

International Islamic University
Islamabad-Pakistan
Faculty of Islamic Studies
Department of Comparative Religions



CRITICISM OF CHRISTIANITY:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AL-MADRASSAH
AL-NIZĀMIYYAH OF BAGHDAD AND THE
MODERN WEST
A STUDY OF AL-GHAZĀLĪ AND BULTMANN
AND THEIR METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

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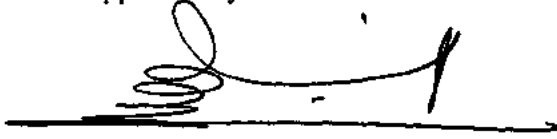
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in viva-voce examination held at the Department of Comparative Religion, Faculty of Islamic Studies (Usuluddin), International Islamic University Islamabad.

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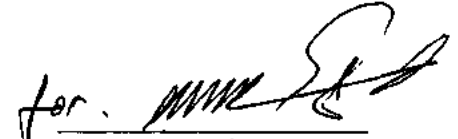
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To my parents
With
Love and gratitude

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ABSTRACT

نقد المسيحية بين المدرسة النظامية ببغداد والدراسات النقدية الغربية الحديثة: منهج التأويل بين الإمام الغزالي

وبولتمان

الحمد لله الذي علم بالقلم، علم الإنسان ما لم يعلم ، والصلاة والسلام على من أوتى فصل الحكم و جوامع الكلم وآله وصحبه وسلم ، أما بعد فإن النص الديني له أهمية خاصة في الأديان عامة وفي الأديان السماوية خاصة. ولكن مع تلك الأهمية هناك مشكلة أخرى تواجه أصحاب هذه الأديان وهي الشرح والتأويل الصحيح لهذا الخطاب وتزداد المشكلة إذا طال الزمن بين القارئ و النص كما هو الحال في المسيحية.

من الوسائل التي نحتاج في التأويل هي معرفة اللغة والظروف التاريخية والدينية والثقافية التي تظهر فيه النص. فوق ذلك هناك أمران مهمان، الأول علاقة النص بالقارئ في التأويل وبعبارة أخرى إن النص في الحقيقة يعتبر 'الوسط' بين واضع النص والقارئ، فهل يؤول النص من ناحية الواضع أو من ناحية القارئ لأنه سوف يختلف التأويل في كلتي الحالتين. والثاني أن اللغة الدينية إلى حد كبير لغة رمزية وهي أكبر معضلة في النص الديني. السؤال هنا هو من إي منظور تؤول الرموز، أمن خلال الإطار الديني أم خارجه؟ ثم هل ينبغي أن تكون ضوابط وأسس التأويل دينية أم لا. هذه بعض الوجوه المختلفة في التأويل وحسب هذه الاختلافات تختلف التأويل التي قد تؤدي إلى مفاهيم جديدة للنص. وبالطبع فإن السؤال وارد أي من التأويلات تختار من بين هذه التأويلات المختلفة إضافة إلى الأسئلة التي أوردناها آنفا.

للإجابة على هذه الأسئلة اخترت العلميين البارزين من الديانتين الإسلام والمسيحية ألا وهما الغزالي وبولتمان. نجد أن كلاهما اتخذ في تأويل إنجيل يوحنا تمحا يختلف إلى حد كبير عن الآخر. لقد أولى الإمام الغزالي والذي يمثل المدرسة النظامية ببغداد أهمية كبيرة لجانب اللغة ولكن مع ذلك التأويل عنده مبني على أسس دينية والنص الديني له قداسة ذاتية وبالتالي فإنه يؤول النص من ناحية الواضع، أما بولتمان والذي كان من اللاهوتيين البارزين من القرن العشرين و ينتمي إلى الكنيسة البروتستانتية فإنه كان يؤمن بأن الكتاب المقدس هو مثل سائر الكتب التاريخية، فلا قداسة له وينطبق عليه في التأويل كل ما ينطبق على كتب التاريخ عامة . ثم يؤول النص من ناحية القارئ وفي ضوء الفلسفة الوجودية.

أما تقسيم الرسالة فهي مقسمة إلى أربعة فصول، الفصل الأول متعلق بحياة الغزالي و بولتمان وظروفهما الثقافية والتاريخية ودراسة الأديان في المدرسة النظامية وفي العصور الحديثة.

أما الفصل الثاني فيتعلق بمفهوم وأسس التأويل عندها، والفصل الثالث فقد طبق فيه أسسهما علي إنجيل يوحنا. أخيرا فإن الفصل الأخير يتعلق بتقييم المناهج للتأويل ودور اللغة الرمزية في الكتب المقدسة لدى كلا من الغزالي وبولتمان. و أخيرا ذكرت نتائج البحث التي توصلت إليها. وأسأل الله رب العرش العظيم أن يجعل عملي هذا خالصا لوجهه الكريم وصلي الله تعالى علي نبينا محمد و علي آله وأصحابه وأتباعه إلي يوم الدين وبارك وسلم.

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spiritually. May Allah reward him and his family with the best in this world and in the Hereafter. Ameen.

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INTRODUCTION

Al-Madāris al-Nizāmiyyah was one of the prestigious chains of universities in the early Muslim era, which played a leading role in the field of education. Its significance and impact was not limited to the study of Islam, rather it made a remarkable contribution to the study of other religions as well. The study of other faiths was initiated by the Holy Qur'ān as it provided principles and methods with which to deal with and study other religions. In the light of these principles Muslim scholars explored other religions and developed various methodologies in this regard. These methodologies were noteworthy and outstanding in their times and are very much valid in the modern age. Historically, Christians were settled in the Arab land long before the emergence of Islam, they established their churches, monasteries and other religious and educational centers there. After the coming of Islam large number of them converted to Islam, still a big minority adhered to their old religion. Thus, their interaction with Muslims was more as compared to the people of other faiths. Moreover, Christians were intellectually active; among them were famous translators, philosophers and doctors therefore their influence in the society particularly among the elite was great. Consequently Muslims gave more attention to them as compared to other religions. As Christianity was considered a revealed religion, Muslim attention was diverted to its faith, the distortion brought in by Christians and the ambiguities prevalent there. In the light of the following verse the commonalties present in the two religions became the heart of discussion, which says:

“Say: People of the Book! Come now to a word common between us and you, that we serve none but God, and that we associate not aught with Him, and do not some of us take others as lords apart from God.” (3:64).

As faith on God is first such element therefore large number of books appeared with the title al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā where the main focus was on criticism on Christian faith. In these works trinity or divinity of Jesus was discussed and refuted. Another

important component for a revealed religion is its books so the second major area of study for Muslims was Christian scriptures. Here again the focus was on change and distortion which appeared in their books. Unlike faith, scriptural studies got less space and within it more attention was paid to the origin and authenticity of the books which in modern studies is known as historical critical studies of the Bible as compared to its meaning or interpretation.

Coming to al-Madrassah al-Nizāmiyyah, here apart from this general trend among Muslims, we also find unprecedented contribution in certain areas for example textual criticism by al-Juwaynī in *al-Shifā*, first encyclopedia on religions by al-Sharistānī and criticism on the divinity of Jesus through interpretation of text in *al-Radd al-Jamīl* by al-Ghazālī.

Coming to the modern west, traditional position of Christianity has been immensely shaken by the onslaughts of modern rationalism and scientific critical studies of Christianity. Christianity unlike other religions is based on certain historical events and in the modern age historical critical method was the sharpest tool which brought down Christianity to ground by strongly suggesting inaccuracy of these historical facts. Importance and place of Jesus Christ in Christianity cannot be ignored. In fact Christianity is established on the historical figure of Jesus which is a hotly debated issue in the modern studies. Faced with the shortage of available historical record modern scholars are finding it very hard to prove his historical status. Further, philosophies of Kant, Hegel, Humanism, and Deism to name only few gave a new shape and spirit to religious studies. Thus, in this situation religion generally and Christianity particularly were looked through different glasses where all unscientific elements were questioned. Therefore traditional Christianity with its dogmas and doctrines became outdated so they were either discarded as done by liberals or were given new meanings. Influenced by this state of affairs where Christianity was criticized from different sides Bultmann took the option of interpreting Christian faith as the old dogmas were unacceptable to the modern man.

Therefore interpretation of Bultmann or of al-Ghazālī has direct relevance with critical waves of their own times. Although assumptions, philosophy or meaning and methodology of 'criticism' and 'interpretation' differs widely in the traditional Muslim and the modern western worldviews but the point of convergence is that the Christian doctrines are irrational and contradictory therefore cannot be accepted by the sane mind. Al-Ghazālī and Bultmann both instead of simply eliminating dogmas opted for rereading the text in order to remove their irrationalities.

Importance of text or the scripture cannot be negated in revealed religion rather it is the foundation on which religion is established therefore its correct understanding is mandatory. It is the center around, which faith or worship or general religious understanding revolves. At the same time in Christianity there are many problems related to their religious text. The historical ambiguity related to its origin and early compilation has reduced the worth of the text. Besides, time difference of centuries has rendered these writings difficult to understand for the coming generations. The cultural, intellectual, contextual and linguistic environment in which the text emerged changed with the passage of time and a gap is present. To bridge this gap the text needs interpretation, to make it meaningful for the late generations. Further, it must be kept in mind that since the beginning it has been the primary task of theologians to interpret the sacred text and to make it meaningful for the believers, so there is a long history of 'interpretation' in Christianity.

In addition to the above it may be noted that interpretation does not take place in vacuum rather there are many factors which influence this process. From them are the principles and rules which determine the direction of interpretation, any variation in these rules can bring major change in the meaning of the text. Moreover, these principles themselves at times are religiously oriented i.e. theology or can have non-religious grounds like philosophy or social and cultural influences. Further, these principles also reflect the mindset or the worldview of a theologian and thus can manipulate interpretation. In other words every era has its own requirements and

priorities which work at the background and exert its influence on the interpretation. Due to these various factors interpretation of any text can be many dimensional and consequently it is impossible to avoid 'opinions' or 'views' for a single text. Here the question arises which interpretation is to be selected among the conflicting ones, or which one is to be preferred among the various interpretations. To put it in another way, the question of legitimacy of these factors arises, as already stated interpretation is bound with these factors so it must be discerned which one of them, religious or non-religious, are the correct ones to be taken into consideration. Does the interpretation of religious text always follow religious principles or it can accept non-religious principles as well and if so to what extent? Particularly the social and cultural influences in interpretation when taken in consideration might lead to endless readings so to what extent such principles are allowed to play their role. These are some of the issues which would be addressed in this thesis and how the underlying assumptions influence the text and lead to varying interpretations. As al-Ghazālī and Bultmann represent two paradigms so comparison of their interpretations would bring to light how the same text can give a different meaning altogether, one religious and the other philosophical. Al-Ghazālī being a theologian of al-Nizāmiyyah remained within religious circle whereas Bultmann a twentieth century German theologian was concerned with contemporary requirements and opted for the philosophical standards for interpretation.

As for the structure of the thesis it comprises of four chapters, the first is the introduction about life and the background of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann. Nature of scriptural studies in Muslim scholarship generally and the role of al-madrassah al-Nizāmiyyah particularly; similarly in the western world some of the modern religious trends with the status and interpretation of the Bible has been mentioned.

In the second chapter meaning of al-ta'wīl and demythologizing in the thought of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann have been respectively discussed. Further some of the major principles and the underlying assumptions in interpretation have been mentioned.

The third chapter is about the application of these principles on the Gospel of John. To make the comparison easy and meaningful some of the common principles have been selected for comparison; among them for instance are reason, language, theology and lastly mystical and philosophical aspects. And it has been shown how these aspects were understood differently by al-Ghazālī and Bultmann and as a result of that the meaning of the text i.e. the Gospel of John varied altogether.

