali. None of these need hinder our comparing their works, but they should be noted; furthermore, observing these textual differences directs our analysis towards the theological aspects of their variance, which take precedence over the other, more superficial comparative points, both similarities and differences.

We have considered in previous chapters the vast secondary literature that deals with poverty in the Christian tradition in contrast with the relative lack of such academic analysis on the same subject in Islam. The popularity and strength of the mendicant orders in Christianity elicited academic responses almost from their inception, so the literature discussing the meaning of poverty in the Christian context stretches for several centuries and continues to appear at a high volume to this day. The secondary literature on Franciscan poverty must be incorporated into any assessment of poverty as a Christian spiritual ideal, whereas the secondary literature on poverty (*faqr*) in Islam is sparse and contains little depth, as to this point scholars have been

focused primarily on the related concepts of renunciation and asceticism (*zuhd*).²⁰ Therefore, this dissertation contains much more original research in the realm of Islamic studies, and has relied more heavily on secondary sources in relating the Christian traditions concerning poverty.

Furthermore, a consideration of the textual styles and purposes employed in these two traditions seems also to restrict our ability to compare the ideas contained within them. For example, it is difficult to find in thirteenth-century Christendom a corollary for the *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, which represents al-Ghazali's crowning achievement as a spiritual thinker; the closest thing would be Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, but that text does not devote the same amount of space to the treatment of poverty as does the *Iḥyāʾ*.²¹ Nevertheless, both the *Iḥyāʾ* and the *Summa* are comprehensive, compendious spiritual examinations, written at the heights of their respective authors' careers and as representations of the fullest development of their different systems of thought.

Thus, just as we have focused the scope of this dissertation on the portion of the thirty-fourth book of al-Ghazali's *Iḥyāʾ* that discusses poverty, so we must also focus our comparison on the Christian texts most pertinent to this particular study. This again raises an obstacle, since

²⁰ There are a few notable exceptions to this dearth of attention to poverty. For a discussion of poverty as a sociological force, see Adam Sabra's *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250-1517*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, which contains a short chapter summarizing the understanding of poverty in early Sufi thought. For a cursory discussion of the hadith traditions concerning poverty and wealth, see the article by Leah Kinberg, "Compromise of commerce: a study of early traditions concerning poverty and wealth." *Der Islam* 66 (1989): 193-212. Neither of these studies deals with Al-Ghazali's time and place, nor do they perform in-depth analyses of poverty as a theological or spiritual concept.

²¹ In fact, many comparisons between Aquinas and al-Ghazali have been made. See David Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: an Interfaith Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Wilhelmus Valkenberg, *Sharing Lights on the Way to God: Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Theology in the Context of Abrahamic Partnership* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006); Jan Jan G. J. van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God: Thomas Aquinas on Evangelical Poverty* (Leuven: Peeters, 1994).

the Christian period under review produced so much more work explicitly devoted to the question of poverty than did the period of Islamic history which we have studied; however, the plethora of material on Christian poverty actually works in our favor, as it allows for the identification of the various currents of thought on poverty from that time.²² Given the relative similarities noted above concerning the developments taking place around the issue of poverty and asceticism in the Islamic world and Christendom, the context and content of the Christian texts reviewed in the previous chapter help to illuminate possibilities for a similar contextualization of al-Ghazali's major work.

For instance, al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'* has recently been shown to consist of more than a simple exposition on ethics, and thus to share the characteristics of Bonaventure's works insofar as al-Ghazali wrote it with the intention of advocating for a reorientation of his contemporaries' priorities about religious knowledge and practice.²³ The thirty-fourth book on poverty can in this context be read not only as al-Ghazali's assertions about the importance of poverty but also as a response to prior conversations about the subject, as well as a bulwark against contemporary and potential detractors.²⁴ The *Ihyā'* is, of course, also a practical text on mystical ethics; al-Ghazali wrote it with the intention of guiding Muslims along a path of cleansing the mirrors of their hearts and reflecting the divine knowledge of God.²⁵ Ultimately, al-Ghazali's teleology in the

²² We have tracked the general currents of thought in chapter five of this dissertation.

²³ Ken Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 63-168.

²⁴ We have attempted to place Book XXXIV into its historical and intellectual contexts in chapters three and four of this dissertation.

²⁵ Ken Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 68. *Ihyā'* 3:2-76 (*kitāb* XXI-XXII).

Ihyā' explores the intersection of the knowledge and love of God, two intimately related concepts in his thought.²⁶

So, while it is difficult to find two texts with which to perform a direct inter-religious comparison, a consideration of a broader spectrum of texts reveals similar elements of genre and style in both traditions. For instance, although we focus primarily on *The Book of Poverty and Renunciation*, we have also taken into account some of al-Ghazali's other works. These include the autobiographical *Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, which has recently been reevaluated in consideration of its apologetic tone, revealing some of al-Ghazali's likely goals for writing it so late in his career.²⁷ In the *Munqidh* we find important biographical details that provide context for the other texts written by al-Ghazali.²⁸ We have also briefly considered the esoteric *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, in which al-Ghazali takes a more explicitly mystical approach than usual to theology,²⁹ and the *al-Maḡṣad*, in which al-Ghazali explores the importance and meaning of God's divine names, including *al-Ghanī*.³⁰

²⁶ Al-Ghazali explores this explicitly in *Ihyā'* 4: 286 (*kitāb XXXVI, introduction*); Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 2.

²⁷ Eric Ormsby, "The Taste of Truth: the Structure of Experience in al-Ghazali's *Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*," in *Islamic Studies presented to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden: Brill, 1991): 133-52; Josef van Ess, "Quelques remarques sur le *Munqid min ad-dalal*," *al-Ghazali: La raison et le miracle* (Paris: Editions Maisonneuve et Larose, 1987): 57-68; Kenneth Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and his Revival of Religious Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-3; 158-61.

²⁸ Although the *Munqidh* contains many biographical elements, it does not represent an autobiography in the sense that genre is understood in modern times. Rather, it should be seen as al-Ghazali's own account of his spiritual life, and it therefore cannot be trusted implicitly with regard to historical facts.

²⁹ Al-Ghazali, *The Niche of Lights: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, translated, introduced, and edited by David Buchman (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), xviii-xxi.

³⁰ Al-Ghazali, *al-maḡṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ ma'ānī asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*, ed. Fadlou A Shehadi (Beirut: Dar al-Machreq, 1971).

The works most pertinent to a study of poverty in the thirteenth-century Christian world come from Bonaventure; both his *Apologia Pauperum* and his *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection* were written in the midst of disputes over and in defense of the Franciscan ideal of the absolute poverty of Christ. They serve not only as texts aimed at establishing doctrine but also as arguments against those who denounced the Franciscan (and generally the monastic) way of life.³¹ His *Breviloquium* contains a brief presentation of his theology, providing context for his beliefs on poverty,³² while his *Tree of Life* focuses more specifically on the importance of Christ's crucifixion as a manifestation of poverty and humility.³³ The fourth quarter of the *Ihyā'*, in which the thirty-fourth book finds its home, perhaps best corresponds to Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, in which he describes the stages by which a person's soul ascends to meet God, including the knowledge and love gained in the process.³⁴

We must also consider the sources of religious authority to which both traditions appeal. On the one hand, al-Ghazali constructs his case about poverty out of the sources sacred in Islam, the Qur'an, hadith, and the writings of other notable Muslim thinkers who preceded him. We have seen in earlier chapters just how al-Ghazali employs these texts to support his own

³¹ Kevin L. Hughes, "Bonaventure's Defense of Mendicancy," in *A Companion to Bonaventure*, eds. Jay M. Hammond, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and Jared Goff (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 509-41.

³² Saint Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, translated by Dominic V. Monti (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Saint Bonaventure University, 2005).

³³ I have used the translation of this work found in Richard S. Martignetti, *Saint Bonaventure's Tree of Life: Theology of the Mystical Journey* (Rome: Frati Editori di Quaracchi, 2004).

³⁴ Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, trans. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M., ed. Stephen F. Brown (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993).

assertions about poverty in his *Ihyā'* and elsewhere. On the other hand, Bonaventure uses the sacred texts of Christianity, and specifically the life of Christ as recorded in the gospels, as his primary source material, along with the thought and actions of earlier Christian theologians and saints, especially those of St. Francis. His *Major Legend of Saint Francis* stands as the ultimate medieval hagiographical expression of the life of the founder of the Franciscan brotherhood, and in it we find representative examples of the ways in which Bonaventure utilizes a combination of scripture and other material to make the case for his interpretation of poverty.³⁵

Not only do al-Ghazali's use of hadith and Bonaventure's *Major Legend* resemble one another, but also several other similarities in their uses of texts stand out. For example, al-Ghazali clearly had access to some version of the Gospel of Matthew, as he makes references to the Sermon on the Mount,³⁶ an excerpt which features prominently in Bonaventure's own interpretation of poverty.³⁷ Al-Ghazali also depicts Jesus, albeit the Muslim Jesus, as the prophet who best exemplifies poverty throughout the *Ihyā'*.³⁸ This obviously occurs in Bonaventure's work, where Jesus is Christ, the exemplar of all virtue. While their use of these sources looks similar, however, the content and meaning of those sources ultimately represent the primary

³⁵ Bonaventure, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, translated by Regis J. Armstrong, in *Francis of Assisi: The Founder*, vol. 2 (New York: City Press, 2000), 525-649.

³⁶ This has been noted by Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 33, and especially n. 43.

³⁷ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, introduction and notes by Robert J. Karris, translation by Jose de Vinck and Robert J. Karris (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2010): 69-80. Chapter III, Paragraphs 1-14.

³⁸ See again Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*, 42-3. Khalidi notes al-Ghazali's use of Jesus as a moral model, but he fails to make the connection to *zuhd* or *faqr* that I wish to suggest here. I find this strange, considering Khalidi's observation on p. 34 that the "largest group of sayings and stories may be thought of as establishing the outlines of Jesus as a patron saint of Muslim asceticism."

difference between the Christian and Muslim understandings of poverty considered in this dissertation.