In the last chapter the principles of interpretation as taken by al-Ghazālī and Bultmann are evaluated, particularly their relevance to the Gospel of John. Moreover, problematic nature of religious language and the credibility of tools used by al-Ghazālī and Bultmann in interpretation of John have been discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abundant works are present on al-Ghazālī and Bultmann in many languages, with a difference that discussion on interpretation is not extensive for al-Ghazālī as compared to Bultmann where the idea of interpretation stirred an on-going debate among western theologians. For al-Ghazālī plenty of studies are done on areas like mysticism, jurisprudence, theological and philosophical aspects, his refutations on philosophers or other deviated sects, educational and psychological teachings and so forth whereas in comparison to that his concept of al-ta'wīl has not occupied much space among scholars. In his own writings it is in *Ihyā'* where it is elaborated at length while mentioning its principles, status and authenticity, particularly in the portions of *Qawā'id al-'Itiqād* and *Ādāb al-Tilawāh*. To mention few other books we find its principles with implementation in *Mishkāt*, *al-Iljām*, *al-Qistās*, *Qānūn al-Ta'wīl* and *Jawābir*. Among the modern scholars Muḥammad Abū Qāsim translated *Jawābir* with an introduction on it, as *The Jewels of the Qur'ān* and his translation of *Ādāb* as *The Recitation and Interpretation of the Qur'ān*. Al-Ghazālī's crux in understanding and interpretation of the Qur'ān is mystical. For him to arrive at the correct understanding of the author it is important to know the hidden meanings present in it, or to dive deep

in the fathomless ocean to get the pearls. This theory is further expanded on by Abū Qāsim in an article “al-Ghazālī in Defence of Sufistic Interpretation of the Qur’ān”. Besides, interpretation in relation to the understanding and categorization of the text has been discussed by Frank Griffel in *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*. Referring to *al-Qistās* and *al-Iljām* Griffel elaborates that interpretation in al-Ghazālī’s thought is not imposed by the interpreter on the text rather it is the other way round. The text directs towards the literal or the metaphorical interpretation after its proper categorization. Coming to Martin Whittingham in his *Al-Ghazālī and the Qur’ān: One Book And Marry Meanings*, which is a detailed discussion of al-ta’wīl in al-Ghazālī’s thought. Whittingham selected *Fayṣal*, *al-Mustasfā*, *Ādāb*, *Jawāhir*, *Mishkāt*, *Qarwā’id*, *al-Qistās* from al-Ghazālī’s writings. He divided interpretation in these writings in the ‘activities of this world’, ‘the actives of the hereafter’, and its practical implementation is in *Jawāhir* and comparison with philosophical interpretation in *al-Qistās* and *Mishkāt*.

In all the above works interpretation in al-Ghazālī’s thought has been discussed in reference to the Holy Qur’ān, which is not directly relevant to our topic. But it does provide general understanding for the concept of al-ta’wīl. As the source of revelation whether it is the Holy Qur’ān or what was revealed to Jesus is one so there is some sort of similarity present in the religious text in these two religions which may help in interpretation. Thus the above mentioned works of al-Ghazālī are like an umbrella for the concept of al-ta’wīl in John.

Regarding works on Christianity by al-Ghazālī or by others, they are very few. General references to Christian or Jew scriptures are in the form of sayings of Jesus or other prophets in his various writings. Zwemer in his book *A Moslem Seeker After God* collected these sayings which are from canonical and non-canonical books and shows al-Ghazālī’s acquaintance with these books. Specifically al-Ghazālī wrote a small book *al-Radd al-Jamīl* on Christianity which mainly concerns us in this research. There is debate among scholars about the authenticity of this book, whether it is a genuine

work of al-Ghazālī or not. The book has been edited and brought to light by Rev. R. Chidiac and later by 'Abdul 'Azīz Ḥilmī who in a detailed introduction discussed the authenticity and nature of other studies on Christianity prior to al-Ghazālī. Although Ḥilmī highlights various aspects of al-Ghazālī's criticism on Christianity still it does not mention, except for brief insights, al-ta'wīl in reference to the Gospel of John. Therefore this thesis is a first humble attempt, as far as I know, about al-Ghazālī's interpretation for Christian books particularly the Gospel of John.

Coming to Bultmann, as already stated, many works are present on his demythologization, its principles, assumptions and criticism on it. These works can broadly be classified in translations, which form a bulk of work done on his thought. Bultmann mainly wrote in German language and many of them are translated in other languages particularly in English. Apart from translations, Bultmann's interpretation has been extremely criticized. *Kerygma and Myth A Theological Debate* is a collection of criticism and a reply from him. Similarly *Myth and Christianity an inquiry into the possibility of Religion without myth* by Karl Jaspers and Bultmann, and *Fact and Faith in the Kerygma of Today* by Paul Althaus, present various objections raised on Bultmann's interpretation. It has been claimed that there are structural drawbacks in demythologization, Bultmann is not consistent in his thought and there are paradoxes and contradictions present in it. Moreover, interpreting Christian dogmas and doctrines in existential terms means that their traditional meanings are negated and in its place new and modern connotations are being given which in fact are foreign to Christian faith. Besides that his whole programme is based on the idea of science versus myth where the former is true and later untrue, which has been objected and criticized. Apart from criticism Schubert M. Ogden in his book *Christ without Myth* and John Macquarrie in *The Scope of Demythologizing* expanded on the ideas of Bultmann in interpretation. As history, dogmas, language and philosophy are some of the important aspects of his interpretation therefore in these writings discussion revolves around them and their relation with demythologizing. All these works though they are about

interpretation, its philosophy and assumptions still none of them deals with comparison of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann in their methodology of interpretation in particular the Gospel of John.

METHODOLOGY

In the study of more than one personality method of comparison of their thoughts is best suited therefore for al-Ghazālī and Bultmann in this work comparative method is mainly followed. Moreover, comparison of ideas itself requires their clarification and analysis on the one hand and evaluation and criticism on the other to highlight similarities and differences present in their thought. Therefore it can be said that the comparative method is supported by analysis, elaboration and criticism to bring the opposites on the front. For this reason the three are taken together in this study with more emphasis on comparison. Further, it may be noted that al-Ghazālī and Bultmann represent two very different paradigms. Ignoring their contextual and other differences might lead to incorrect results in comparison thus an attempt has been made not to overlook them.

Besides, some of the preliminary clarifications may be mentioned; the term al-ta'wīl and demythologization has been rendered as 'interpretation' and the word literal is added to it whenever its opposite is meant. In dates it is the hijri calendar, as far as possible, for the Muslim side and the Gregorian calendar for the Christian dates has been followed. In case of both dates the hijri/Gregorian style is followed, and in case of hijri date only 'H' is affixed to denote that. Thirdly, in transliteration the pattern of Islamic Studies journal of 'Islamic Research Institute Islamabad' has been followed. Fourthly, the citations of the Holy Qur'ān are taken from A. J. Arberry's online English translation and of the Bible from The American Standard Version online.

CHAPTER ONE

AL-GHAZĀLĪ AND BULTMANN: LIFE AND BACKGROUND

LIFE OF AL-GHAZĀLĪ

To write about a famous personality is as hard as to explain a known fact and it becomes harder when in front is a towering figure, like al-Ghazālī a remarkable scholar whose expertise was not limited to one discipline. His encyclopedic knowledge is well expressed by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī (d. 1945) that majority of the scholars are famous in one discipline, for example Ibn Sīnā' (d. 428/1037) and al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) are known philosophers, al-Bukhārī (d. 256/), or Muslim (d. 261/) are renowned names in ḥadīth, and Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) is a famous Sufi. Whereas al-Ghazālī's expertise cannot be confined to one discipline; he was not one personality but an encyclopediac with an unmatched mastery in Sufism, theology, philosophy, jurisprudence,¹ and wrote extensively in all these fields.

He was Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad² Abū Ḥāmid³ al-Ghazālī⁴ al-Ṭūsī⁵, al-Shāfi'ī⁶, al-Ash'arī⁷, and was honoured with the titles of respect "Proof of Islam" and "Ornament of Din".

¹ See Aḥmad Farid al-Rifa'i, statement of Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī on al-Ghazālī in *al-Ghazālī* (Egypt: Maṭba'ah 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī n. d.), vol. 1, pp. 9-10.

² For details see his autobiography *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, there are numerous other biographical studies on him, from his contemporaries and the recent period. Taking chronologically, among the classical biographers was, 'Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārīsī who died in 529/1135. They were fellows in *al-Nizāmiyyah* and he got his information directly from al-Ghazālī. See *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li Tārīkh Nishāpur*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad 'Ābid 'Azīz (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1409/1989), pp.73-74; Abū Bakr b. al-'Arabī (d. 543/1143), *al-'Awāsim min al-Qawāsim* (Cairo: Maktabah Dār al-Turāth 1417/1997); Abū al-Qasim Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1176), *Tabayīn kadhīb al-Muṣṭarī fi mā Nusiba ila al-Imām Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī* (Damascus: Maṭba'ah al-Tawfiq, 1347 H.), pp. 291-306; Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), *al-Muntazim* (Hydarabād, Dakan: Maṭba'ah dā'irah al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyyah 1359 H.), vol.9, pp.168-170; Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), *Wafayāt al-A'yān* ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-dīn, (Cairo: Maṭba'ah al-Sa'ādah 1368 /1948), vol. 4, pp. 353-355; al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347), *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1410/1990), vol.19, pp. 322-346; al-Yāfi'ī (d. 768/1366), *Mir'āt al-Jinān wa Ibrah al-Yaqzān fi Ma'rifaḥ Ḥawādith al-Zamān* (Hydarābad, Dakkan: Maṭba'ah dā'irah al-Ma'ārif al-Nizāmiyyah, 1338 H.), vol.3, pp. 177-192. The most detailed one is by Tāj al-dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1369), *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. 'Abd al-Fattāh and Maḥmud Muḥammad (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīyyah, n. d.), vol.6, pp.191-389; Jamāl al-dīn al-tābakī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, 1935), vol.5, p.203; Muḥammad Bāqir, *Rawḍāt al-Jannāt* (Tahran: al-Maṭba'ah al-Hydariyyah, 1390 H.), vol.8, pp 3-20; Ṭāsh Kubrā Zādah (d. 962/1365), *Miftāḥ al-Sa'ādah wa Misbāḥ al-Siyādah* (Hydarābad Dakkan: Dā'irah al-Ma'ārif al-Nizāmiyyah, n. d.), vol. 2, pp. 190-211; Salāh al-dīn al-Ṣafīdī (d. 964/1367), *al-Wāfi bil Wafayāt* (Istanbul: Maṭba'ah al-dawlah 1931.H.), vol.1, pp. 274-277; Ibn al-'Imād (d.1089/1679), *Shadharāt al-Dhahab* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Qudsī, 1350 H.), vol.4, pp.10-13; Murtaḍā

He was born in Tūs in 450/1058; he and his brother were raised up as orphans by a Sufi friend of their father, a custodian appointed by their father on the deathbed with a request to educate them. To fulfill the wish they joined a madrassah and that opened for them the path of knowledge.³

(d. 1205/1790), *Ithāf al-Sādah al-Muttaqīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1409/1989), vol. 1, pp.8-7. From the prominent recent works are S. M. Zwemer, *A Moslem Seeker after God*: (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company 1920); W. M. Watt, *The Study of al-Gazālī Oriens* vol. 13 (1960-1961), pp. 121-131 and *Muslim Intellectual A Study of al-Ghazālī* (Edinburgh: University Press 1971); Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, (Oxford: University Press 2009); and Al-Ghazali in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; Richard Joseph McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Boston: G. K. Hall & co. 1980); Ehsan Yarshater ed., art. Gazālī in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press 2001), vol. 10; Statement of Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī on al-Ghazālī in the book of Aḥmad Farid al-Rifa‘ī, *al-Ghazālī* (Egypt: Maṭba‘ah ‘Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī n. d.), vol. 1, pp. 9-15; Yūsuf al-Qardāwī, *al-Imām al-Ghazālī baina Mādihīhi wa Nāqidihī* (Beirut: Mū‘assasat al-Risālah 1414/1994).

³ *Kunyah* (name in relation to father or child), it was an honourific title as he had daughters only and no son.

⁴ *Nisbah* to Ghazāl, there is a long debate regarding the meaning of Ghazāl which is linked with to spell it with single ‘z’ or double. Those who prefer it with double ‘z’ among them are Subkī, Ibn Khallikān, Dhahabī, Muḥammad Bāqir, Ibn ‘Imād, Murtaḍā and for them Ghazzāl means a spinner and it was the trend in Khawārazm to call people according to their profession. Whereas for al-Sam‘ānī it is with single ‘z’ Ghazāla which probably was the name of a village near Tūs. In contemporary writings, particularly orientalist use single ‘z’. See a detailed discussion in W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual A Study of Al-Ghazālī* (Edinburgh: R& R. Clark, Ltd. 1963), pp. 181-183; in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. Lewis, Pellat and Schacht (Leiden: E.J.Brill 1965), vol. 2, p. 1038; M. M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Pakistan: Pakistan Philosophical Congress 1983), vol. 1, p. 582.

One of the uncles of al-Ghazālī also had the same *nisbah* and *kunyah*, he was known as Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Abū Ḥamid Ghazālī al-Qadīm, al-Kabīr see al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 4, p. 87, and also his brother had same *nisbah* and *kunyah* Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Tūsī al-Ghazālī (d. 520 H.). See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 6, p.61.

⁵ *Nisbah* (related) to Tūs. It was a small city comprising of two towns, Ṭabarān and Nuwqān in the province of Khurasān, of old Persian Empire. It was conquered in the times of ‘Uthmān bin ‘Affān, the third caliph after the Prophet (peace be upon him). See Yāqut al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-Buldān* (Cairo: Maṭb‘ah al-Sa‘ādah 1324/1906), vol.6, p. 70. In modern times, it is situated near Meshad.

⁶ *Madhab al-Shāfi‘ī* was founded on the teachings of Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) who followed the school of Madīna in the beginning but later in Irāq developed a different *madhab* in *fiqh*. To some extent, this school combined the traditionalism of Mālik (d. 179/ 795) and rational thought of Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767) together. He wrote a small book *al-Risalah*, on the method of legal reasoning and with it founded the branch of *Uṣūl al-fiqh*.

⁷ Ash‘arite school of *Kalām* was founded on the teachings of Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘ari (d. 324 H.). This school tried to balance between the rationalism of Mu‘tazilah and literalism of Ḥanābilah. Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403 H.), Abū Ishāq al-Isfirā’yīnī (d. 418 H.), Abū al-Mu‘ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478 H.), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.606 H.) were the prominent scholars of this school.

⁸ See, al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 6, p. 193.

EDUCATION

After early schooling with the Sufi friend of his father, formal education started in his own village Ṭūs with Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Rādhakānī with the study of jurisprudence.⁹ After that he went to Jurjān to study with Abū Nasr al-Ismā'īlī (d. 405 H.).¹⁰ On his return to Ṭūs he stayed there for some time and learnt Sufism with Yūsuf al-Nassāj then left for Nishāpur¹¹ to study with Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085)¹² in al-Madrassah al-Nizāmiyyah.¹³ There he studied theology, jurisprudence, logic, philosophy, rhetoric, natural sciences and Sufism.¹⁴ His teacher and colleagues soon recognized his extraordinary intellectual abilities. Al-Juwaynī used to say, 'al-Ghazālī is a sea to drown in'. During this period, he taught fellow students and wrote books in theology, philosophy and logic.¹⁵ Here he also studied Sufism with Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Fārmadī (d. 477/1084-85) who was a disciple of Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) author of *al-Risālah* in Sufism and learnt more about spiritual practices.¹⁶

PROFESSIONAL CAREER

On the death of al-Juwaynī in 478/1085, al-Ghazālī left Nishāpur for the royal camp of Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092).¹⁷ Soon his excellence and profound knowledge impressed

⁹ See, al-Ṣafḍī, *al-Wāfi bil Wafayāt*, p. 274, Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, p. 353, al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 6, p. 195.

¹⁰ See, al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, he mentions his full name as Muḥammad b. Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ismā'īl Abū Nasr al-Ismā'īlī (d.405 H.) Obviously, he cannot be the teacher of al-Ghazālī. There was another scholar named Ismā'īl b. Mas'addah b. Ismā'īl b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ismā'īl (d.477 H.) who might have taught al-Ghazālī. See Muṣṭafa Abū Sway, *Al-Ghazālī A study in Islamic Epistemology*, (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka 1996), p.17.

¹¹ M. M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, p. 583;

¹² See footnote no. 195 down.

¹³ See p. 22 down.

¹⁴ See, al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 196; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubāla*, p. 323.

¹⁵ See 'Abd al-Ghāfir, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li Tārikh*, p. 73; Ibn Jawzī, *al-Muntazim*, p. 168; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 196.

¹⁶ See, Murtaḍā, *Ithāf al-Sādab*, p. 26; Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-Uns* (Lahore: Masraqi Printinig Press n. d.), tr. Urdu Aḥmad 'Alī, p. 400; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tabyin Kadhib al-Muftarī*, p. 295; Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, p.17; M. M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, p.583.

¹⁷ See footnote no. 110.

all. Consequently, in 484 H. Nizām al-Mulk appointed him to the chair of theology in Nizāmiyyah of Baghdad, a most prestigious institution of the time.¹⁸

In Baghdad he was welcomed very warmly; his lectures attracted hundreds of people among them were students, scholars and nobles alike. Apart from teaching during this period, he wrote books and gave Fatwā (legal opinions) on different matters. His position, status, fame, wealth and the respect he received excelled dignitaries and he enjoyed a life what men can dream of but few can attain.¹⁹

LEAVING BAGHDAD AND THE SPIRITUAL CRISIS

While still at the height of reputation and with a bright future lying in front he left al-Nizāmiyyah and the city of Baghdad in 488/1096 and opted for seclusion and wandering. It was a major turn in his life that changed his thought and had far-reaching results.²⁰

This was not a sudden change; its roots were in his background, education and the training that he received in his early life and particularly from al-Juwaynī undoubtedly were the stirring factors. As mentioned before his childhood grooming was under the Sufi friend of his father; then he studied Tasawwuf with Yusuf al-Nassāj and al-Farmadhī al-Ṭūsī, which revealed for him that the 'Truth' is above human reason thus opening the doors for such a faculty.²¹ Moreover, training and education, which he received from al-Juwaynī, polished his thinking and creative abilities further. Al-Juwaynī never appreciated *Taqīd* (blind following), and encouraged discussions among his students to inculcate open inquiry. Above that, it was in the *Fitrah* (nature) of al-

¹⁸ See, al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 197; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ṭabyīn Kadhib al-Muftarī*, p. 292; Yāfi'ī, *Mir'āt al-Jannān*, p. 177; Ibn Khalliqān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, p.354.

¹⁹ See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*; al-Dhahabī, *Sīar A'lām al-Nubāla'*, p. 323; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bil Wafayāt*, p. 275; al-Yāfi'ī, p. 177.

²⁰ See, al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*; Ibn Khalliqān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, p. 353; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ṭabyīn Kadhib al-Muftarī*, pp 292-293; Ibn al-Jūwzī, *al-Muntazim*, p. 169.

²¹ See, Murtaḍā, *Ithāf al-Sādah*, p. 12. He was also influenced by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), al-Muḥāsabī (d.243/857), al-Junayd (d.289/910), al-Shibli (d. 334/945) and Abū Yazīd al-Buṣṭāmī (d. 261/875).

Ghazālī, which kept him moving towards Reality.²² In Baghdad, he was not satisfied with his situation and realized that the worldly life, which he was living, was a hindrance in reaching the Truth. Fear of God and the life of Hereafter were the main factors that turned him towards God, leaving everything behind.²³

JOURNEYS IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

From Baghdad he went to Damascus, and wrote his most famous book *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-dīn* then to Jerusalem and from there to Egypt and Alexandria. During this period, he gave himself a tough time of self-discipline, purification and worship. He stayed away from people, visited mosques and shrines until he attained the level of "Quṭb al-Wujūd" (pivot of existence), a Blessing for all and a Guide towards al-Raḥmān.²⁴

Lastly, he came back to his village Ṭūs and established a Madrassah with a khāniqāh next to his house where he remained for the rest of his life. During this period, he concentrated on teaching, recitation of the Holy Qur'ān and to stay with the friends of God. He also started to look again in the traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) particularly al-Bukhārī and al-Muslim. It is said that he must have excelled it if life had allowed him so.²⁵

DEATH

He died on Monday in 505/1111 at the age of fifty-three, and was buried in Ṭābarān. His brother Aḥmad relates that on the day of death al-Ghazālī performed ablution and said his prayers then asked for the shroud and kissed it and said, 'with full submission

²² See al-Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, ed. 'Abdul Ḥalim Maḥmūd (Cairo: Maktabah al-Anjilo al-Miṣriyyah 1964), pp. 11-14.

²³ See Ibn 'Asākir, *Tabayīn Kadhib al-Muṣṭarī*, p. 293; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*; al-Dhahabī, *Sīar A'lām al-Nubāla*, p.324.

²⁴ See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 200.

²⁵ See 'Abd al-Ghāfir as narrated by al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 210; Murtaḍā, *Ithāf al-Sādah*, p.12; Ibn Jūwzī, *al-Muntaẓim*, p.170; Smith, *Al-Ghazālī the Mystic*, p. 29.

to the angel' then he stretched his feet and turned towards al-Qiblah (direction of Makkah) and died before sunrise.²⁶

MAJOR THREADS OF HIS THOUGHT

Al-Ghazālī, as said above, was a theologian, a jurist, a philosopher and above all a mystic, which is the most significant aspect of his thought; besides that he was Sunnī and Asha'ri with respect to his theological leanings. However, was he a strict follower of any of these shades of thought or was an independent thinker is a frequently asked question.²⁷ Best source to know his thought is what he narrated himself in *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* regarding intellectual and spiritual development of his life. His picture in it is of the seeker after truth, who probed in every shade of thought and evaluated all those who claimed to be the bearers of truth in his age. As narrated by him, since early age, there was an urge in him to know the truth and not to follow anyone blindly. The passion for gaining knowledge was an inborn instinct in him or was like a burning flame to reach the reality, which he termed as 'fiṭrah' (nature). Nevertheless, it may be noted here that following others or taqlid has not been negated by him in toto. He denied its negative aspect only, which is follow without knowledge, for him the correct should be differentiated from the incorrect one in following others.²⁸ Otherwise its positive aspect that is to follow the right authority is important in religion, as faith is based on what prophet Muḥammad (Ṣallā Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam) informed and to follow that is binding for the believer.²⁹ Above the common following is gradation in knowledge among people as mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān, "God will raise up in rank those of you who believe and have been given knowledge." (58:11).

²⁶ See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 201; Murtadā, *Ithāf al-Sādah*, p.14.

²⁷ See Nakamura Kojiro, Was Ghazālī an Ash'arite?, *The Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko*, 51(1993); Michael E. Marmura, Ghazali and Demonstrative Science, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (1965); R. M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite school* (Durham: Duke University Press 1994).

²⁸ See Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, p. 126.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

Thus, for al-Ghazālī to know the right authority and to follow it is required in religion, for him taqlīd is related with knowledge and rejects only the negative aspect of it. From above we may conclude that while remaining within the boundaries of religious authority he never closed the doors of reasoning and used the tool of knowledge to differentiate between the correct and the incorrect authority.

In search of correct authority, the thing that bothered him was the division of people in various religions and sects where each one claimed to be on the right path and that salvation lies with them only. As all claimed to possess the true knowledge, this led him to seek the true, assured knowledge or conviction without doubt.³⁰ In other words, it is *al-‘ilm al-yaqīn* that nothing can nullify its truth. For example if someone claims that the numerical value of ten is less than three and to prove it he turns a rod in a snake, this action in itself might be astonishing but should not shake the knowledge for numerical values.³¹ Although all factions claimed to have attained *al-‘ilm al-yaqīn* but al-Ghazālī, as an independent thinker, evaluates their claims. It may be noted that al-Ghazālī remained within the religious frame as far as the possibility and source of such knowledge is concerned. He is not skeptical of its possibility neither he considers its source to be away from God. Perfect knowledge comes from God only. Apart from it, the lowest level of knowledge is of senses *al-ḥissiyyāt* then the rational evidence of *al-darūriyyāt* and after that is *al-‘aqliyyāt*. In this gradation, the lowest level is of senses judged by reason, and above reason is another faculty that corrects reason. To demonstrate its possibility al-Ghazālī compares a dream with an awakened state. A dreamer while in dream considers it to be a reality; only on awakening he realizes the truth. Similarly, this life is like a state of sleep or dream and the truth will be clear on death. Knowledge gained then would be the most accurate and authentic as compared to all other categories, as it comes in the prophetic saying,

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 124-127; Muṣṭafa Abū Sway, *Al-Ghazālī A study in Islamic Epistemology*, pp53-56.

³¹ See Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, p. 127.

People are sleeping; when they die they awaken.

And in the verse of the Holy Qur'an it comes:

"Thou wast heedless of this; therefore We have now removed from thee thy covering, and so thy sight today is piercing." (50:22).

However, some people do not acknowledge this category, but it is most accurate as its source is from God. It is *nūr*, which enters the heart and is not the result of rational proofs. Moreover, whosoever considers that knowledge is limited to senses or rational perception only has confined the mercy of God to few categories.³³ This knowledge is above reason and senses, being supra rational and supra logical it is intuitive in nature and surpasses reason and senses but at the same time it does not contradict reason. For al-Ghazālī, there is an intellectual equilibrium attained at this level between reason and intuition, with reason being lower to intuition. Thus, for him knowledge is attained within religious frame and through God.