Therefore, the comparison taking place in this chapter is not a simple one, as it does not rely only upon two similar texts, but the consideration of various works from each religious tradition allows us to identify similar textual structures and purposes, so that the comparison itself remains coherent. Both al-Ghazali and Bonaventure struggled with the issue of poverty and its relationship to human spiritual advancement; neither of them wrote solely about this subject, and they produced different quantities of material on it, but these discrepancies do not invalidate a comparison of their thinking about poverty. The ways in which they construct their texts, and the ways in which they utilize other texts to do so, bring to light their shared appeal to the life and teachings of Jesus, an important figure to both traditions.

Material Poverty, Poverty of Existence, and the Importance of Jesus in Both Traditions

The first issue dealt with in both al-Ghazali's mystical ethics and the Franciscan spiritual tradition pertains to the materiality of poverty. At its most basic level, poverty indicates the lack of something necessary for human survival or flourishing; as creatures who exist in the physical world, human beings require physical means to maintain their lives, and when these means are not available (or are rejected), people live in poverty. Both the Islamic and Christian traditions analyzed here consider the nature of material poverty, its positive and negative characteristics, its usefulness in spiritual development, its fundamental necessity in the pursuit of spiritual purification or perfection, and perhaps most especially its exemplification by Jesus. The

similarities between these two traditions regarding poverty as a material state point towards some of their few shared theological points concerning poverty.

To begin, al-Ghazali and the Franciscans clearly write only in reference to voluntary poverty; the involuntary poverty of the truly needy lies outside the scope of their spiritual systems. Al-Ghazali clearly places the involuntarily poor at the bottom of his levels of poverty because those who do not choose poverty constantly desire wealth.³⁹ They are prone to the same kind of temptations as the wealthy, since they desire what they cannot possess, although the poor are less to blame than the wealthy for their distraction with this world and its goods, since the poor are so attracted out of a desire to sustain life rather than a desire to hoard things in excess. Similarly, the Franciscan debates surrounding poverty were entirely in reference to voluntary poverty; in fact, even individual voluntary poverty was seen as commonplace in the ecclesial context of the Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁰ At issue was only one particular form of voluntary poverty, the communal poverty practiced by the monastic orders as manifested in the Franciscan tradition, which was much more narrowly-defined than the poverty discussed by al-Ghazali.⁴¹

In both traditions, the willing acceptance and pursuit of poverty was seen as better than the alternatives, whether involuntary poverty or excessive wealth. They agree on the temptations that arise from being involuntarily poor, as those who suffer from this circumstance often desire

³⁹ *Iḥyā'* 4:186 (XXXIV, *shatr* 1, *bayān* 1).

⁴⁰ Augustine Thompson, "The Origins of Religious Mendicancy in Medieval Europe," in *The Origin, Development and Refinement of Medieval Religious Mendicancies*, ed. Donald S. Prudlo (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 23-4.

⁴¹ Bonaventure addresses this in *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter VII.

and actively pursue wealth, which works against their intimacy with God.⁴² These people, despite being poor, do not benefit from their poverty in the same ways as the voluntarily poor, since their poverty has become a distraction for them. Therefore, Bonaventure and al-Ghazali both rely upon material poverty as a significant aspect of purity or perfection, while at the same time cautioning against the dangers inherent to the practice of radical poverty, which amounts to the pursuit of poverty for its own good.⁴³ Bonaventure worked to limit the Spiritual Franciscans of his own time, just as al-Ghazali consistently critiques the thought and actions of certain radical ascetics and groups of ascetics.

Since voluntary material poverty serves to remedy the ills obtained through the possession of material wealth, but involuntary poverty can itself also carry with it certain spiritual deficiencies, it stands to reason that poverty is not good in itself. In fact, the texts from both of these spiritual traditions support such a position, indicating that material poverty is instrumental to goodness, and not good in itself. We find in the writings of both al-Ghazali and Bonaventure a relationship between the pursuit of material poverty and what we have called the poverty of human existence, or at times ontological poverty.⁴⁴ Both al-Ghazali and Bonaventure characterize human beings as inherently poor on an ontological level; the created nature of

⁴² On Aquinas' approach to involuntary poverty, see Van den Eijnden, *Poverty on the Way to God*, 30; Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Poverty*, 75-76 (Q. II, Article 1, Replies to Arguments for Negative Position, n. 1); al-Ghazali, *Ihyā'* 4:200 (k. XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 2).

⁴³ Al-Ghazali warns against the dangers of Sufi claims, but he specifically mentions these in relation to poverty within the context of his discussion about begging: *Ihyā'* 4:201-10 (*kitāb* XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayānāt* 5-9). Bonaventure seems more radical in his advocacy for absolute poverty, but he never suggests one should go hungry or unclothed, as seen in his discussion of 'simple use' in Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter XI.

⁴⁴ We have discussed this in two places: in reference to al-Ghazali in chapter two, pages 89-98; in reference to Bonaventure in chapter five, pages 234-241.

human beings imbues them with a poverty of existence or poverty of being.⁴⁵ This poverty of existence, in both the Muslim and Christian contexts analyzed here, emerges from the dependence of human existence on God as the only necessary being, absolute and self-sustaining, upon whose creative impulse all creatures rely to bring them into being and to maintain their existences.⁴⁶

This mutually beneficial relationship between human beings and God exists ‘in the beginning,’ but it does not last long because the first human beings become tempted by the beauty and wealth of the created world.⁴⁷ As human beings seek to own material goods, they turn their gaze away from God and move farther from relying upon God for subsistence.⁴⁸ This greater independence may produce an increase in material wealth, but it diminishes spiritual wealth, therefore deepening the poverty of existence through an increased alienation from God. Bonaventure depicts this as the book of the external world beginning to take precedence over the book of the soul, leading human beings to seek the possession of material and mutable goods.⁴⁹ He describes this in terms of the poverty of sin, a state in which all human beings now live. Al-Ghazali describes a similar process, as the material world presents itself to human beings in the

⁴⁵ See in al-Ghazali the prologue to Book XXXIV, *Iḥyā’* 4:185 (XXXIV, introduction); and in Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 84-98; part II, chapters 9-12.

⁴⁶ *Iḥyā’* 4; 186 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1). Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Poverty*, Q. 1, Conclusion, p. 41-2.

⁴⁷ *Iḥyā’* 4:185 (XXXIV, introduction).

⁴⁸ *Iḥyā’* 4:185 (XXXIV, introduction).

⁴⁹ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 99-107. Part III, Chapters 1-4.

form of a beautiful woman, enticing and lovely, in order to trap them on their way to God.⁵⁰ For both thinkers this world is a place of temptation, and human beings largely fail to recognize it as such until it is too late, ending up possessing material goods and losing the eternal spiritual wealth that comes from remaining close to God.

Bonaventure and al-Ghazali also agree on the general remedy for this separation from God: knowledge. Bonaventure discusses this in terms of the books of nature, soul, and scripture, which human beings must use to perceive the truth of God.⁵¹ Sin emerged when the original humans lost sight of the internal book of the soul and focused too much on the external book of nature. Turning away from the interior in this way not only gave privilege to the book of nature but also perverted its true value as a sign of God's gifts; creation became something inherently good, a distortion of God's original intention for it, and something to be possessed on its own merit, transforming it into a distraction from God.⁵² The reclamation of knowledge about the truth of the created world would set straight the person seeking after God.

Al-Ghazali also emphasizes the importance of knowledge to perceiving the truth about this world and God; al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* is a work devoted entirely to reestablishing the meaning of knowledge in the Islamic intellectual world. Those who know (*'arifun*) see through the beautiful guise presented by the world and recognize its nature as an evil old hag,

⁵⁰ *Iḥyā'* 4:185 (XXXIV, introduction).

⁵¹ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Zachery Hayes, O.F.M., ed. George Marcil, O.F.M. (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2000) Question I, article 2, Conclusion, p. 128.

⁵² Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 104-12. Part III, Chapters 2-4.

bent on their destruction.⁵³ Increasing one's knowledge produces an intimacy with the subject of that knowledge, so whatever one chooses to know better, this world or God, is that to which one will draw nearer.⁵⁴ God continually casts this knowledge into humans' hearts, but few of them do the work necessary to attain it. Al-Ghazali wrote the *Iḥyā'* as a guide for those who wish to do the work, who wish to polish the mirrors of their hearts in order to reflect in themselves the knowledge of God and the true knowledge of the created world.

Thus, in both of these traditions, one aspect of the knowledge helpful in bringing people closer to God is material poverty itself, which is a critical component of the remedy to the poverty of existence. Since material wealth only emerges from the pursuit and possession of this world, material poverty is believed to be the way to counter the desire for such pursuit, a method of severing one's ties with this world, reorienting one's gaze towards the next world and freeing one to pursue states of greater intimacy with God. Therefore, material poverty is not necessarily something to be pursued for its own sake but because of its usefulness in the process of spiritual progress or purification, a process that results in an increased knowledge and love of God. The nature of the relationship between material and spiritual poverty, then, leads to the realization that material poverty is not inherently good but instead is instrumental to goodness. The lack of wealth, which empowers people to participate in the temptations of the material world, disables the human capacity for such participation. A poor man cannot eat in excess, or wear clothing that is too refined, or live in an opulent home. A poor man cannot put wealth to ill use because he

⁵³ *Iḥyā'* 4:185 (XXXIV, introduction).

⁵⁴ *Iḥyā'* 4:198 (XXXIV, *shatr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

does not have it. Thus, material poverty is instrumental in nature, in that it leads to the acquisition of goodness through the absence of occasion of evil.

Al-Ghazali makes this clear by connecting poverty to renunciation, identifying poverty as one piece of a larger movement towards total detachment from this world in the state of *mustaghni*.⁵⁵ Bonaventure too, contrary to popular opinion, believes poverty is not something to be pursued for its own sake; he makes it clear that the purpose of poverty lies in its ability to produce humility (*minoritas*), a virtue he considers the “summit of evangelical perfection.”⁵⁶ Similarly, wealth is not considered inherently evil, but is also instrumental to the evils of the world, to jealousy and pride and avarice, vices which corrupt the human soul and encourage further pursuit of the things of this world.⁵⁷ Both of these men prefer poverty, therefore, as a way to counter the temptations wealth brings with it; lacking wealth frees one to turn away from this world because one has neither the responsibility to maintain what one possesses nor the desire to pursue what one does not yet possess.

The instrumental character of poverty also indicates a similarity regarding the various degrees to which poverty may be practiced; there is a direct correlation between one’s perfection of external, material poverty and one’s internal relationship to the material world as a whole. In other words, the deeper one’s poverty, the greater one’s spiritual distance from the world. Al-Ghazali’s levels of poverty express this clearly, as they move from greed to contentment,

⁵⁵ *Iḥyā’* 4:186 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

⁵⁶ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Poverty*, Q. 1, Conclusion, p. 44.

⁵⁷ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, Ch. VII, paragraph 26, p. 205.

satisfaction, renunciation, and finally *mustaghni*.⁵⁸ This represents two simultaneous movements, one material and the other spiritual; the internal movement requires a shift in attitude, in response to one's poverty, and ultimately in a more dramatic shift to the actual pursuit of poverty through renunciation. Bonaventure and Aquinas also make the connection between the external practice of poverty and the internal movement away from the world; Bonaventure especially presents this through his treatment of Francis, who always sought to be perceived as the poorest, most humble follower of Christ.⁵⁹

The detachment of the soul from the world is not the end of poverty, however, and it is balanced on the other side by the movement towards greater intimacy with God. Al-Ghazali presents this in the image of a zero-sum game: God and this world represent two poles, and human beings waver between them incessantly, so the extent to which they approach one pole equals the extent to which they withdraw from the other. Any movement away from the world can only mean a movement towards God, who is the true end of the pursuit of poverty.⁶⁰ Bonaventure has a similar understanding of this process. The cultivation of poverty is not good in and of itself; rather, it produces humility, which in turn conforms one's soul to Christ, the eternal exemplar and Word of the Father.⁶¹ In fact, the deeper one's poverty, or the more strictly one observes the practice of material poverty, the more profound one's humility and spiritual

⁵⁸ *Iḥyā'* 4:186 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

⁵⁹ As an example, see Bonaventure's account of St. Francis' encounter with Lady Poverty: Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, 581. Ch. VII, P. 6.

⁶⁰ *Iḥyā'* 4:198 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

⁶¹ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, Question I, pages 29-52.

connection to Christ's example.⁶² Removing oneself from the everyday life of the world, and living in seclusion, helps remove the distractions of this world and opens up the possibility of becoming closer to the divine.

Perhaps most strikingly, we also find some correspondence between these two traditions in their appeals to Jesus as a religious authority on poverty. Although these similarities ultimately remain on the surface level, we must still identify them in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of how the theological traditions differ at deeper levels of reflection. Chapter five of this dissertation provides a detailed analysis of the Franciscan depiction of Christ's poverty at several levels, according to which he represents both a material, temporal exemplar and an divine, eternal exemplar for the practice and embodiment of poverty. Here we will briefly analyze al-Ghazali's depiction of Jesus in the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation* before comparing and contrasting it with the Franciscan understanding of Jesus' exemplarity in relation to poverty. In the end we see that we are presented with two different images of Jesus, each of which reflects the theological doctrines native to the religious tradition for which it is an authority.

Jesus in al-Ghazali's *Book of Poverty and Renunciation*

Al-Ghazali's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* "contains the largest number of sayings ascribed to Jesus in any Arabic Islamic text ... [they are] dense and rhythmic, constantly reappearing at the

⁶² Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter III, Paragraph 20, p. 86.

high points of Ghazali's moral argument."⁶³ Jesus appears many times in the second half of the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation*, the half devoted to renunciation (*zuhd*), but only four times in the first half on poverty; he appears once as a character in a story about a man who has renounced the world, and the other three times al-Ghazali quotes his teachings about poverty. An analysis of Jesus' role in the thirty-fourth book of the *Ihyā'* demonstrates several things: al-Ghazali's use of a Muslim version of Jesus' life, primarily drawn from an "Islamized" version of the Gospel of Matthew and other Christian narratives;⁶⁴ Jesus' fundamentally physical rejection of wealth; and Jesus' status as the representative of renunciation, one of the highest levels of poverty for al-Ghazali.

Two of the quotations attributed to Jesus appear fairly close to one another in al-Ghazali's text, within a section entitled "On the excellence of poverty in general." Among a number of other prophetic utterances attributed primarily to the Prophet Muhammad, Jesus states, "The rich man enters paradise with great difficulty."⁶⁵ Later in the same section Jesus states, "Truly I love poverty and hate prosperity."⁶⁶ Besides their general indication of Jesus' preference for poverty, these two statements also bring to mind the Gospel of Matthew, which

⁶³ Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*, 42.

⁶⁴ Khalidi notes in the extensive introduction to *The Muslim Jesus* that Matthew seems to have undergone some process of "Islamization" before al-Ghazali's time, although the details of this process, and those who contributed to it most heavily, are still relatively unknown. Fr. Sidney Griffith has also recently pointed out the lack of interest by biblical scholars in studying the Arabic versions of the gospels, a trend that has only recently begun to reverse. See Sidney Griffith, "When Did the Bible Become Arabic?" *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 1 (2013): 7-23.

⁶⁵ *Ihyā'* 4:191 (XXXIV, *shatr* 1, *bayān* 2).

⁶⁶ *Ihyā'* 4:191 (XXXIV, *shatr* 1, *bayān* 2).

seems to have been in wide use by Muslim scholars of al-Ghazali's time and earlier.⁶⁷ The former quote clearly echoes Matthew 19:23, in which Jesus utters almost these exact words, with the exception that al-Ghazali uses the Arabic word *jannah* (garden) for paradise while Matthew refers to the Kingdom of heaven. The latter quote does not mirror the gospel so closely, but it does bring to mind Matthew 6:24, in which Jesus reminds his listeners that they cannot have two masters: "You cannot serve God and mammon."

The third quotation of Jesus that appears in the half of the book devoted to poverty comes in a section titled "The excellence of poverty over wealth," in which Jesus states, "Don't look at the riches of the people of this world for the luster of their riches will take away the light of your faith."⁶⁸ Unlike the others, this quotation does not seem to correspond to any gospel text, but here again we find Jesus indicating his distaste for material wealth. Al-Ghazali also begins to connect Jesus' exemplarity concerning poverty to the rejection of the world characterized by renunciation. This particular quote uses external, sensible imagery to convey a message al-Ghazali will later emphasize through a discussion of the rejection of the world, of which Jesus represents the best human model for behavior. It also indicates the temptation inherent to material wealth, as well as the potential wealth has to diminish one's faith.

The fourth appearance of Jesus in the first half of Book XXXIV does not provide a quotation but relates an account of his encounter with another person. This story resembles the accounts found in the second half of the book, which deals with renunciation. In this particular

⁶⁷ Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*, 33.

⁶⁸ *Iḥyā'* 4; 198 (XXXIV, *sh.* 1, *b.* 4, *m.* 1).

instance, Jesus comes across a sleeping man, wakes him, and tells him to remember God. The man then declares to Jesus that he has left the world to its people, to which Jesus replies that the man should return to what he was doing.⁶⁹ Rather than promoting a belief regarding wealth, Jesus condones the actions of this man, who, having rejected this world, merely waits for the next life; ready to teach, Jesus discovers this man has already learned his lesson and leaves him alone. He does not implore him to rise and pray, nor to go about in the world for any reason; he merely allows him to return to his satisfied detachment from all material goods.

Whereas in these accounts Jesus speaks about the benefits of poverty and renunciation, later in the chapter al-Ghazali depicts him as embodying these concepts through his actions. There are too many to recount in full here, but the following excerpt from the *Iḥyā'* is indicative of how al-Ghazali presents Jesus in the latter half of the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation*:

The renunciation of the furniture of the household also has degrees. The highest of them is the condition of Jesus *al-Masih* (PBUH). He used to keep only a comb and a clay pot, but he saw a man combing his beard with his fingers and he threw away the comb. Then he saw another man drinking from the river with his hands and he threw away the clay pot.⁷⁰

Al-Ghazali goes on to say that Jesus here exemplifies the fundamental principle of renunciation of the world; he is willing to part with anything that is not necessary for survival, which in the end means that he owns nothing. Just as in this section on household items, so in the other

⁶⁹ *Iḥyā'* 4:191 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 2).

⁷⁰ *Iḥyā'* 4:233 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 4, *muhimm* 5). Al-Ghazali consistently refers to Jesus as *al-masih* throughout Book XXXIV of the *Iḥyā'*. I have chosen to transliterate rather than translate this term; the most obvious English alternatives would be 'messiah' and 'Christ,' both of which carry powerful theological connotations not to be worked out in this limited space. It is enough to know *al-masīh* is an honorific used by al-Ghazali to distinguish Jesus from other, lesser prophets of Islam.

sections al-Ghazali names Jesus as the most exemplary human being in terms of renunciation. In fact, near the conclusion of the chapter al-Ghazali states, “the last limit is to reject everything except God, until you do not even take a stone as a pillow, as *al-Masīh* did not.”⁷¹ The pursuit of poverty and the renunciation of the world ultimately lead to the total reliance on God, and Jesus embodies the most pertinent human exemplar of this.