With this perception of true and authentic knowledge and after breaking the hurdles of al-taqlīd, al-Ghazālī classified various thoughts present in his times to identify where the truth lies. According to him, philosophers represent rational approach based on logic and *al-burhān* (categorical and clear proof), whereas rationalism of al-mutakallimūn is of *al-ra'y wa al-nazar* category, sect of al-Ta'limiyyah fully submit to the authority of imām, and those who rely on intuition are Sufis. To verify the truth claims of these groups al-Ghazālī penetrated in their core teachings and concluded that Sufism is the best option as it opens the path towards God and a sufi thus receives directly from Him the knowledge.

Concluding the above discussion it can be stated that it seems unfair to confine a scholar like al-Ghazālī within the boundaries of particular thought. Although he

³² Abū Nu'aym al-Isbahānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabī, 1405), vol. 7, p. 52.

³³ See Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, p. 130.

criticised *al-madhhabiyah* for declaring the opponents as unbelievers and that it leads to blind following.³⁴ However, he never denied his allegiance to Ash'arite thought while rejecting some of their concepts.³⁵ He denounced al-taqlid and literalism of al-Kalām, pure rationalism of philosophy where it went against the clear teachings of religion. His perception was based on assured knowledge, which had the highest authority, it is the supra rational or supra logical knowledge which is intuitive and comes directly to the heart after its purification. This knowledge is above rationalism or literalism, though it never contradicts the literal or the rational understanding of religion, it only goes beyond them. Thus, al-Ghazālī was undoubtedly an independent thinker but always remained a Sunnī, Shāfi'ite and Ash'arite throughout his life.³⁶

It may be said in this regard that intellectual equilibrium between literalism, rationalism and intuition is one of the greatest contributions of al-Ghazālī and consequently rightfully gained him the title of mujaddid. At the same time, it may be reminded that in trying to bring the intellectual balance, he could not escape the heavy criticism from all these fronts.

But no doubt that all these trends are indispensable to reach the correct understanding of religion and helps in interpretation of the religious text. This equilibrium is well reflected in his writings particularly in *al-Ihyā'* and for Christians in his interpretation of Gospel of John, which will be discussed in the coming chapters.

³⁴ See al-Ghazālī, Fayṣal al-Tafriqah, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il al-Imān al-Ghazālī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah n. d.), p. 77; Al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-Arba'in fi Uṣūl al-Dīn* ed. 'Abd Allāh 'Abd al-Hamīd 'Arawānī and Muḥammad Bashīr al-shaqafah (Damascus: Dār al-Qalm 2003), p. 276; Al-Ghazālī, *Mizān al-'Amal* ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif 1964), p. 409.

³⁵ See Nakamura Kojiro, Was Ghazālī an Ash'arite?, *The Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko*, pp. 7-20. Al-Ghazālī deviated from Ash'arite in issues like theory of *al-aṣṭab*, Atomism, and theory of Soul.

³⁶ Al-Ghazālī's criticism of *madhhabiyah* may not be equated with modern negation of *madhāhib*, his criticism was leveled against some of their misperceptions only and its nature was methodological whereas in modern age the negation is outright rejection and is unmethodological, which resembles to some extent Protestant thought in the Christian world.

WORKS OF AL-GHAZĀLĪ

Al-Ghazālī wrote extensively in the areas of jurisprudence, philosophy, logic, theology, Sufism, ethics and polemics. Some of his major books can be classified as follows: in Fiqh, the prominent works are *al-Wasīt*, *al-Basīt*, *al-Wajīz*, *al-Khulāṣah*, in *Uṣūl al-Manḡhūl*, *al-Mustasfā*. In philosophy there is *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah*, *Tabāfut al-Falāsifah*, *Mi'yār al-'Ilm*, *Muḥik al-Nazar* and *al-Qiṣṭas al-Mustaqīm*. In kalām the major writings are *al-Iqtisād fil al-'Itiqād*, *al-Asma' al-Husna*, *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*, *Iljām al-'Awām 'an 'Ilm al-Kalām* and *Ma'ārij al-Quds*. In Tasawwūf there is *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-din*, *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah*, *Minhāj al-'Ābidīn*, *Ma'ārij al-Sālikīn*. There was a commentary on the Holy Qur'ān with the title *Yāqūt al-tā'wīl fi Tafsīr al-Tanzīl* in 40 volumes but is unfortunately lost, another interpretation on it is *Jawāhir al-Qurān*. In refutation of sects there is *Hujjat al-Haqq*, *al-Mustazharī*, *Fadā'ih al-Bāṭiniyyah*, a refutation on Christianity *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, and his autobiography is *al-Munqadh min al-Dalāl*.³⁷ Due to large number of his writings, since the middle of nineteenth century many scholars dealt with the issue of identification and verification of genuine work from the great corpus and their arrangement in chronological order.³⁸ Within the books our concern is with *al-Radd al-Jamīl* a refutation on Christian faith therefore its status briefly is what follows.

STATUS OF AL-RADD AL-JAMĪL

Authenticity of *al-Radd al-Jamīl li Ilāhiyyat 'Isā bi Ṣarīḥ al-Injīl* was not a settled issue like his other famous books.

³⁷ See, al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, pp. 224-227; Ibn 'Imād, *Shadharāt ad-Dhabab*, pp. 12-13; Muḥammad Bāqir, *Ruḡdāt al-Janāt*, pp. 17-19; Ibn Khalliqān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, pp. 354-355; Murtādā, *Aitāhaf al-Sādab*, pp. 56-60.

³⁸ See, 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, *Mu'allafāt al-Ghazālī* (Kuwait: Wakālah al-Maṭbū'āt 1977), he gives good information about all the previous works done on this topic; W. Montgomery Watt, *The Authenticity of the Works Attributed to al-Ghazālī*, <http://www.ghazali.org/site/bibliography.htm> (accessed on 3/1/09); George F. Hourani, A Revised Chronology of al-Ghazālī's Writings, *American Oriental Society* 104.2 (1984), pp.289-302; Mashhad al-'Allāf, *Kutub al-Imām al-Ghazālī al-Thābit minhā wa al-Manḡhūl*, <http://www.ghazali.org/biblio/AuthenticityofGhazaliWorks-AR.htm> (accessed on 3/1/09).

Badawī in his *Mu'allafāt al-Ghazālī* categorizes it among the doubtful books, although he provides information of all those who ascribed the book to al-Ghazālī.³⁹

The objections raised by those who considered it as unauthentic work of al-Ghazālī are firstly that there is no cross references for it in the other books of al-Ghazālī. Secondly, linguistically it is different from other works. Thirdly it is not mentioned by other biographers; only a Coptic theologian mentions it. Fourthly al-Ghazālī talks in detail about Christian religion and their books in *al-Radd al-Jamīl* but this information is absent in his other works, and lastly authenticity of it depends on his visit to Egypt and Alexandria which in itself is a doubtful issue.⁴⁰

On the other side those who considered it an authentic work, among them is Massignon who discovered two manuscripts in the Aya Sofia library at Istanbul⁴¹ of *al-Radd al-Jamīl* and in an article⁴² he emphatically ascribed it to al-Ghazālī and translated some portions of it. Later in 1936, Rev. R. Chidiac edited the book and brought it to light. In 1973, another critical edition appeared from Cairo by 'Abd al-'Aziz Ḥilmī which further strengthened the authenticity of *al-Radd al-Jamīl*. The last two works used internal and external criticism to verify the authenticity and to refute the

³⁹ See Badawī, *Mu'allafāt al-Ghazālī*, p. 262

⁴⁰ See G. F. Hourani, *A Revised Chronology of al-Ghazālī's Writings*, where he summarizes these objections of H. Lazarus-Yafeh from her book, *Studies in Al-Ghazzālī* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press 1975), pp.458-477; 'Abd al-'Aziz 'Abdul Ḥaḡ Ḥilmī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl li al-Ghazālī*, (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Amīriyyah 1393/1973), pp. 121-126; W. Montgomery Watt, *The Authenticity of the Works Attributed to al-Ghazālī*; according to Badawī this book was considered by Bouyges unauthentic but later on he changed his opinion because the proofs are not very strong to mark it as unauthentic, see *Mu'allafāt*, p. 262.

⁴¹ These manuscripts are numbered as Aya Sufiyya 2246 and 2247. They were copied by M. b. 'Isa b. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Shafī'ī in Cairo in 672 / 1273 with the book of *al-Imām al-Juwaynī, Shifā' al-Ghālīl fī Biyān mā Waḡa' fī al-Tawrāt wa al-Injīl min al-Tabdīl* and is present in one cover. See Constance E. Padwick, *Al-Ghazālī and the Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, *The Moslem World*, vol. xxix no. 2, (April, 1939), p. 131.

⁴² The title of the article is *Le Christ dans les Evangiles selon al-Ghazālī* in *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1932, p. 523. For him the importance of this treaty lies in the fact that it tells us about the Christian Muslim relations and reveals a different methodology used by al-Ghazālī as compared to al-Juwaynī or Ibn Ḥazm. Unlike the other two he is not searching for the original text rather accepted the text as it is and accused Christians on false interpretation. See Padwick, *Al-Ghazālī and the Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, p. 131.

objections raised over it; especially Hilmī discussed in detail the ambiguities left over by Chidiac. Briefly, the refutation on objections is as follows.

External criticism showed that Abū al-Khayr b. al-Ṭayyab a Christian author of sixth century mentioned it in his book to refute al-Ghazālī's allegations.⁴³ Moreover, Ḥājī Khalifah (d.1068 H.) mentioned it with a little variation in the title as *al-Radd al-Jamīl ala man Ghayyarah al-Tawrāt wa al-Injīl*.⁴⁴ After him "Abd al-Qādir al-'Iydrūsī (d. 1038 H.) mentioned it in his commentary on *al-Ihyā'*"⁴⁵ as *Kitāb al-Qawl al-Jamīl fi al-Radd ala man Ghayyarah al-Injīl*.⁴⁶ Although there is variation in the wordings but the content is same which verifies the authenticity of the book.⁴⁷

Internal criticism shows similarity of methodology adopted by al-Ghazālī in *al-Radd* and in his other works, particularly which he wrote in refutation of Greek philosophy or al-Bāṭiniyyah.⁴⁸ That is to accept the arguments of the opponents then to show the faults and weakness present in their thought.⁴⁹ Moreover, there is linguistic similarity in use of phrases and words in *al-Radd al-Jamīl* and in other works of al-Ghazālī.⁵⁰

As far as al-Ghazālī's knowledge of Christianity is concerned, *Ihyā'* is a good example of that. Zwemer gathered all the traditions and logia (sayings attributed to Jesus peace be upon him) in al-Ghazālī's books particularly *Ihyā'*.⁵¹ According to him, al-Ghazālī was well acquainted with the Old and the New Testaments and cannot be accused of

⁴³ See 'Abd al-'Aziz 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Ḥilmī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl li Imām al-Ghazālī*, pp. 57-58.

⁴⁴ See, Ḥājī Khalifah, *Kashf al-Zanun an Asāmī al-Kutub wa al-Fanūn* (Makkah al-Mukarramah: al-Maktabah al-Fīṣaliyyah, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 337.

⁴⁵ 'Abd al-Qādir al-'Iydrūsī, *Ta'rif al-Ahyā' bi fadā'il al-Ihyā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'ārifah, 1404 H.), p. 9.

⁴⁶ See, Abd al-'Aziz Ḥilmī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl li Imām al-Ghazālī*, p. 59.

⁴⁷ For Ḥilmī there is variation in the wordings of titles for different books and this need to be verified by comparison with manuscripts, see Ḥilmī, *ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁸ See for example *Tahāfuṭ al-Falāsifah* and *Faḍā'ih al-Bāṭiniyyah*.

⁴⁹ Al-Ghazālī elaborates his methodology in *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*.

⁵⁰ Words like "Bil ḥarā", "fa bil ḥarā" or "fakam ḥarā" which are present in *al-Radd* are also present in *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, see Ḥilmī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl li al-Ghazālī*, pp. 64-65.

⁵¹ See S.M. Zwemer, *A Muslim Seeker after God*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company 1920), pp. 257-294. It was also published in an Arabic booklet as *Maqām al-Masīh il-Makīm fi Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Cairo: Nile Mission Press), see Padwick, *Al-Ghazālī and the Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, p. 130.

presenting distorted text or relying on his memory only, in the case of gospels he cited the 'very words of the text'.⁵²

Further Padwick tried to determine the version of the New Testament used by al-Ghazālī. For him it seems that he might have used separate versions for gospels and epistles, which were not necessarily from the same translation. Secondly, the Arabic translations of the N.T. in that age were from Greek, Syrian or Coptic languages. He might have used copto-arabic versions, which were written in parallel columns,⁵³ as they are very near to quotations of al-Ghazālī particularly of John.⁵⁴

There is a possibility that al-Ghazālī relied on different translations of the N.T. If that being true then presence of few Coptic words in *al-Radd*, which related the writing of this book with the visit of Egypt, can be resolved. Secondly, this visit was considered a legend⁵⁵ because it was linked with the journey for al-Maghrib but, their dates do not coincide⁵⁶ so the journey was discarded. Consequently, *al-Radd* was categorized as inauthentic. In fact, the conclusion is based on linking the two visits, i.e. to Egypt and al-Maghrib together. It is possible that al-Ghazālī visited Egypt prior to 499 H. during his other journeys⁵⁷ and that nullifies the whole argument.