Therefore, in his *Iḥyā’* al-Ghazali depicts Jesus as the consummate ascetic, a prophetic exemplar in word and deed. In Book XXXIV of the *Iḥyā’*, Christ is the ultimate practitioner of poverty and renunciation, happily leaving behind any aspect of this world and turning his gaze towards God. Even when the devil criticizes him for using the basest of things in this world, a rock for a pillow, Christ unhesitatingly gives it up for the sake of following God.⁷² Christ is the embodiment of both the self-sacrifice that is representative of *zuhd* and the devotion to God required to live a day-to-day existence completely reliant on God’s providence and sustenance.⁷³

This resembles the self-sacrifice Christ made according to the Christian tradition, both in his incarnation and his crucifixion. During the thirteenth century, much of the controversy surrounding poverty centered on the Franciscan assertion that Christ was not only materially poor but also representative of the poverty of spirit to which he called his followers during the Sermon on the Mount. According to Bonaventure and his Franciscan brethren, Christ humbled

⁷¹ *Iḥyā’* 4:237 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 5).

⁷² *Iḥyā’* 4:223 (*kitāb* XXXIV, *shaṭr* 2, *bayān* 3, *faṣl* 3).

⁷³ Further reinforced by the subsequent book of the *Iḥyā’*, the *Book of Divine Unity and God-reliance: Iḥyā’* 4:238-85 (*kitāb* XXXV).

himself to participate in the human poverty of existence, and then sacrificed himself to experience and conquer death, the ultimate act of humiliation and expression of poverty.⁷⁴

Even the most cursory reading of these similarities, however, reveals a glaring truth: that although there are functional and superficial correspondences on poverty between this Islamic tradition and this Christian tradition, any attempt to delve more deeply into the comparison quickly sees them move apart. Beyond the very basic recognition that both al-Ghazali and Bonaventure utilize poverty in their respective spiritual traditions, that they consider it voluntary, foundational, and instrumental to other spiritual states, our comparison does not yield much in the way of positive correlations between them. This results primarily from their reliance upon different sources of Jesus' life and works, which convey competing images of Jesus in accordance with the theological traditions in which they originate.

Muslim Jesus, Christian Christ: the Fundamental Theological Difference of Exemplarity

The fact that al-Ghazali and Bonaventure disagree about the nature of Jesus, whether he is fully human or also divine, is not surprising. They lived, thought, and practiced in the hearts of two religious traditions for which this issue has always been a source of dispute. And yet, both al-Ghazali and Bonaventure appeal to Jesus as an authoritative voice on the perfect practice and embodiment of poverty and renunciation. Although this is a move we expect Bonaventure to make, since Christ serves as the authority on every virtue in Christian thought, he does so more

⁷⁴ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter XXII, paragraph 28, p. 351-2. Bonaventure here makes reference to 2Cor. 8:9.

powerfully than perhaps anyone in the history of Catholic thought, becoming the representative voice of the Franciscans on poverty. Al-Ghazali's reliance on Jesus as exemplar for the practice of poverty is slightly more surprising, although understandable considering the importance of Jesus in the history of Islamic thought.⁷⁵ The forms of exemplarity to which each of these thinkers appeals, however, differ greatly, as Christ plays vastly different roles in the theological systems of Islam and Christianity generally, and in the thought of Bonaventure and al-Ghazali in particular.

In the previous chapter, we have already discussed the meaning of Christ's exemplarity to Bonaventure, according to whom Christ serves as both temporal and eternal exemplar for human beings. His approach reflects not only a belief in the poverty of Christ's life with the disciples but also the Christian beliefs in Christ as eternal Word, as incarnate Son of God, and as Crucified Lord; each of these identities, highly interrelated but separated here for analytical purposes, has a specific relationship to poverty, as well as a specific use in the theological interpretation of poverty advanced by Bonaventure. Just as Bonaventure draws upon his Christian tradition in developing his thought about Christ, al-Ghazali builds his own image of Jesus out of a uniquely Islamic picture of his life and teachings as a prophet. Al-Ghazali, relying on this 'Muslim Gospel,' as it has been termed by Tarif Khalidi, rejects Jesus' eternity, would see the idea of

⁷⁵ As a prophet, Jesus features prominently in various traditions of Islamic theology and spirituality. See Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

incarnation as an affront to God's unity, and would consider the crucifixion abhorrent, even for the fully human Jesus of Islam.⁷⁶

First, Bonaventure's beliefs about Christ reflect his belief in the Trinitarian nature of God.⁷⁷ This fundamental Christian belief about God shapes all Christian thinkers, and it is especially present in Bonaventure's writings, where a reader finds nearly every section or subject divided into groups of threes. Christ is the eternal Word of the Father, who, "as the uncreated Word is the intellectual mirror and eternal exemplar of the entire worldly structure."⁷⁸ While the Father is the creator of the world, creation takes place through the Word, who serves as the eternal model or exemplar for creation. Creation is a pale reflection of the reality and goodness of the Word, to the extent that the original human beings had the ability to recognize God in what Bonaventure calls the "Book of Nature."⁷⁹ This eternal exemplarity of the Word and the Trinity stands in stark contrast to the poverty of existence inherent to the created order, and to human beings. While God possesses ontological fullness, self-subsistence, and necessary being, humanity's existence is one of contingency, impermanence, and emptiness of spirit.⁸⁰

As long as human beings viewed the created world as a mere sign and reflection of the uncreated Word, and thus of God, they remained spiritually full, since their relationship with the

⁷⁶ Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*, 12. Khalidi discusses the Qur'anic "purification" of Christ, a reading of Christ's life with which al-Ghazali undoubtedly agreed.

⁷⁷ For more on this see Zachary Hayes, *The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Christology in St. Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute of Saint Bonaventure University, 1992).

⁷⁸ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter II, Paragraph 12, p. 61-2.

⁷⁹ Saint Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, Part II, Chapter XI, Paragraph 2, p. 94.

⁸⁰ Other scholars have recently made the same observation: Hughes, "Bonaventure's Defense of Mendicancy," 539.

divine was uninterrupted and complete. They failed to maintain such a perspective on the world due to their shifting understanding of creation, from an impoverished reflection of the divine to a good thing they wished to possess for its own end.⁸¹ Therefore, according to Bonaventure, the pursuit of possessions, of material wealth, destroyed the spiritual wealth bestowed on human beings by God. This resulted in the presence of sin, a new kind of spiritual poverty characterized by a separation from God's presence, which required further action from God, who wished to save human beings from their own blindness.

According to Christian thought, this meant the incarnation of God as Jesus of Nazareth, in whose life and death Christians find an exemplar for their own behaviors and attitudes. The act of incarnation, willingly accepted by the eternal Word of the Father, is another location of the spiritual exemplarity of the poverty of Christ. His willingness to accept the limited form of a human being, to participate in the poverty of existence inherent only to created beings, demonstrates a model of the willing pursuit of poverty to which human beings should aspire. The incarnation involves an inimitable form of condescension, from eternal to temporal, extending beyond the capacity of human beings.⁸²

Finally, Christ's entire life on earth was lived in poverty, as Bonaventure was fond of noting. He was born to a poor mother, lived poorly among his disciples, and died poor and naked on the Cross. Although Bonaventure and the Franciscans consistently point to Christ's material poverty as an example for all Christians, it is the final event of the crucifixion that represents the

⁸¹ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, Part III, Chapter III, Paragraph 2, p. 105.

⁸² For instance, see his *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, Question II, Article 1, section 4, number 2, p. 77-79; and his *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter I, p. 35-47.

ultimate exemplification of poverty, both materially and spiritually.⁸³ Christ died naked, as he was born, demonstrating his devotion to a life of material poverty; he also died crucified, suffering, as both man and God, exemplifying the full extent to which the Word, who had become incarnated, was willing to go to identify with the human experience.⁸⁴ Even more than the incarnation, the crucifixion, with its suffering and ultimate self-sacrifice, exemplifies the kind of poverty Bonaventure thinks should be sought by those aspiring to live a perfect Christian life.

In direct contrast with Bonaventure's work, however, al-Ghazali depicts Jesus in alignment with the Muslim understanding of him as *'Isa al-Masīh*, a human prophet, revered and imitated but having nothing to do with divinity in nature.⁸⁵ Al-Ghazali's use of Jesus as an exemplar for poverty diverges from Bonaventure's in nearly every possible way: he is not eternal; the incarnation is heretical; and God would never have crucified and humiliated one of his prophets. Al-Ghazali builds his thought about Jesus on the foundational Muslim belief in the unity of God (*tawhīd*), a notion that informs the entire structure and execution of his *Ihyā'*. Defined by *tawhīd*, God does not interact directly with creation; rather, God communicates with human beings through the mediation of angels (specifically Gabriel) and prophets and messengers, human beings he has sent throughout history to guide his people. Jesus is one among these many prophets, a messenger carrying the truth of Islam to the people of his time and place.

⁸³ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, Question I, section 2, number 21, p. 36.

⁸⁴ Franco Mormando, "Nudus Nudum Christum Sequi": The Franciscans and Differing Interpretations of Male Nakedness in Fifteenth-Century Italy," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 33 (January 2008): 171-97.

⁸⁵ Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*, 34.

Therefore, the Jesus we find in al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'*, and especially in the *Book of Poverty and Renunciation*, serves primarily as an exemplar for poverty in a human mode. He is neither eternal nor divine; and although his exemplarity may be considered both bodily and spiritual, it does not resemble the way in which Bonaventure depicts Christ as a spiritual model of poverty. Bonaventure points out and utilizes the material poverty of Christ's life on earth, but he emphasizes much more greatly the implications of the incarnation and the crucifixion to understanding poverty theologically. Al-Ghazali appeals to the authority of Jesus in a very different way, focusing primarily on his behavior and attitude toward poverty in this world, and what these aspects of Jesus' example tell us about the appropriate human behavior towards material poverty. He establishes a connection between the material and the spiritual, as we have discussed in previous chapters, but Jesus' exemplarity consists principally in the bodily practice of poverty and renunciation.

Al-Ghazali's portrayal of Jesus in relation to poverty deviates from that of Bonaventure's in important ways. Although al-Ghazali clearly used some version of the Gospel of Matthew, by his time it had already been purged of its Christian theological elements and transformed into a Muslim source text. In fact, "there is hardly any trace in the Muslim gospel" of the Passion narrative, perhaps the most significant aspect of Christology, and certainly a part of Christ's experience that Bonaventure emphasized in his work on poverty.⁸⁶ Not only does Jesus' status as a messenger in al-Ghazali's thought eliminate the possibility of the incarnation, but also it

⁸⁶ Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*, 34.

precludes any reference to the crucifixion, a humiliation and suffering to which Muslims believe God would not have subjected his honored messenger *'Isa al-Masīh*.

These variant interpretations of Jesus' exemplarity in relation to poverty also impact other features of poverty for these two thinkers. Who they believe Jesus is affects how they believe Jesus functions in the lives of human beings. As a result, they characterize the individual human relationship to Jesus through poverty in different ways. Although for both Bonaventure and al-Ghazali poverty is instrumental to higher spiritual states, those states differ significantly according to their contrasting theological foundations. Furthermore, the ultimate end of the human pursuit of God through poverty also varies in relation to their confessional starting points.

The Perfection of Poverty and Theological Difference

One of the most vivid illustrations of the theological difference between al-Ghazali's work on poverty and that of the thirteenth-century Franciscans comes in the form of poverty's perfect states. We have already noted that each tradition believes poverty is instrumental to higher states, so that the perfection of poverty consists not in poverty itself but in other virtues or positive character traits. As with the other theological elements involved in this analysis, the qualities of these higher states differ in accordance with each tradition's theological position on Jesus. On the one hand, the Christ to which the Franciscans appeal represents not only the importance of poverty but also the higher Christian virtue of humility, which Bonaventure describes as the "foundation of all Christian perfection," and that in which "the summit of all evangelical perfection consists."⁸⁷ On the other hand, al-Ghazali describes the highest level of

⁸⁷ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, Q. I, Conclusion, p. 40, 44.

poverty as “such that having material wealth and lacking it are equal, so if one has it, one is not glad and does not detest it, and if one lacks it, it is just the same ... the adherent of this state should be called ‘the one without need’ (*mustaghni*).”⁸⁸

More than the states differ, however, as the traditions also provide human exemplars of these perfected forms of poverty. Bonaventure uses the *Major Legend of St. Francis* in part as a forum in which to show the importance of a life of poverty, its influence in developing the virtue of humility, and its power in helping the Christian conform to Christ. Al-Ghazali repeatedly uses a story about Muhammad’s wife ‘A’isha to illustrate his highest form of poverty, so that she and not Jesus represents the perfection of that particular positive character trait in his mystical ethics. These models for human behavior serve several purposes: first, they offer Muslims and Christians ideals to which they can aspire in their own behavior; second, they operate as illuminative examples of the ways in which these two men think differently not only about poverty but also about the nature of God and the methods by which human beings may establish relationships with God.

An analysis of their presentations of models for the perfection of poverty supports the recognition of difference about Jesus discussed above, but it also provides insight into their vastly different theological starting points and their divergence on the question of how human beings can achieve intimacy with God. For instance, al-Ghazali’s exposition on poverty reveals its role in a deeper mystical ethics characterized by the human participation in the divine name

⁸⁸ *Ihyā*’ 4; 186 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

al-Ghanī.⁸⁹ This occurs through an increased human identification with the detachment and self-subsistence inherent to God's nature, reflecting the Islamic theological belief in *tawhīd*. And Bonaventure's discussion of poverty demonstrates its function in the process of pursuing evangelical perfection, a state in which the Christian conforms perfectly to Christ.⁹⁰ The ways in which Bonaventure presents this process illustrate his own belief in Trinitarian theology of God, according to which Jesus is Christ, the second person of the Trinity and the Son of God. Therefore, when moving beyond poverty to its higher, more perfect states, we find further evidence of difference between Bonaventure and al-Ghazali in accordance with their respective theological traditions.

Humility and Evangelical Perfection, *mustaghni* and *al-Ghanī*

At every stage of Christ's exemplarity, Bonaventure reminds his readers that Christ models not only poverty but also humility for his followers. For instance, when he discusses the *kenosis* of the Incarnation, God's willing acceptance of the poverty inherent to created existence, Bonaventure states, "by assuming human nature he became humble among us while remaining in himself," meaning that the Incarnation is the first location and example not only of Christ's poverty but also of his humility.⁹¹ In reference to Christ's having lived in poverty for his entire life, Bonaventure persistently mentions Christ's having humbled himself before human beings,

⁸⁹ We have discussed this in depth in chapter two of this dissertation, p. 89-98.

⁹⁰ See our discussion of this in chapter five of this dissertation.

⁹¹ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter I, Paragraph 10, p. 46.

even condescending to the level of mortal sinners in some of his behaviors in order to establish an attainable model for them to follow, particularly in his use of money held in common with his disciples.⁹² Finally, since “the exemplar of perfect virtue is Christ on the cross where he was in the greatest abjection,” the crucifixion represents the most perfect manifestation of the humility of Christ.⁹³ Not only did Christ willingly give up his life, fulfilling his salvation of creation through the abandonment of his physical form, he did so naked and crucified, humiliated before those who witnessed his death.

Bonaventure and the Franciscans also turn toward a human exemplar of poverty and humility in order to demonstrate how other human beings might be poor. Christ’s divine example extends beyond the possible for human activity, so the founder of the Order of the Friars Minor, St. Francis of Assisi, represents the ideal human representative of both poverty and humility. Especially in the *Major Legend*, Bonaventure depicts St. Francis’ life as one of abject voluntary poverty, which he connects repeatedly to the virtue of humility.⁹⁴ Francis’ outward practice of poverty represents the perfect development of an interior humility, which contributes to his conformity with Christ’s example. His intimacy with Christ reached its pinnacle during a meditative experience he had on the mountain of La Verna, where he experienced a vision and his flesh was imprinted with the signs of the Passion.⁹⁵ The stigmata signifies his perfect

⁹² Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, Question II, Article 1, section 4, number 2, p. 77-9.

⁹³ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, Question I, section 2, number 21, p. 36.

⁹⁴ For example, when St. Francis encounters “Lady Poverty,” and he learns “to regard himself inferior to all.” Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, Chapter VII, Paragraph 6, p. 581.

⁹⁵ Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, Chapter XIII, Paragraph 3, p. 632.

embodiment of the poverty and humility of Christ, as well as his attainment to the “summit of Gospel perfection.”⁹⁶ Since human beings will never be able to approach the kind of poverty and humility demonstrated by Christ in the incarnation’s movement from eternity to the temporal world or in the crucifixion’s salvific significance, St. Francis serves as a human model for the proper behavior and attitude of Christians in relation to poverty.

Unlike the thirteenth-century Franciscans and their detractors, al-Ghazali relies solely upon human beings as exemplars for his highest states of poverty. This includes Jesus, since al-Ghazali was part of a theological tradition that rejected both the incarnation of God in human form and the crucifixion of Jesus. Even in terms of the perfection of material poverty in this world, al-Ghazali asserts that it was not Jesus but ‘A’isha, one of the Prophet Muhammad’s wives, who most perfectly embodied the highest state of poverty, called *mustaghni*.⁹⁷ While Jesus represents the perfect model for renunciation of wealth and the world, ‘A’isha exceeds this state to perfect the indifference towards wealth which characterizes *mustaghni*. In a story he relates several times, ‘A’isha demonstrates her embodiment of this state by receiving and promptly giving away a vast sum of money, even forgetting to keep any for the purpose of feeding herself and her family. Most telling of all, when reminded of her omission, she states, “If you had told me, I would have kept it,” indicating her total lack of attachment to wealth, whether it is much or little.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, Chapter XIII, Paragraph 10, p. 639.

⁹⁷ *Iḥyā’* 4; 187 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

⁹⁸ *Iḥyā’* 4; 187 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 1).

Al-Ghazali prizes this kind of detachment from the world and its wealth, as opposed to an active hatred and rejection of them. Jesus' manifestation of poverty as renunciation (*zuhd*) consists in the material and bodily denial of things as well as the soul's loathing of the material world, both of which one should imitate as part of the spiritual process of accepting and pursuing poverty. Once one has reached a certain level of spiritual development, however, al-Ghazali warns against even this hatred of the world, as it can itself become a form of distraction with the world opposed to a complete captivation with God. 'A'isha's relationship to wealth runs more deeply, as it entails a renunciation of not only the material world but also of one's attachment to it. She has rejected any form of occupation with the world, any form of distraction from her pursuit of God. 'A'isha's highest state of poverty demonstrates al-Ghazali's idea that the pursuit of asceticism confuses the instrument with the goal by emphasizing the importance of living in as poor a state as possible. In reality, al-Ghazali wishes to eliminate even this negative form of attachment to the world and to cultivate a kind of sacred indifference to wealth.

The detachment exhibited by 'A'isha in al-Ghazali's depiction of her reflects the transcendent nature of God expressed in the Islamic theological concept of *tawhīd*, a state of utter unity in which all difference or multiplicity dissolves. As we have discussed earlier in chapters two and three, those who achieve *mustaghni* participate in a version of this unity through the divine name *al-Ghanī* by embodying a detachment from the world that resembles *tawhīd*.⁹⁹ Jesus' guidance in poverty and renunciation provides the point of entry into this state by demonstrating how human beings should behave and feel towards material wealth and the

⁹⁹ See chapter three, p. 121-133.

created world more generally. But the advanced state *mustaghni* provides human beings an opportunity to transform the inherent, creaturely poverty of existence into a wealth of spirit only available to them through the reflection of God's knowledge in the mirrors of their hearts.¹⁰⁰

Al-Ghazali describes the content of the knowledge reflected in the heart as *'ilm al-mukāshafa*, a "light" cast into the breast as a result of one's reflection on the meaning of the Qur'an and one's imitation of Prophet Muhammad's worshipful acts, such as poverty and renunciation.¹⁰¹ The increase in this knowledge results in an increase in love and intimacy between the Muslim and God, leading to the experience of an epistemological state in which the human being sees the world as it truly is, as part of the unity of *tawhīd* rather than in its multiplicity.¹⁰² Thus, the path begun in poverty ultimately ends in the human reception of divine knowledge, mediated through one or more of the divine names, in this case *al-Ghanī*, and the love of and intimacy with God that results from the acquisition of such knowledge.