In addition, a comparison of al-Ghazālī's thought in *al-Radd* with some other works might help in determining the status of the book, although there is an opinion that al-Ghazālī's thought is not consistent and is contradictory at times.⁵⁸ Whereas the case is

⁵² See Zewmer, *A Muslim Seeker after God*, p. 260; Padwick, *Al-Ghazālī and the Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, pp. 130-131.

⁵³ It was written in 1204 or 1205 and is found in Vatican library with the number Vatican Coptic No. 9, see Padwick, *Al-Ghazālī and the Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, pp. 137-138.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-139.

⁵⁵ See Badawī, *Mu'allafāt al-Ghazālī*, p. 23; Jabre in the article of G. F. Hourani, *A Revised Chronology of al-Ghazālī's Writings*, p. 296; Bouyges in Hilmi's book *al-Radd al-Jamil*, p. 53.

⁵⁶ Al-Ghazālī planned to visit Yūsuf b. Tāshfīn in al-Maghrib but when he heard the news of his death, he changed the plan. The problem aroused because Yūsuf b. Tāshfīn died in 500 H. whereas al-Ghazālī returned from his journey in 499 H. and was teaching in Nishāpūr in 500 H.

⁵⁷ See Hilmi, *al-Radd al-Jamil li Imām al-Ghazālī*, p. 57.

⁵⁸ See R. M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 1994), p. 3 where he says about al-Ghazālī, "His writings differ greatly from one another in form and

not so, beneath the apparent diversity there is underlying consistency which can be deduced from his writings including *al-Radd*. In Peter Heath's opinion there are certain underlying principles in al-Ghazālī's writings which can solve the seemingly inconsistencies.⁵⁹ According to Heath, conceptual structure of al-Ghazālī was well grounded in philosophy, theology and mysticism of his day. He took from them the theories and blended them to suit his own argument. He was not a strict follower of any of these trends particularly philosophy and theology although he picked elements from them. He condemned non-rationalism of philosophers, literalism of theologians and deviations present in mysticism, and his thrust was to uncover the real spirit of religion and mysticism, in his opinion, most suited for that.⁶⁰ However, there are shifts present in his terminology, language and ideas, which led many to criticize him. Reason behind these shifts is that he changes them according to his audience whereas the content remains the same.⁶¹ When we compare these principles of al-Ghazālī with *al-Radd* we find striking similarities. In *al-Radd*, he is strongly condemning non-rationality of Christian philosophers, literalism of their theologians and pointing to the deeper philosophical issue of religious language in comprehensible terms of mysticism. His presentation of terminology, language and ideas are to suit his Christian audience; he talks to Christians in their tone. Al-Ghazālī even makes it clear in *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* that the requirement before criticism is to have a full grasp of the opponent's thought.⁶² In that case it is natural to borrow the opponent's terminology which would be easy to understand therefore we find al-Ghazālī using Christian terms and idiom in *al-Radd* which is absent from his other works.⁶³

rhetoric as well as in topic and focus"; Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf 'an Manāhij al-Adilah fi 'Aqā'id al-Milah* ed. Muhammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Wihdah al-'Arabiyyah 1998), p. 151.

⁵⁹ See Peter Heath, Reading al-Ghazālī: The Case of Psychology in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam* ed. Todd Lawson (London: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies 2005), p. 187-188.

⁶⁰ Ibid. pp187-196.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 191.

⁶² See al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, p. 25.

⁶³ This might be the reason, which forced Ibn Rushd to claim that al-Ghazālī changes his identity according to the identity of his addressees, "He is an Ash'arī with Ash'aris, a Sufi with Sufis and a

The methodology of al-Ghazālī in *al-Radd* can be compared to *Ihyā'* his most famous and authentic work. Kenneth Garden pointed out two important aspects of style in *Ihyā'*⁶⁴ when compared with *al-Radd* we find sharp similarities present in them. Firstly both are polemical, *Ihyā'* as the name depicts is to revive the religious sciences which became obscure in his age so it was written against the prevailing Muslim religious trends and norms of his age,⁶⁵ and in the same tone he criticized Christian religious norms and understanding in *al-Radd*. Secondly, in both books, there is rereading of religious terminology, in the sense that originally, the words had some particular meaning but with passage of time a new understanding evolved and the original meaning was forgotten, and this paved the way for change in meaning of the text.⁶⁶ In addition, al-Ghazālī by pointing out this change tried to restore the original sense of the terms.

Consequently, it can be said that the arguments to prove authenticity of *al-Radd* are sound enough to ascribe this work to al-Ghazālī in spite of the objections raised.

Apart from the authenticity, a brief summary of the book is as follows. As is clear from the title this treatise was a refutation of divinity of Jesus in Christianity. The book has three portions; a short introduction, main body of al-ta'wīl and a conclusion with comments on concepts considered foundational for the concept of divinity of Jesus. The introduction is about the issue of al-taqlīd in Christian thought. Al-Ghazālī differentiates between the teachings of Jesus and the literal interpretations of the late generations. These literal interpretations after a passage of time replaced the original religion of Jesus, and the later generations considered that this was the religion preached by Jesus. Al-Ghazālī criticized their uncompromising understanding and

philosopher with philosophers". See Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-Maqāl Fimā bayna al-Ḥikmah wa al-Sharī'ah min al-Ittiṣāl* ed. Muḥammad 'Ammārā (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif 1969), 2nd edition, p.52.

⁶⁴ See Kenneth Garden, "AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S Contested Revival: *Ihyā'* Ulūm Al-Dīn and its Critics in Khorasan and the Maghrib" (Ph.D. Thesis) Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-30.

⁶⁶ To cite one example, see the reinterpretation for the word '*Fiqh*' in *Ihyā'* as discussed by Garden, *ibid.* p 30, and for the term '*Illah*' in *al-Radd al-Jamīl lil Imam al-Ghazālī*, pp. 244-245.

refusal to accept interpretation for the text.⁶⁷ Further, he elaborated the influence of Greek philosophy on Christianity. The early generations borrowed notions from the Greek philosophy to explain their major tenets. Next to it is the main portion of *al-Radd* where implementation of al-ta'wīl is carried on. Al-Ghazālī concentrated on the Gospel of John, as it is the most venerated gospel among Christians. In the end, al-Ghazālī highlighted the nature of religious language, which is different from the common language. Religious language carries deep meanings and in order to understand it properly, one should be able to 'go beyond' or 'cross' the literal meanings for deeper ones. This going beyond or crossing is al-ta'wīl. These are the main issues discussed in *al-Radd*, which would be discussed in the following chapters, before that let us take a fleeting glance on the age of al-Ghazālī.

THE AGE OF AL-GHAZĀLĪ

Al-Ghazālī witnessed a disintegrated Abbasids Caliphate,⁶⁸ their power was limited to certain religious ceremonies or their names were inscribed on coins.⁶⁹ Caliphs who sat on throne during the lifetime of al-Ghazālī were al-Qā'im bi Amrillāh (d. 467/1075), al-Muqtadī bi Amrillāh (d. 487/1094) and al-Mustazhar billāh (d. 512/1118).⁷⁰ During this period sultans (provincial governors)⁷¹ were politically dominant, among them Saljuqs (429-552/1038-1157)⁷² came to power before al-Ghazālī was born by taking over eastern

⁶⁷ It reminds the aim of al-Ghazālī in writing *Ihyā'*, when the real teachings of religion are forgotten and are replaced by later interpretations. See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol. 1, p. 10.

⁶⁸ Abbasids Caliphate was established in 132/750 by Abū al-'Abbās al-Saffāh and lasted until the fall of Baghdad in 656/1258 with the slain of Caliph al-Musta'ṣim. They ruled for five centuries.

⁶⁹ See Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate* (London: Clarendon Press n. d.), p. 327.

⁷⁰ See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, ed. 'Alī 'Abd al-Sātir (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah 1407/1987), vol.12, pp. 117, 155, 195.

⁷¹ From the reasons of disintegration in the second half of the caliphate was the vast territory under them so for administrative purposes, they appointed governors and delegated powers to them. These governors with the passage of time became very powerful that they could refuse to obey the orders of the caliph and at times pressed the caliph with undue demands. See 'Abd al-Majīd Abū al-Futūḥ Badawī, *al-Tārīkh al-Siyāsī wa al-Fikrī* (Cairo: Dār al-Wafā' 1408/1988), pp. 16-18; Ḥasan Abrāhīm Ḥasan, *Tārīkh al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī 1965), vol. 3, pp. 1-2.

⁷² Saljuqs were Turkish tribes, who were nomads and entered Khursān. They were the descendants of Saljuq b. Duqāq who was from the branch of Oghuz tribe named as Qiniq. It is also narrated that Saljuq

provinces and Baghdad. They defeated Mas'ūd b. Maḥmūd of Ghaznah in 431/1040⁷³ then Buwayhids in 447/1055.⁷⁴ Moreover, they established their kingdom firmly under Alap Arsalān and Malik Shāh. During this period Niẓām al-Mulk, their powerful wazīr played a leading role in cultural development. Saljuqs had friendly terms with the Caliphate and were Sunnis like the Abbasids.⁷⁵ Submission to the office of Caliph was in religious spirit more than political,⁷⁶ and the caliphs, on the other hand, respected them as well.⁷⁷

In the religious arena the prominent factions were al-Shāfi'iyyah, al-Aḥnāf,⁷⁸ al-Ḥanābilah,⁷⁹ al-Ashā'irah, al-Mu'tazilah,⁸⁰ The Twevelers,⁸¹ al-Isma'īliyyah,⁸² al-

was the name of the place where Saljuq b. Duqāq was born and was named after the place. See Ibn Bibi, *Saljuq Nāmah*, tr. (Urdu) Muḥammad Zakariyyā Mā'il (Lahore: Zarin Art Press 1975), pp. 10-11.

According to Ibn Athīr Saljuq with his people embraced Islam and started to open the land of Turks. See *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārikh*, ed. Carolus Johannes Tornberg (Beirut: Dār Beirut 1386/1966), vol. 9, p. 474.

⁷³ See Ibn Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārikh*, vol.9, pp. 482-483; Spuler, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. Holt, Lamton and Bernard Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1970), vol. 1 A, p. 149.

Ghaznavid dynasty (351-582/962-1136) was of Turkish origin and their name is derived from the city of Ghazna which lies in Afghanistan now. Most prominent ruler of this dynasty was Maḥmūd of Ghazna (388-421/998-1030) who was the governor of Khurasān. See Spuler in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, p. 147; Ḥasan Ibrāhīm Ḥasan, *Tārikh al-Islām*, vol. 3, p. 83.

⁷⁴ See Ibn al-Ṭaḥṭāqī, *al-Fakhārī fī al-Adāb al-Sulṭāniyyah wa al-Duwal al-Islamiyyah* (Egypt: al-Maṭba'ah al-Rahmāniyyah, n. d.), p. 211; Ibn Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārikh*, vol. 9, pp. 609-610; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, vol. 12, pp. 70-71; Spuler, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, p. 149; Ibn Khuldūn, *Tārikh Ibn Khuldūn*, ed. Turki Farḥān al-Muṣṭafa (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī 1419/1999), vol.4, p. 495. Buwayhids (334-447/945-1055) were from the tribe of Daylam at the south of the Caspian Sea, what is now Azarbayjān. Their historical background is not clear; some relate them to royal family of Persia or to Arab tribe or to a poor family background. See Ḥasan Ibrāhīm Ḥasan, *Tārikh al-Islām*, vol. 3, pp. 37-38.

⁷⁵ See Spuler, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, p. 149.

⁷⁶ The Caliph called Ṭuḡhrul Beg for help against the Shiite Buyids who was supported by Egypt see Ibn Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārikh*, p. 609; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, p. 71.

⁷⁷ Ṭuḡhrul Beg was warmly welcomed by the caliph with gifts and was bestowed with the title of the king of the east and the west, the caliph even married niece of Ṭuḡhrul Beg see Ibn Athīr, *ibid.*, p. 617, 634; Ibn Kathīr, *ibid.*, p. 72, 77.