The end of poverty in Bonaventure's thought differs from this according to his belief in Christ as the second person of the Trinity. The pursuit of poverty and humility that characterizes his ideal method of following Christ's model leads ultimately to evangelical perfection, a state in which a person's soul is perfectly conformed to Christ.¹⁰³ St. Francis' reception of the stigmata represents such a perfection and reinforces the confluence on the cross of material and spiritual poverty, characterized by humility, both of which work together to enrich the soul with Christ's

¹⁰⁰ *Iḥyā'* 4; 200 (XXXIV, *shaṭr* 1, *bayān* 4, *maqām* 1).

¹⁰¹ *Iḥyā'* 1:11 (*kitāb* I, *introduction*, *bā'ith* 2).

¹⁰² See chapter three, p. 121-133.

¹⁰³ Hughes, "Bonaventure's Defense of Mendicancy," 515-19.

presence. People are called to follow Christ's example by impoverishing themselves as He did in the incarnation, moving away from a state of eternal wealth to participate in a state of existential poverty as a human being.¹⁰⁴

The relational nature of the Trinity is reflected in this movement by Christ directly into the created world; God's active participation in the material realm saves both humanity and creation as a whole. Human beings can work to correct their own existential poverty by imitating the poverty of Christ, so that the deeper one's material poverty, the deeper one's internal poverty, or humility.¹⁰⁵ The perfection of poverty leads to the perfection of humility, which produces such an intense relationship with Christ one's body potentially manifests the marks of Christ's deepest humility on the cross. Such an identification with the divine does not fully overcome the poverty inherent to created beings, as they will never be eternal in the way Christ is eternal, but it does lead to one's salvation through Christ and eternal life after death.¹⁰⁶

While both Bonaventure and al-Ghazali agree on poverty's instrumentality, they believe it leads to very different states; the nature of the difference between humility and *mustaghni* reinforces their theological separation concerning both Jesus and God. Bonaventure's pursuit of poverty is deeply informed by his belief in Trinitarian theology, including the incarnation and salvific crucifixion of Christ, all of which indicate a movement of God, and specifically the Word of God, into the created world in an effort to provide human beings with a model of

¹⁰⁴ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter XXII, paragraph 28, p. 351-2.

¹⁰⁵ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter III, Paragraph 20, p. 86.

¹⁰⁶ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter XXII, paragraph 28, p. 351-2.

poverty that is both spiritual and bodily. The deeper one's material poverty, the greater one's conformity with Christ's life, and ultimately the more complete one's humility and state of perfection. All of this indicates a life integrated into the world, as manifested in Christ's own dual nature, although standing apart from the temptations created through the possession of the world's material wealth.¹⁰⁷ If achieved fully, conformity to Christ literally becomes imprinted on one's body, as in the case of St Francis, demonstrating the intimate connection in Bonaventure's Christian thought between God and the world, as the intimacy achieved leads to a deeply transformative experience in the human soul and body.

In contrast, al-Ghazali's discussion of Jesus' poverty reflects his belief in *tawhīd*, the unity of God that also represents a divine transcendence in relation to the created world and its multiplicity. The perfection of poverty in this system is characterized by the consistent movement away from the world, as God never condescends to the human level, for this would encroach upon the unity inherent to God's nature. Although the divine attributes, in this case *al-Ghanī*, provide anthropomorphic modalities through which human beings can know God, even they are incomplete and reflective representations of God's complete essence; thus the state of *mustaghni* consists in a relationship to the world that resembles God's own absolute ontological self-subsistence and needlessness but does not approach that ontological state in reality. At best, human beings achieve an epistemological shift such that they may know the world as it really is,

¹⁰⁷ This is perhaps further reflected in both Francis' and Bonaventure's repeated insistence that the Friars Minor participate in manual labor to support themselves.

an experience many have confused with a true identification with God's being but which al-Ghazali is careful to note does not impact one's ontological state.

Therefore, al-Ghazali and Bonaventure articulate vastly different theologies of poverty, including the perfection of poverty through the transcendence of the human condition and the enrichment of the soul. In the end, to understand how each of these traditions defines and applies poverty to the spiritual quest is to investigate the theological foundations underlying each one. This perfection of poverty does not constitute the end of the human quest, however, as both Bonaventure and al-Ghazali move past poverty and its directly related states to an even higher one, the love of God experienced as a blissful encounter in the afterlife.

Poverty and the Eschatology of Love

The surface similarities have to this point given way to deeper disparities in relation to poverty's function in the process of spiritual purification; however, as we move towards poverty's end results in each tradition, we discover once more a profound congruence of ideas. In both al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā'* and the works of Bonaventure, poverty leads to a higher knowledge of God, which is both the result of and the catalyst for an intimacy both thinkers describe as a love of God rooted in the direct experience of the divine. Although al-Ghazali and Bonaventure characterize these concepts very differently, according to their beliefs in *tawḥīd* and Trinity, they end up using very similar language when referring to the actual human experience of seeing and loving God. A comparison of this language, found in the thirty-sixth book of al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā'* and the final chapters of Bonaventure's *Journey of the Soul to God*, reveals a theological similarity between the authors regarding the eschatology of the individual human life.

A full assessment of al-Ghazali's theology of poverty has led us to conclude that it is merely the first step in a person's turning away from the world and towards God. Just as repentance (*tawba*) constitutes the decision to turn away from sinful behavior and to follow the path set forward in God's revelation, poverty marks the choice to turn completely away from the things of this world and to pursue God alone. This second pivot is more dramatic and more difficult; more people are capable of living righteous yet worldly lives than of renouncing all belongings and attachment to the created world. Therefore it is poverty that marks the beginning of the journey that ultimately ends in the love of God (*maḥabba*) in the fourth quarter of al-Ghazali's *Ihyā'*. This love is the natural end of one's pursuit of poverty, as severing one's ties to wealth and this world frees one to acquire knowledge of God, which produces love of God and eventually transforms into a direct witnessing (*mushāhada*) of God and what al-Ghazali describes as felicity (*sa'āda*) in the hereafter.

Al-Ghazali discusses the love of God in the thirty-sixth book of the *Ihyā'*, *The Book of Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment*. There, he states, "Love of God is the utmost goal among the stages and the supreme summit of the steps. There is no stage beyond the grasp of love that is not one of its fruits and one of its consequences ... nor is there prior to love any stage that is not preparatory to it."¹⁰⁸ Al-Ghazali then delineates five reasons for human beings to love other things before declaring, "God alone merits love."¹⁰⁹ He means that if love is perfected in

¹⁰⁸ *Ihyā'* 4:286 (*kitāb XXXVI*). Al-Ghazali discusses *maḥabba* (love), along with its related states, in *Ihyā'* 4: 286-349 (*XXXVI*), *kitāb al-maḥabba wa al-shawq wa al-uns wa al-riḍā'*. I have also consulted and at many times relied upon the translation by Eric Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment: Book XXXVI of the Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn)* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2012), 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Ihyā'* 4:292 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 2, aṣl 4, sabab 5*). Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 22.

those beings or things which contain perfection themselves, then one ultimately realizes only God perfects all things, so only God is worthy of being loved. Human beings come to love God through a faculty to which al-Ghazali assigns many names: “In the heart too there is an instinct that may be called the ‘divine light’ (*al-nūr al-ilahī*) ... This may be called ‘intellect’ (*‘aql*) as well as ‘inner vision’ (*al-baṣīra al-bāṭina*) and ‘the light of faith and certitude’ (*nūr al-imān wa’l-yaqīn*).”¹¹⁰

Finally naming it Intellect, al-Ghazali characterizes this faculty as that through which “man apprehends knowledge of God; hence, it is the most resplendent of traits.”¹¹¹ He continues, “By its very nature the intellect demands knowledge; knowledge is its pleasure, just as the other faculties demand their particular pleasures.”¹¹² Later he asserts, “Clearly, then, knowledge is pleasurable and the most pleasurable knowledge is the knowledge of God ... Moreover, the pleasure of knowledge is stronger than other pleasures; stronger, that is, than the pleasures of appetite, anger, or the rest of the five senses.”¹¹³ The acquisition of knowledge, and especially the knowledge of God, is the greatest pleasure for the properly ordered human Intellect, and the process of purification described throughout al-Ghazali’s mystical ethics is ultimately in service of this goal.

In fact, some people who attain to the direct knowledge of God in this life are also blessed with an ecstatic experience:

¹¹⁰ *Iḥyā’* 4:299 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 4*). Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 42-3.

¹¹¹ *Iḥyā’* 4:299 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 4*). Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 43.

¹¹² *Iḥyā’* 4:299 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 4*). Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 44.

¹¹³ *Iḥyā’* 4:300 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 4*). Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 46.

The sole and ultimate object of all gnostics is to arrive at an encounter with God, for it is the delight of their hearts since *no soul knows what delights have been stored up for them* (Q 32:17). When these delights appear, cares will be wiped away together with all desires; the mind will be immersed so utterly in felicity that were the blessed to be cast into fire, they would not feel it in their ecstasy. Were all the pleasures of this world to be spread out for them at that moment, they would not spare them a glance because they possess consummate bliss and that utmost joy which is limitless.¹¹⁴

These people are so caught up in their experience of God that they would not even spare a glance to the world. This vision of God resembles what al-Ghazali discusses in the thirty-fifth book of the *Ihyā'*, in which he describes four different levels of experiencing *tawḥīd*. As we mentioned in the third chapter of this dissertation, the fourth and final level of *tawḥīd* involves a unification so complete that a human being who arrives at it sees the world as it truly is, as God sees it from within his state of utter unity.¹¹⁵ Just as that state is fleeting when one experiences it in this life, so is the experience of the kind of love described by al-Ghazali in the *Book of Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment*.