⁷⁸ School of *Fiqh* based on the teachings of Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān al-Kūfī (d.150 H.), and is also known as *Ashāb al-Rā'i* (inclined towards opinion), it was followed more in Baghdad, Balk, Bukhāra, Persia, India and parts of Africa.

⁷⁹ This school of *fiqh* was founded on the teachings of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) He is famous for his resistance against *Mu'tazilah* on the issue of uncreated Qur'ān which kept the Sunni faith intact. He rejected rationalism of *Mu'tazilah* and favoured interpretation of *Qur'ān bil-Qur'ān*.

Qarāmiṭah.⁸³ Tension between them was due to religious-cum-political factors, particularly friction between Abbasids and Fatimids⁸⁴ played a major role in it. Riots between Sunnis and Shi'is on 'āshūrā' (10th of Muḥarram), or between al-Ḥanābilah and al-Ashā'irah⁸⁵ or al-Shāfi'iyyah and al-Ḥanābilah⁸⁶ were to the extent of bloodshed, persecution of scholars⁸⁷ or murders by Ismā'ilis⁸⁸ was as common as suicide bombing of today. Commenting on the reasons of unrest, Richard W. Bulliet discards economic, ethnic reasons or class divisions present among these groups. According to him it was Aṣabiyyah (fanatic attitude), which emerged due to the difference of opinion in jurisprudence or theology, with an interesting fact that both, theology and jurisprudence, are not the sources of religion but are interpretation of the sources.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Wasil b. 'Aṭā' (d.131 H.) was the founder of Kalāmi School. Their basic teachings are *al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* which are *al-Tawbīd*, *al-'Adal*, *al-Wa'd wa al-Wa'id*, *al-Manzilah bayn al-Manzilatayn*, *al-Amr bil al-Ma'rūf wa al-Nahy 'An al-Munkar*. They are rationalists and in sharp contrast to Ḥanbalī thought.

⁸¹ They are orthodox Shi'is who believe in twelve Imāms the descendants of al-Hussīn b. 'Alī and the twelfth one is Mahdī (disappeared in 260/874). They differ from Sunnis on the issue of *Imāmah*, and believe that descendants of 'Alī have the divine right for the leadership and on sinlessness of Mahdī.

⁸² A faction within Shi'ah who follow Ismā'il b. Ja'far (died between 136/753-146/763) and believe in *al-Ta'wīl al-bāṭinī* with such rigour and force that all the religious concepts and beliefs are interpreted accordingly. They are also known as *al-Bāṭiniyyah* and *al-Ta'limiyyah*.

⁸³ There are different opinions about them, it is said that *al-Qarāmiṭah* is another name of *al-Ismā'iliyyah*, or they were the followers of Ḥamadān Qarmaṭ. Like *Ismā'ilis* they are extremists and believe in *al-Ta'wīl al-Bāṭinī*.

⁸⁴ Fatimid kingdom (297/909-567/1171) was established in Egypt and al-Maghrib by 'Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī (d. 322 H.). According to some of the historians they were the descendents of Ismā'il b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq therefore they were known as Ismā'ilis and for some their forefather was 'Abd Allāh b. Maymūn al-Qadāh. He believed in two Gods of *al-Khayr* and *al-Sharr*. Last ruler of it was Aazid who died in 1171 and Ṣalāh al-dīn restored the power of 'Abbasid Caliphate in Egypt.

⁸⁵ See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, vol.12, p.122, 125.

⁸⁶ See Ibn Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi al-Tārikh*, p. 614

⁸⁷ Al-Juwaynī, al-Qushayrī and others were persecuted by Ḥanafī *wazīr* al-Kundarī (d. 457 H.) of Tuḡhrul Beg. Al-Kundarī was very harsh towards *al-Shāfi'iyyah* and *al-Ashā'irah*, according to Ibn Athīr he treated them like *al-Rāfidah*. See vol.10, p. 33.

⁸⁸ Sunni Scholars and the dignitaries were the target of Ismā'ilis. 'Abd ur-Raḥmān al-Ṣabūnī(d.380 H.), 'Abū al-Qāsim b. al-Juwaynī (d.493 H.), Fakhr al-Mulk b. Nizām ul-Mulk (d.500 H.) were killed by them.

⁸⁹ See Richard W. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1972), pp.31-33. 'Abd al-Majīd Abū al-Fattūh Badawī in *al-Tārikh al-Siyāsī wa al-Fikrī* discussed the historical development of sectarian division which appeared due to difference of understanding and interpreting the text. There were two extremes of pure literalists and the other of rationalists, and the rest of the sects swing between these two.

This reflects a disturbed psyche of the age, which must have affected al-Ghazālī. This shallowness of religious life, with his internal spiritual crisis, forced him to leave Baghdad and later on to write his master piece *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, with the intention of reviving the true religious spirit.

Apart from Muslim sects, among major minorities were Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians in Baghdad. Concentrating on Christians only here, Eastern Christianity⁹⁰ was divided into Nestorian,⁹¹ Jacobite,⁹² and Malkite⁹³ sects living in Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Armenia. Regarding their social and religious conditions under Muslim rule there

⁹⁰ Western (Roman Catholic) and the Eastern (Greek Orthodox) Churches were divided in the eleventh century of Christian era due to theological, political and cultural differences. Issues like supremacy over Christian world, position of pope or the patriarch in respect to civil authority and the differences in theology were the causes of split. See Powel Mills Dawley, *Chapters in Church History* (New York: The Seabury Press 1963), pp. 67-70; Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1959), pp. 140-150.

⁹¹ The sect was named after Nestorius the bishop of Constantinople in 428, and became official when Mar 'Abd-'Ishu of Nisibis formulated "The Orthodox Creed of Nestorians" in 1298. See G. P. Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*, (London: Darf Publishers Limited 1987), vol. 2, pp. 49-51. Nestorius differed from the Alexandrian school on the theological issue of 'relation of the divine Logos with the humanity of Jesus'. Alexandrian school stressed on the unity in Christ's personality i.e. his humanity was absorbed in his divinity. Nestorius on the other hand followed the school of Antioch, for them there was no merging of the divine and the human in Christ; the two were ethically joined through a harmony of will or purpose. They condemned the use of the title *Theotokos* (Mother of God) for Mary and the phrases as God died or the God was born were blasphemous for them. This sect was powerful in Persia, Syria and due to missionary activity spread in Arabia, Turkistan, India, and China. See T. A. Burkill, *The Evolution of Christian Thought* (USA: Cornell University Press 1971), pp.96-98; John Joseph, *Muslim-Christian relations and inter-Christian Rivalries in the Middle East* (New York: University Press 1983), p. 4; Jean Danielou, *The Christian Centuries A New History of the Catholic Church* tr. Vincent Cronin (New York: Longman & Todd Ltd. 1964), vol. 1, pp. 335-342.

⁹² Jacobite or the Syrian Jacobites were from the Monophysite Church who believed in one deified human nature of Christ or one divine nature after the union of Christ with Jesus. The sect was organized by Jacob Baradaeus. They were well established in west Syria and Persia and coexisted with Nestorian Church there. Other churches of Monophysites were the Coptic (Egyptian) and Abyssinian (Ethiopian) Church, Armenian Church and the Maronite Church in Lebanon. See John Joseph, *Muslim-Christian relations and inter-Christian Rivalries in the Middle East*, p. 4.

⁹³ Malkites (also spelled as Melchites) which means Royalists, were who remained faithful with Byzantine Empire or the East Roman or the Greek Orthodox also known as Rūm Orthodox in Arabic. They were mainly in Syria, Slavic Balkan and some villages in Damascus. They were among earlier Christians who easily shifted to Arabic language from the Greek. They followed the theological stance of Byzantine Church i.e. Christ as savior of humanity had to be both man and God, One person in Two Natures. See John Joseph, *Muslim-Christian relations and inter-Christian Rivalries in the Middle East*, pp. 2, 5; al-Biruni, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, tr. Edward Sachau (Lahore: Hijra International Publishers 1983), p. 282.

are different narrations. According to some, Muslim Caliphs provided religious and social protection to their non-Muslim subjects, and they enjoyed a better life under Muslims as compared to Byzantine Empire, their co-religionists.⁹⁴ On the other hand, there are some examples of maltreatment meted out by Muslim rulers as happened in Palestine or Egypt⁹⁵ or in Armenia.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the overall condition of Christians was that they enjoyed a peaceful life a fact that can be verified from their social conditions. Christians were active members of the community among them were doctors, historians, poets, translators, philosophers and teachers, due to their high caliber they enjoyed social respect.⁹⁷ Moreover, Christians and Muslims both were engaged in religious discourses and theological debates,⁹⁸ detail of it will follow in the coming section but this in itself is a sign of freedom of religious expression. The situation is well stated by Lawrence E. Browne in his *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia* who quoted Eliyya of Nasibia (1008-1049) which says:

“What we believe concerning the Muslims is that their obedience and love impresses us more than the obedience of people of all other religions and kingdoms that are opposed to us, whether we are in their land or not, and whether they treat us well or

⁹⁴ See Rashā Hamūd al-Ṣabāh, *al-Islam wa al-Masihiyah fi al-Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā Alam al-Fikar*, vol.15, issue 3, p 702; Aziz Suryal Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity* (London: 1968), pp. 193-194.

⁹⁵ In 1009 Caliph al-Hākim passed fanatical orders against Christians in Palestine and Egypt. Nearly 3000 churches were destroyed and many were forced to convert to Islam. See W.H.C. Frend, *Religion in the Middle East*, ed. M.A.C. Warren and A.J. Arberry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984), vol.1, p. 249; John Joseph, *Muslim-Christian relations and inter-Christian Rivalries in the Middle East*, p.13.

⁹⁶ See James Thayer Addison, *The Christian Approach to the Moslem A Historical Study* (New York: Columbia University Press 1942), p. 21.

⁹⁷ For detail of Christian condition see, Rafā'il Bābo Ishaq, *Aḥwāl Naṣrā Baghdād fi 'Ahd al-Khilāfah al-'Abbāsiyyah* (Baghdad: Maṭba'ah Shafi' 1960); Samir Khalil, “al-Turāth al-'Arabī al-Masiḥī al-Qadīm wa Tafā'uluḥu ma' al-Fikr al-'Arabī al-Islāmī, *Islamochristiana*, 8, (1982), p. 19; Samir Khalil, *Ancient Arabic Christian Thought*, *Theological Review The Near East school of Theology* vol. 2 (1982), pp. 173-174; James Thayer Addison, *The Christian Approach to the Moslem A Historical Study*, pp. 23-24.

⁹⁸ J. Windrow Sweetman in *Islam and Christian Theology* covered in detail the theological debates going on in these two religions over the centuries. For Rashā Hamūd al-Ṣabāh Christians were under political, cultural and religious pressure therefore they initiated the debate; see *al-Islam wa al-Masihiyyah fi al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā*, p. 85; Lawrence E. Browne, *The Eclipse Of Christianity in Asia*, (Cambridge: University Press 1933), pp. 111-112.

not. And that is because the Muslims regard it as a matter of religion and duty to protect us, to honour us, and to treat us well. And whosoever of them oppresses us, their Master, i.e. their Prophet, will be his adversary on the day of resurrection.”⁹⁹

Coming to the intellectual life, despite the political instability there was intellectual development as fourth century is known as the Golden Age for Muslims and this wave of progress continued without any change in the following centuries as well.¹⁰⁰

As stated above Abbasids Caliphate was politically at its ebb and the power was with Sultāns. They worked for the betterment of the state and people, and took various measures to this effect, for example establishment of madāris, libraries, hospitals, roads or to gift large sum of money to scholars.¹⁰¹ Whether behind it was the true spirit of serving people or it was a sign of power, is not our concern here but it helped in general uplift of people and enhanced in turn the intellectual growth. From the other factors which worked in the uplift was that different ethnic and religious groups were living together which naturally resulted in exchange of ideas;¹⁰² moreover translation of ancient sciences from different languages opened new vistas for thought.¹⁰³ In addition, as different schools of thought were already established by this time they used these ‘Ulūm in one way or the other to defend their own positions.¹⁰⁴ Added to these factors was the non-biased attitude of the early Saljuq rulers which was a decisive element in cultural and intellectual development in their times. Although Muslim heritage of this

⁹⁹ Laurence E. Browne, *The Eclipse Of Christianity in Asia*, p. 48; John Joseph, *Muslim-Christian relations and inter-Christian Rivalries in the Middle East* p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ For some there was intellectual stagnation and decline in this period as only Sunni school of thought prevailed. However, the truth is contrary to it; intellectual production of this age is as rich as of the previous century and secondly replacement of Shi‘i thought by Sunnis is a sign of change and not of stagnation or static ness.