As ephemeral as it may be, the love of God achieved in this life corresponds directly to the degree of intimacy one will enjoy in the hereafter. After death, and after the cleansing and purification of the soul, and after “what has been foreordained has reached its term and when all that Revelation has promised ... has been brought to conclusion ... God (Great and Glorious is He!) will manifest Himself within him to such an extent that the revelation of his Self-manifestation will stand in relation to what he now knows like the clarity which a mirror reveals

¹¹⁴ *Ihyā'* 4:303 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 4*). Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 54.

¹¹⁵ *Ihyā'* 4:238 (*kitāb XXXV, shaṭr 1, bayān 1*).

in comparison to the merely imagined.”¹¹⁶ The clarity of vision is not one of physical sight but of the human Intellect, so that “there is no difference between direct seeing in the next world and that which can be known here, except in a magnification of disclosure and lucidity.”¹¹⁷ For that reason, “only those who are gnostics in *this* world will succeed in attaining the level of contemplative vision; for knowledge is the light which in the next world will be converted to direct apprehension.”¹¹⁸

Therefore, the pursuit of knowledge of God in this world leads directly to a vision of God in the hereafter, which itself ultimately produces a bliss described by al-Ghazali as felicity (*sa’āda*). He sums it up nicely when he writes, “Since the bliss of paradise lies in proportion to one’s love of God, and the love of God is in proportion to one’s knowledge of Him, the very basis of all felicity, therefore, is that knowledge which Revelation enunciates as belief.”¹¹⁹ He lays out a clear chain of progression from belief in Revelation, to knowledge of God, to felicity itself in the hereafter. That chain could then, for the purposes of this dissertation, be extended even further back; the knowledge to which he refers as belief reflects itself in the soul only if one effectively and actively polishes the mirror of the heart. And that polishing only begins to reflect any knowledge of God once one has decided to turn away from one’s knowledge of this world, which must necessarily be preceded by a rejection of material wealth. Thus, poverty becomes the

¹¹⁶ *Iḥyā’* 4:303-4 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 5*). Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 58-9.

¹¹⁷ *Iḥyā’* 4:304 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 5*). Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 59.

¹¹⁸ *Iḥyā’* 4:304 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 5*). Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 60.

¹¹⁹ *Iḥyā’* 4:305 (*kitāb XXXVI, bayān 5*). Ormsby, *Al-Ghazali on Love*, 61.

point at which one embarks upon a spiritual path which ends in the hereafter with the experience of a blissful intimacy with God.

Although he does so in very different theological terms, Bonaventure describes the end result of poverty in terms very similar to those used by al-Ghazali. In his *Defense of the Mendicants* Bonaventure discusses the relationship between poverty and the love of God, while in his *Journey of the Mind to God* he lays out a spiritual itinerary that ends in a direct experience of God. According to this sequence, poverty serves as the tool by which one achieves humility, which conforms one to Christ in evangelical perfection. Bonaventure characterizes this perfection of the soul at its highest level as the contemplation of God in his Unity and his Trinity, and finally as a rest of the human soul in its direct experience of God. This eschatological approach to poverty ends in a rest in God's presence resembling what al-Ghazali characterizes as felicity in his *Ihyā'*.

As we have already discussed, poverty and humility are first modeled by Christ in the Incarnation, such that "no one ascended to perform such deeds of power out of so great a love as Christ did when he descended to perform such deeds of weakness."¹²⁰ God's motivation in sending his Son to earth in order to live as a human being demonstrates his unending *caritas*, or charitable love for the world. Christ further demonstrated such a profound love in his acceptance of the crucifixion, giving his life for the salvation of human beings, as a means to providing an avenue by which to restore the perfection of creation. Human beings are expected to reciprocate this *caritas* in our own acceptance of poverty and humility as part of a pursuit of evangelical

¹²⁰ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter I, Paragraph 11; 47.

perfection. Therefore, Bonaventure writes, "...the root, form, purpose, fulfillment and 'bond of perfection' is love," so that it is only from love of Christ that human beings may achieve evangelical perfection.¹²¹ Just as Christ died for humanity, "...to desire to die for Christ, to expose oneself to death for the sake of Christ, and to rejoice in the agony of death are acts of perfect love."¹²² To accept and even pursue martyrdom, to rejoice in the giving of one's life for the sake of Christ, these are the ultimate forms of poverty and humility one could embody.

Love is not only the root of evangelical perfection for Bonaventure, but it is also the beginning of the entire movement towards God, as seen in his expression of that process in his *Journey of the Mind to God*. In this brief text, Bonaventure lays out "six progressive illuminations by which the soul is disposed, as by certain grades or steps, to pass over to peace through the ecstatic transports of Christian wisdom. The road to this peace is through nothing else than a most ardent love of the Crucified ... This love so absorbed the soul of Francis when he bore the most holy marks of the Passion in his body."¹²³ Furthermore, as one moves through these progressive illuminations, the love of Christ remains the key component in one's success: "Filled with all these intellectual lights, our mind like the house of God is inhabited by Divine Wisdom ... All this is accomplished by the most sincere love of Christ ... without Whom we cannot know the mysteries of God."¹²⁴ These six illuminations consist in the contemplation of

¹²¹ Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter III, Paragraph 2; 69.

¹²² Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, Chapter IV, Paragraph 3; 98.

¹²³ Bonaventure's *Journey of the Mind to God*, translated by Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M., Edited, with Introduction and Notes, by Stephen F. Brown. Hackett: Indianapolis, 1993, 1-2; Prologue, Paragraph 3.

¹²⁴ Bonaventure, *Journey of the Mind to God*, 26; Chapter 4, Paragraph 8.

God through various lenses: his vestiges in the universe, his vestiges in the visible world, his image imprinted on our natural powers, his image reformed through the gifts of grace, the consideration of unity through the divine name Being, and the consideration of Trinity in its name Good.

These final two stages in the process are most pertinent to our comparison with al-Ghazali's works, as they resemble his depiction in the *Ihyā'* of the levels of *tawhīd*. According to Bonaventure's fifth level of contemplation, one "fixes the soul's gaze primarily and principally on Being Itself, declaring that the first name of God is *He Who is*."¹²⁵ The sixth level of contemplation relates to "the plurality of the Divine Persons," which means a recognition of the fundamental paradox inherent to the Trinity, something with which the rational mind of the human being can never come to terms.¹²⁶ The contemplation and understanding of these concepts about God are themselves perfect, and "now nothing further remains but the day of rest on which through transports of mind the penetrating power of the human mind *rests from all the work that it has done*."¹²⁷ These fifth and sixth levels represent different aspects of God in Bonaventure's thought; the first depicts God's utter unity in Being as the highest, most eternal, simplest form of being, while the second concerns God's goodness, which for Bonaventure exceeds God's being, as it is goodness that leads to the emanation of being into the Trinity and subsequently into creation.

¹²⁵ Bonaventure, *Journey of the Mind to God*, 28; Chapter 5, Paragraph 2.

¹²⁶ Bonaventure, *Journey of the Mind to God*, 28; Chapter 5, Paragraph 2.

¹²⁷ Bonaventure, *Journey of the Mind to God*, 36; Chapter 6, Paragraph 7.

The final chapter of the *Journey of the Mind to God*, however, represents the point of silence at which human beings come to rest in God. Such rest involves the transcendence of the human Intellect beyond its own capacities, so that “in this transit, if one be perfect, it is proper that all intellectual activities be relinquished, and the whole apex of affection be transferred and transformed into God.”¹²⁸ In the end, Bonaventure turns to his predecessor Dionysius to express what he thinks about the final stage of the mind’s journey to God:

We can say with Dionysius: And you, my friend, in this matter of mystical visions, renew your journey, “abandon the senses, intellectual activities, and all visible and invisible things – everything that is not and everything that is – and, oblivious of yourself, let yourself be brought back, in so far as it is possible, to union with Him Who is above all essence and all knowledge. And transcending yourself and all things, ascend to the superessential gleam of the divine darkness by an incommensurable and absolute transport of a pure mind.”¹²⁹

Thus, the end of the journey is a silence of standing in wonder at God’s brilliance; it is a transcendence that can neither be understood by the Intellect nor expressed rationally. It is a kind of union that results from the love of Christ and emerges from the intimacy with God that results from the contemplation of God’s Goodness.

As we have found with other theological aspects of our comparison, here too al-Ghazali and Bonaventure discuss the end of poverty in an intimacy with God in terms of the theological frameworks in which they believed. This means that Bonaventure discusses the journey toward God in terms of loving Christ and contemplating the Trinity, while al-Ghazali passes through a discussion of *tawhīd* on the way to his treatment of loving God. Despite this foundational

¹²⁸ Bonaventure, *Journey of the Mind to God*, 38; Chapter 7, Paragraph 4.

¹²⁹ Bonaventure, *Journey of the Mind to God*, 39; Chapter 7, Paragraph 5.

theological difference, however, a comparison of their presentations of the ends of poverty in God's presence produces an enriching understanding of the other. Reading these two traditions of thought on poverty within an inter-religious dialogue not only provides insight into how they differ but also deepens our understanding of their individual meanings.

Furthermore, we discover a formal similarity between their systems of thought concerning poverty: both al-Ghazali and Bonaventure, as representatives of specific theological traditions within broader religious complexes, conceive of the human life as a path towards God. Their contemplation of the eschatological meaning of human life results in the utilization of poverty as a primary catalyst in the commencement of the process of spiritual perfection. If we wish to say that each of these men contemplates the same God from different theological perspectives, then their vastly divergent theological horizons seem in this case to overlap somewhat in God himself. Poverty leads by very different paths to a direct experience of the divine that in some way reflects the peace and love of resting in reunion with one from whom we have been separated for a very long time. While the significant differences between these theological traditions should not be glossed over, neither should this meeting of those same theological horizons in God be ignored. Perhaps this is the ultimate meaning of mutual theological enrichment, that opposing starting points and conflicting doctrinal positions eventually meet in the presence of God, where all becomes resolved.

Conclusion

In both of the traditions analyzed in this chapter, the embodiment of poverty involves the pursuit of a closer identification with God through the perfection of the body and soul in

enduring poverty. Material poverty provides a method through which to embody not only the external attributes of Jesus, in both traditions, but also the humility of the incarnation in Bonaventure's thought and the self-subsistence of God represented by the divine name *al-Ghani* in al-Ghazali's. Both traditions emphasize the connection between one's external behaviors and one's internal states, and both place greater weight on the interior state. The different characterizations of the outcome of material poverty, whether through Christ or the divine name *al-Ghani*, ultimately express a similar internal state of conformity and intimacy with God. Thus the embodiment of poverty opens the pathway for human beings to transcend their poverty of existence. Recognizing this aspect of their nature forces human beings to confront their own impermanence and dependence upon God as the provider of gifts. This reminder is always necessary because human beings have become distracted by the wealth of the world, which entices them to the comforts attainable through the acquisition of such wealth.

The true importance of poverty for both Bonaventure and al-Ghazali, therefore, does not lay in its material form or practice, but in how that ascetic practice affects one's spiritual state by drawing one closer to God. Any comparison of their works must keep in mind their vastly different historical, institutional, textual, and theological backgrounds, especially in reference to their emergence from Christian and Muslim backgrounds, which have traditionally had trouble coming to terms on theological grounds about Christ. This does not change in the context of this comparison. Bringing al-Ghazali and Bonaventure into conversation, however, has given us deeper insights into al-Ghazali's understanding of poverty and its role in his mystical ethics. It has also hopefully provided a certain amount of mutual enrichment between two different yet at certain points analogous theological traditions within Islam and Christianity. This kind of

enrichment should be the goal of all comparative theology or inter-religious dialogue in general; Muslims and Christians will never agree on fine points of doctrine, but coming to terms with the beliefs of the other through conversation strengthens ties between disparate communities. Just as al-Ghazali's and Bonaventure's theological horizons seem to meet and overlap as they approach the direct contemplation of the human experience of God, so must Muslims and Christians in dialogue remain open to the possibility of such a meeting in the presence of the divine.

Conclusion

When understood as a theological ideal, a positive character trait to be cultivated by the pious believer, poverty functions as a significant stage in the spiritual ethical systems of two major theological traditions of the medieval era: the mystical ethics of al-Ghazali, elaborated upon in this dissertation, and the theological thinking about poverty among the Franciscans of thirteenth century Christendom. The role of poverty in the latter has been well documented, as it appears explicitly in many of the most prominent Franciscan writings of that time; understood in the theological manner in which this dissertation interprets it, poverty clearly influences St. Bonaventure's thought to a significant degree. The importance of poverty in the writings of al-Ghazali, however, has been treated less extensively, despite the prominent placement of *faqr* among the positive character traits of the *Ihyā*'s fourth quarter.

Al-Ghazali never chose to emphasize poverty to the extent the Franciscans did, for he selected other states of the heart to place at the center of his spiritual thought. He did, however, give poverty a pivotal position in his mystical ethics, in a way no other Islamic thinker before him had done. If for al-Ghazali repentance is the beginning of the journey away from sin, and love is the final destination for the seeker after God, then poverty is the fulcrum in this process. Poverty serves as the means to severing one's ties with the physical world, making it possible to ascend to tastes of the divine heights, if only for brief moments. This is reinforced in al-Ghazali's choice of *mustaghni* as the perfection of poverty; the one without need of this world has achieved material poverty, perhaps, but that is of little consequence in comparison with the spiritual wealth that results from his indifference of spirit toward the physical, material world.

Such a detachment echoes the Islamic theological doctrine of *tawhīd*, which proclaims God's utter transcendence and absolute unity. By moving away from this world and modeling one's heart after God's own transcendent essence, a Muslim in some small way manifests God's attribute of absolute Needlessness, *al-Ghanī*. Thus the pursuit and perfection of poverty represents a template for al-Ghazali's broader mystical ethics; one can embody not only the attribute *al-Ghanī* but also the other attributes, through the pursuit and cultivation of the other character traits discussed in the *Iḥyā'*. In fact, these attributes are not pursued independently of one another; rather, they become attainable as a group by an ascent through the various levels of the heart's clarity, until the divine light cast into the heart's mirror is reflected pristinely. In such a state, the human being is allowed glimpses of divine knowledge, so that he achieves a state of cognition that transcends rational thought. He sees only unity, only God, so that he knows the truth of reality in that moment, which, in this life, disappears in a flash. Without poverty, one cannot know God fully.

The understanding of poverty expressed in the Franciscan tradition also reflects a theological reality for those who articulated it most clearly. For both St. Francis and St. Bonaventure, poverty represents the gateway to intimacy with Christ; it is through one's identification with the suffering of poverty that the deeper elements of Christ's reality are opened to the Christian believer. In this theological system, material poverty serves as a symbol and a sign of both Christ's Incarnation, which represents his acceptance of a poverty of existence inherent to creation, and of Christ's Crucifixion, which represents his ultimate sacrifice on the humility of the Cross. External poverty means nothing without the accompanying internal

poverty that transforms the human being's body (through the stigmata) and soul (through the state of perfection), and leads to one's intimate experience of God.

While these two theological traditions' treatments of poverty differ dramatically in terms of their roots and doctrines, their bodies of work still hold within them the opportunity for mutual understanding and enrichment. Both traditions discuss poverty as instrumental to higher spiritual states; perhaps more significant, that to which poverty is instrumental looks similar in terms of the eschatology of the individual human being. The trajectory of each seeker involves moving from this world towards God, from an attachment to the material towards a detachment from it, from a love of wealth and the world towards a vision of God's face. Each human life is viewed in these two traditions as on a path to the direct encounter with God in the afterlife; each of them ends in the human soul gazing at the beauty of God's face. And while this and other superficial similarities between their theological approaches to poverty break down with any deeper inquiry, we can find ourselves speaking in common theological terms, if not on common theological ground, across two religious traditions.

Poverty opens this door of enrichment for us, but it does not have to be the only such spiritual concept to do so. Others, such as love and faith, have already been investigated, and many more could support further inter-religious comparison. The work of al-Ghazali offers a plethora of subjects with which a scholar could fill an entire career, even without entering into such comparative theological efforts. The relationship between poverty and the other character traits in the *Iḥyā*'s fourth quarter, for instance, would greatly enhance our understanding of poverty itself, perhaps revealing further depth to the theological comparison offered here. Further exploration into al-Ghazali's use of the divine attributes as mediators between God and human

beings would also help strengthen the role of poverty in al-Ghazali's overall mystical ethics. Better understanding al-Ghazali's work would also contribute to the comparative task by creating a richer body of literature from which to draw for reference.

Understood across religious and theological boundaries, poverty comes to be seen as a spiritual concept utilized in multiple contexts. Its adaptability does not mean it is understood in the same way in every tradition of which it is a part, nor does it mean that the broader religious traditions of Islam and Christianity contain only one interpretation of poverty. It provides one lens through which to view two vastly different theological currents within those broader religious traditions; they share a reference to the religious authority of Jesus, but they differ dramatically on how Jesus embodies that authority and how he enacts his own poverty. Despite all of this, we are able to come to a deeper knowledge about each of these traditions through a better understanding of poverty and its role in their spiritual processes of purification.

The ability to arrive at such a mutual understanding across religious boundaries points the way towards the implications this study may have on inter-religious dialogue in practice today. The person of Jesus, as has been seen in this dissertation, frequently functions as a wedge between Muslims and Christians in dialogue. When focusing on the doctrinal or theological understanding of who Jesus is in Christianity and Islam, it is difficult to find points on which dialogue partners may agree. While this form of dialogue can still contribute to inter-religious understanding, it can also serve to drive groups farther apart by emphasizing difference.

In contrast, this dissertation has worked to maintain the theological differences present between Muslim and Christian images of Jesus, while at the same time showing the similarities that emerge from Jesus's life and works. We see not only the superficial similarities concerning

poverty but also the deeper parallel of eschatological thinking in relation to loving and resting in God. The shared idea that poverty contributes to the human endeavor to achieve a direct experience with God shows forth from the comparison of the somewhat contradictory images of Jesus. This leads me to wonder what other kinds of spiritual virtues or character traits might be able to provide a similar avenue of mutual enrichment through dialogue, despite the doctrinal differences between the religious traditions.

Or, perhaps such comparisons need not be limited to hagiographical comparisons, but could instead be centered on thematic or conceptual topics. For instance, both Bonaventure and al-Ghazali concern themselves with evaluating the sciences, both religious and non-religious, and their proper arrangement. A comparison of al-Ghazali's reordering of the sciences in the *Ihyā* with Bonaventure's treatment of the sciences in his own works could yield an interesting understanding of each of these thinkers shifted their respective traditions in relation to these sciences.

While there are many elements of al-Ghazali's mystical ethics, and of the comparison to Bonaventure's works, which we cannot investigate here, poverty certainly emerges from this study as a foundational element of both of their theological systems. Hopefully poverty will gain its rightful place in the field of Islamic studies, as al-Ghazali is far from the only scholar to assert its importance in his mystical ethics. His specific interpretation of poverty was unique, but other works also include it among some of the most important spiritual states in the progression of the soul towards God. Therefore, we must continue to investigate the different representations and interpretations of poverty within Islamic thought in order to get a more complete picture of its role in the overall development of Islamic spirituality of the medieval period.

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