¹⁰¹ See M.M. Sharif, *Muslim Thought its Origin and Achievement* (Lahore: Ashraf Press 1951), pp. 34-39; ‘Abd al-Majīd Badawī, *al-Tārīkh al-Siyāsī wa al-Fikrī*, p. 20.

¹⁰² See Adam Mez, *al-Ḥadārah al-Islāmiyyah fi al-Qarn al-Rābi’ al-Hijrī*, tr. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥādī (Cairo: Maṭba‘ah lajnah al-Ta’līf wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr 1366/1947), vol.1, p. 87.

¹⁰³ See Ahmad Amīn, *Zuhr al-Islām* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah 1962), vol.2, p.11.

¹⁰⁴ See Sa‘īd Marīzan Asaīrī, *al-Ḥayāt al-‘Ilmiyyah fi ‘Irāq fi al-‘Aṣr al-Saljuqī* (Makkah al-Mukarramah: n.p., 1987), p. 153.

era is very rich¹⁰⁵ and to go in details is out of our scope, so here the discussion will be limited to the study of other religions with a focus on Christianity and the role of al-Madāris al-Nizāmiyyah in this regard, to which al-Ghazālī was affiliated. Let us first take al-Nizāmiyyah, its establishment and functioning and later come back to the study of religions.

AL-MADĀRIS AL-NIZĀMIYYAH

Nizām ul Mulk,¹⁰⁶ wazīr of Alap Arsalān and Malik Shāh, founded a chain of institutions known as al-Madāris al-Nizāmiyyah. They were located in Nishāpūr, Iṣfahān, Baṣrah, Harāt, Balkh, Mūṣal and Baghdad.¹⁰⁷

These institutions have a unique place in the history of educational institutions. They resemble present day universities with huge buildings, which were fully funded by Nizām ul Mulk. This was for the first time that the government took the financial responsibility that covered salaries of teachers, staff, and scholarship for students, free education and lodging for them.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ See for details Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Lahore: Suhail Academy 1983); Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of The Arabs* (Cambridge: University Press 1969); M.M. Sharif, *Muslim Thought its Origin and Achievement*; Hasan Ibrāhīm Hasan, *Tārikh al-Islām*; Sa'id Marṭzan, *al-Hayāt al-Ilmiyyah fi 'Irāq fi al-'Aṣr al-Saljūqī*, pp. 343-504; 'Umar Farūkh, *Tārikh al-Fikar al-'Arabī* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijārī lil Ṭibā'ah 1382/1962), pp. 319-355; 'Alī 'Abd Allāh al-Difā', *al-Mujiz fi al-Turāth al-Ilmi* (Toronto: 1979), pp. 80, 133, 139, 146, 155. Some of the prominent scholars of this era are Ibn Miskawaih (d. 421/1030), al-Bīrūnī (d. 440 H.), Nāsir Khusro (d. 481/1008), 'Umar al-Khayyām (d. 517 H.), Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), Ibn Bājja (d. 1138), Ibn Haytham (d. 430/1039).

¹⁰⁶ Al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Iṣḥāq b. al-'Abbās Abū 'Alī Nizām ul Mulk al-Ṭūsī al-Shāfi'i was born in 408 H. in Ṭūs. He was minister for Alap Arsalān and Malik Shāh for 29 years until his death in 485 H. He was a learned man, and a Sufī who greatly respected scholars and encouraged discussions in his court. He also erected many Mosques, *Madāris*, *Khaniqāhs* (Sufī lodgings) in his empire. See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, vol. 4, pp. 309-328; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, vol. 12, pp. 149-150; Ibn Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi al-Tārikh*, vol.10, p. 204-209; Ibn 'Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, vol. 3, pp. 373-377; Ibn Khalikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, vol.2, pp. 128-131.

¹⁰⁷ See 'Abd al-Razzāq Kānpūrī, *Nizām ul Mulk Ṭūsī* (Kānpūr: 1329 H.), pp. 666-672; Aḥmad Shalabī, *Tārikh Ta'līm wa Tarbiyyat Islamiyyah*, tr. Muḥammad Ḥusain Khān Zuberī (Lahore: Idārah thaqāfat Islamiyyah 1963), pp. 116-118; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 4, p. 313; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, vol. 12, p. 150,

¹⁰⁸ See Sa'id Nafisi, "al-Madrasah al-Nizāmiyyah fi Baghdad", *Majallah al-Majma' al-Ilmi al-'Irāqī*, tr. Ḥussayn 'Alī Maḥfūz vol.3, no. 1, (1373/1954), pp. 143-144; Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥīm Ghanīmah, *Tārikh al-Jāmi'āt al-Kubrā* (Taṭwūn: Dār al-Ṭibā'ah al-Maghribiyyah 1953), p. 77.

Al-Nizāmiyyah of Baghdad was most famous among them although chronologically it was after al-Nizāmiyyah of Nishāpūr. Its construction started in 457 H. and was inaugurated in 459 H. It was situated on the eastern side of Baghdad and had big lecture halls, library, hostels, stores and shops. The cost of construction was two hundred thousand Dīnār with annual expenditure of fifteen thousand Dīnār, with enrollment of six thousand students.¹⁰⁹

The academic structure was composed of al-Ustādh (Professor), al-Muʿid (Assistant to professors), and al-Wuʿāz (Preachers). To maintain the decorum of the institution teachers wore black gown and used elevated chairs while teaching.¹¹⁰ Medium of instruction was Arabic and the curriculum comprised of pure Islamic traditional disciplines i.e. Arabic language and literature, al-Qurʾān and its ʿUlūm, Ḥadīth and its ʿUlūm, fiqh, mathematics etc..¹¹¹

OBJECTIVES OF AL-NIZĀMIYYAH

Nizām ul Mulk was a God gifted man, with qualities that are rare in administrators. Piety and sound scholarship were the underlying elements of his personality and were clearly reflected in his politics.¹¹² When he came to power there was instability in the country, Nizām ul Mulk realized it and took measures, which could bring peace and stability. From it was educational reform through the establishment of al-Nizāmiyyah. As discussed earlier major reason of this chaos was sectarianism that was politically charged. Before coming of Saljuqs the alliance between al-Muʿtazālī, al-Shīʿī and al-Ismaʿīlī thought, which were spreading rapidly, weakened Sunnis. Al-Ismaʿīlī preachers were spreading their teachings among common people and Saljuqs were to face these

¹⁰⁹ See Saʿīd Nafīsī, "al-Madrasah al-Nizāmiyyah fi Baghdad", p. 147; ʿAbd al-Razāq Kānpūrī, *Nizām ul Mulk Tūsī*, pp. 647-649, 653; G. Le. Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate*, p. 297.

¹¹⁰ See Saʿīd Nafīsī, "al-Madrasah al-Nizāmiyyah fi Baghdad", p. 149.

¹¹¹ See Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Rahīm Ghanīmah, *Tārīkh al-Jāmiʿāt al-Kubrā*, p. 78.

¹¹² For detail, see his book *Sīyāsat Nāmah* tr. Muḥammad Munawwar (Lahore: Reading Printing Press 1961).

fronts.¹¹³ Nizām al-Mulk used the tool of “education” to reduce these tendencies although it was a long term programme but had far reaching effects. The aim of al-Nizāmiyyah was to produce scholars who could teach masses about al-Bāṭaniyyah and revive Sunni thought,¹¹⁴ and play an important role in society by taking over the key positions.¹¹⁵ To achieve these aims Nizām ul Mulk planned that these Madāris should be established in the main cities and scholars from Shāfi‘ite, Asha‘rite school only were allowed to teach. Nizām ul Mulk himself used to interview candidates for all appointments even for the positions of lecturers or the preachers in order to check their ability.¹¹⁶

APPRAISAL OF AL-NIZĀMIYYAH

To determine how far al-Nizāmiyyah was able to achieve the objectives and what impact did it have on society, we need to look in some historical facts.

It was a successful institution in terms of qualitative and quantitative production; large numbers of scholars were attached to it either as teachers or as students. It was the efforts of these scholars that it could stand firmly in front of Shī‘ite wave and could strengthen Sunnī religion.¹¹⁷ To be affiliated with it was considered an honor therefore some scholars even changed their Madhab in order to be part of it; such decisions must have been very hard when Madhabiyyah was very strong.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ See Muḥammad Ghanīmah, *Tārīkh al-Jāmi‘āt al-Kubrā*, pp. 71-72.

¹¹⁴ Al-Ghazālī wrote books to refute al-Bāṭiniyyah from them is *Fadā‘h al-Bāṭiniyyah*.

¹¹⁵ See ‘Abd al-Majīd, *al-Tārīkh al-Siyāsī wa al-Fikrī*, p. 179; Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ghanīmah, *Tārīkh al-Jāmi‘āt al-Kubrā*.

¹¹⁶ See ‘Abd al-Majīd, *al-Tārīkh al-Siyāsī wa al-Fikrī*, pp. 181-183.

¹¹⁷ Al-Nizāmiyyah produced dozens of scholars of great repute who served the society, fought against the deviated tendencies and worked as teachers, judges and in other capacities, for detail see Nour Allah Kasā‘ī, *Madāris Nizāmiyyah wa Tāthīrāt Ilmī wa Ijtamā‘ī An* (Tahrān: Mu’ssah Intishārāt Amīr Khabīr 1374 H.).

¹¹⁸ For example Abū al-Fataḥ Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Tarkān Ibn al-Hamāmi (d.518/1124) was Hanbalī and converted to Shafi‘ite school, he studied with Abū Bakr al-Shāshī and al-Ghazālī then was appointed as teacher, see Ibn Juwzī, *al-Muntazim*, vol.9 p. 251, similarly al-Mubārak b. al-Mubārak al-Wāsiṭi al-Naḥūi (d.612/1215) and al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Yahyā b. al-Muzafar (d.639/1241) converted to Shafi‘ite school from Hanbalite, see *Mir‘āt al-Zamān* vol. 8 p. 573; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3 p. 252.

As already said that al-Nizāmiyyah achieved great results due to the policies it adopted which were conducive in those circumstances. However, it might be objected that it was the power of Nizām ul Mulk that was used to implement his Madhhab. In that case, it would be political authority behind the success of al-Nizāmiyyah.

Badawī in his book *al-Tārikh al-Siyāsī wa al-Fikrī* considered the factors involved, and for him it was Asha'rite school only that could face the challenge at that time. They followed a moderate methodology between al-tanzīh and al-tashbih without ignoring the place of reason. Whereas Hanbalites and Malikites were too literalists and therefore were unable to answer back Bāṭinism. Hanāfite on the other hand mostly followed Mu'tazilite thought in these provinces and were more rationalists. So it was Asha'rites who had the proper means to face the situation. Secondly, there was a common acceptance of these two schools of Fiqh and faith together in the provinces of Khurāsān, Irāq and Persia, which bore fruits to the efforts of Nizām ul Mulk.¹¹⁹

Whereas for Bulliet there were some other reasons, it was due to political reasons that Nizām ul Mulk adopted this policy. Al-Kundarī a rival of Nizām ul Mulk was powerful figure and followed Hanafite school, in order to reduce his strength Nizām ul Mulk played with card of madhabiyyah. It was only by establishing Shāfi'ite faction that the power of al-Kundarī could be minimized and a political stability could be attained.¹²⁰ Whatever the reasons might be but there is no doubt that alliance of Shāfi'ite and Asha'rite schools brought the required results. Nevertheless, the objection raised by Bulliet cannot be ignored that was this alliance in turn was not responsible for keeping the spirit of Madhabiyyah, which was destructive? Particularly what happened in al-Nizāmiyyah in 469/1076 was because of madhabiyyah and aşabiyyah, which resulted

¹¹⁹ See 'Abd al-Majid, *al-Tārikh al-Siyāsī wa al-Fikrī*, pp. 184-185; Muḥammad 'Abdul Ghanimah, *Tārikh al-Jāmi'āt al-Kubrā*, pp. 73-75.

¹²⁰ See Richard W. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, pp. 72-73.

in bloodshed.¹²¹ Although Nizām ul Mulūk was not biased and made it crystal clear that, the purpose of the institution is to serve knowledge and not to divide people.¹²² Still there was no justification for closing the doors on students and teachers of other factions unless they converted to Shāfi'ite school, and it was enough to keep the fire aflame. Caliph al-Mustansir (d. 640 H.) felt the need of bridging the gap between the madhāhib and to inculcate in people the spirit of respect for others. Therefore, he established a madrasah near al-Nizāmiyyah in Baghdad, known as al-Mustansariyah in 631 hijra. The hallmark of this institution was that it was open for four schools of fiqh.¹²³ It was bigger than al-Nizāmiyyah and for each faction there was a mosque and a teaching hall. Al-Nizāmiyyah started to decline and to lose its position after al-Mustansariyah was established.¹²⁴

Within al-Nizāmiyyah there were some strong personalities who raised their voices against al-taqlid and al-ta'ssub;¹²⁵ al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī¹²⁶ were on the forefront to condemn it, both rejected al-taqlid. Their criticism of al-ta'ssub was not only directed towards Muslims but towards Jews and Christians as well. In their view, it blinds human perception and leads people astray. Jews and Christians before Muslims fell in the same pitfall so it is a sickness, which needs a cure. Apart from the individual voices, it must be said that if al-Nizāmiyyah, overall, had worked for this objective it must have produced far better results.

¹²¹ Abū Naṣr b. al-Qushairī (d.514/1120) delivered a lecture in al-Nizāmiyyah in which he condemned Ḥanbalite School and as a reaction to it, fight broke between two factions and people were killed; see Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, vol.12, p.122.

¹²² See Ibn Kathīr, *ibid.*, vol. 12, p. 125; Ibn al-Jwāzī, *al-Muntazim*, vol.8, p. 312

¹²³ See Sa'īd Nafīsī, *al-Madrasah al-Nizāmiyyah fī Baghdad*, p. 147, and the four famous schools are i.e. *al-Shāfi'iyyah*, *al-Mālikīyyah*, *al-Ḥanafīyyah*, *al-Ḥanābilah*.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹²⁵ It was Aṣabiyyah and extremeness, which were condemned; they were trying to remind people of the noble character of the founding figures of these schools towards others and the respect they showed to each other. At the same time, condemning *al-Taqlid* should not be mixed up with *Antāmadhhabiyyah* of modern age.

¹²⁶ See, Al-Ghazālī, *Munqiz min al-Dalāl*, pp. 13-14.

The curriculum of al-Nizāmiyyah focused on traditional religious disciplines, with less importance to pure or social sciences, whereas Muslim contribution in sciences was very rich in this period. Caliph al-Mustanshir tried to compensate for this deficiency in his institute, where medicine was an important subject of the curriculum with a clinic for the treatment of the sick.¹²⁷

Al-Nizāmiyyah of Baghdad survived until the beginning of the ninth century hijra; the rest of them disappeared during wars and with the decline of Saljuq power.¹²⁸ Thus, al-Nizāmiyyah was one of the great institutions, which served the ummah for generations and enriched the Muslim civilization. With this, we move to its role in the study of other religions, but before that let us cast a glance upon the nature and characteristics of this study generally.

STUDY OF 'RELIGIONS' AND THE ROLE OF AL-NIZĀMIYYAH

Study of other religions as a discipline among Muslims developed under 'ilm al Kalām, with the title of *ʿIlm al-Adyān* or *Milal wa Niḥal*¹²⁹ (nations and creeds), outside Kalām; Muslim exegetes also dealt with it in their explanation of the Qur'ānic verses.¹³⁰

Leaving the work of exegetes, here only the specialized works on al-Adyān would be dealt with and Muslims produced vast literature in form of dialogues and books.¹³¹

¹²⁷ See, 'Abd al-Majid, *al-Tārikh al-Siyāsī wa al-Fikrī*, p. 244; Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥīm Ghanīmah, *Tārikh al-Jāmi'āt al-Kubrā*, pp. 167-172.

¹²⁸ See 'Abd al-Majid, *al-Tārikh al-Siyāsī wa al-Fikrī*, p.228; Aḥmad Shalabi, *Tārikh Ta'lim wa Tarbiyyat Islāmiyyah*, p. 119; 'Abd al-Razāq Kānpūrī, *Nizām al-Mulk Tūsi*, pp. 644-645.

¹²⁹ In the beginning, no proper name appeared for it as we have Fiqh or Tafsīr. It appeared on the title for the books of Ibn Ḥazm and al-Shahristānī, it was called *ʿIlm al-Idiyān* by Akūwān al-ṣafā' see their *Rasāʾil* (Qum: Maktab al-'Ilām al-Islāmī 1405 H.), vol.4, p. 16. For Arabs before Islam too it was one of the important disciplines. See al-Shahristānī, *al-Millal wa al-Niḥal*, ed. Muḥammad b. Faṭḥ Allah Badarān (Cairo: Maktabah al-Injilwu al-Miṣriyyah 1364), vol.2, p. 248.

¹³⁰ Although the Holy Qur'ān is not a book of Comparative Religions but it talks about different religions and philosophies particularly Judaism and Christianity therefore study of other religions has its place in Tafasīr. There are some studies done on Tafasīr for example see 'Abd al-Majid Sharafī, "al-Masīhiyyah fī Tafasīr al-Ṭabarī lil Qur'ān al-Karīm, *Islamochristiana* Roma 6, (1980), pp. 105-148; Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qurānic Christians an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: University Press, n.d.), but this area needs further study.

¹³¹ See for detail Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Tārikh al-Jadal* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī 1980); Moritz Steinschneider, *Adab al-Jadal wa al-Difā' fi al-'arabiyyah bayna al-Muslimīn wa al-Masīhiyyīn wa al-Yahūd*,

Regarding the nature of studies whether by Muslims, Christians or Jews in Middle Ages it had certain distinctive features as compared to the modern age, firstly the issues discussed were theological and secondly the style of writing was polemical. Polemicists relied on Aristotelian logic and on philosophical-dialectics, which was dominant in al-Muta'zili writings.¹³² Among the issues were Trinity, Divinity of Jesus, Incarnation and so forth. In scriptural studies it was the signs of prophethood of Muḥammad (peace be upon him), with the nature of revelation, *naskh* (abrogation), corruption of the text, and lack of reliable transmission.¹³³ Apart from it, from Christian side there were also Biblical translations, commentaries, codification of jurisprudence, and religious history.¹³⁴

In L. E. Browne's opinion, polemical dialogue and theological issues are outdated and worthless in the modern age.¹³⁵ No doubt, religious studies in the modern age try to avoid as much as possible polemical or theological trend but the polemical dialogue in the middle ages had certain reasons behind it, which were political and religious in nature. As commented by Rashā Ḥamūd al-Ṣabāḥ Christians after their defeat and the establishment of Muslim empire felt insecure. In order to defend their religion they started to raise objections against Islam and their writings carried the polemical color. Later the wars between Muslims and Christians in tenth and eleventh century too had an emotional impact on Christians living in Muslim territories, the desire for Christian

tr. Saḥāḥ 'Abdul al-'Azīz Maḥjūb Idrīs, revised by Muḥammad Khlifah Ḥasan (Cairo: al-Maṭābi' al-Amīriyah 2005).

¹³² See Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions A Historical Survey*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (Oxford: University Press 1999), p. 49; Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: University Press 1980), p. 1; Samir Khalil, Ancient Arabic Christian Thought, *Theological Review The Near East school of Theology*, p. 174.

¹³³ See J. Windrow Sweetman, *Islam And Christian Theology*, part one vol. 1, pp. 66-83; Laurence E. Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia*, pp. 109-124; David Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam Abū 'Isā al-warrāq's 'Against the Trinity'* ed. & tr. David Thomas (New York: Cambridge University Press 1992), pp.31-50; Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (London: Macmillan Press 1991), pp.43-49.

¹³⁴ See Samir Khalil Samir, *Religion, learning and science in the Abbasid period*, ed. M. J. L. Joung, J.D.Latham and R.B. Serjeant (Cambridge: University Press 1990), pp. 451-454

¹³⁵ As mentioned by Laurence E. Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia*, p. 113.

victory appeared in form of strong polemical writings against Islam. Apart from political reasons, as said above Christian were translators of ancient philosophy, so Aristotelian logic appeared in their writings against Islam. On the other hand Muslims too in their refutations used the same weapon and tone while writing on Christianity.¹³⁶ Thus, it was the political and social situation in the middle ages, which resulted in polemic trend. Further, each epoch has its own trends and ways of expression and perhaps it is wrong to judge a particular era with the standards of another age as it might lead to biasness.

Added to above is, the style of writing is not a criterion to judge the worth of scholarship. In fact, the worth of scholarship depends on soundness of its methodology. Muslim scholarship, though it falls under polemics but is at the same time best example of new and sound methodology in the study of other religions. To the extent that the scriptural studies by Muslims, as will be discussed shortly, is counted by Waardenburg as the initial stage of modern Biblical studies. If polemics is totally worthless than where to place these works and on what criteria to judge them is a question which needs answer.

Similarly, to consider theological issues as non-significant for the modern age must be considered again. Faith is the basis of any religion and study of religions without looking at these differences would be worthless and superficial. The need in religious studies in the modern age is to take in consideration the theological differences so that each can understand the other in a better way and can establish good relationships. Modern dialogue aims at establishment of good understanding and relationship but avoids talking on theological differences and thus ends up with fruitless results.

Coming back to middle ages among Muslims some of the renowned names were, like Ibn Ḥazm (d.1064) who wrote *al-Fiṣal fi al-Milal wa l-hwā' wa al-Niḥal*. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabār (d. 415 H.) wrote *al-Mughnī*. Al-Shahristānī (d.1153) *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, al-

¹³⁶ Rashā Ḥamūd al-Ṣabāḥ, "al-Islam wa al-Masiyhīah fi al-Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā" *Ālam al-Fikr*, pp. 703-713.

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Birūnī *Kitāb al-Hind* and *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah* and al-Juwaynī (d. 478 H.) *Shifā' al-Ghalīl*.

Among Christians who wrote in defense of their religion or to refute objections were Elijah of Nisibia (d. after 440-1/1049),¹³⁷ 'Abū al-Faraj al-Ṭayyib (d.455/1043),¹³⁸ Ibn Zur'ah (d.943/1008),¹³⁹ Ibn al-Atharidī (d.1103) and al-Takrītī of eleventh century who also wrote on astrology, medicine, mathematics, history, theology, spirituality and law.¹⁴⁰ Abū Ṣāliḥ Yu'annis around 1028 C.E. compiled Christian law 'Jumlah' while pointing the fact that Christians do not have Sha'riah like Muslims.¹⁴¹ Apart from it, Christians greatly contributed in translating books of philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy and history from Greek, Syrian and Coptic languages in Arabic. In the academy of *Dar al-Ḥikmah* (House of Wisdom) Yaḥyā b. 'Adī (d.974), Ibn Zur'ah (d.1008), Ibn Khammar (d.1017) and Abū 'Alī al-Samḥ (d.1027) worked as translators and were original thinkers as well.¹⁴²

With these few words on general characteristics, we now move to the scriptural studies in Christianity. Here first we will briefly discuss the Christian sources available with Muslims at that time and than the nature of its study, which as commented by Waardenburg was the initial stage of modern Biblical studies. In what follows concentration will be on the New Testament with a focus on gospels only. Muslims had access to Christian sources either through Christian translations or through the literature produced by converts to Islam. Both these sources were from

¹³⁷ He wrote on theology 'Usūluddīn' in which he discussed *Tawhīd*, *al-Tathlīth*, *al-Tajjassud*, *al-Fidā'*, Prayer, fasting and the authenticity of the Bible, see Louise Shīghū al-Yasū'ī, *Kitāb al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyyah li Katabah al-Nasrāniyyah* (Beirut: Maṭba'ah al-Ābā' al-Yasū'yyin 1924), p. 49

¹³⁸ He had commentary on whole Bible with introduction on Gospels, in theology he wrote on *Tawhīd*, *al-Tathlīth*, *al-Uqnūm*, *al-Ṭabī'ah*, *Fiqh al-Nasrāniyyah* and on councils, *ibid.*, p. 22.

¹³⁹ He wrote on *al-Tawhīd*, *al-Tathlīth*, *al-Ittibād*, refutation on Judaism and Islam and on Gospels, see Louise Shīghū, *Kitāb al-Makhtūṭāt al-'Arabiyyah li Katabah al-Nasrāniyyah*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁰ For details see Louise Shīghū al-Yasū'ī, *ibid.*, p. 20; Samir Khalil Samir, *Religion, learning and science in the Abbasid period*, p. 459.

¹⁴¹ See Samir Khalil Samir, *Religion, learning and science in the Abbasid period*, p. 449.

¹⁴² See, Muḥammad Nāsir b. Omar, *Christian Translators in Medieval Islamic Baghdad: The Life and Works of Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī*, *Hamdard Islamicus*, vol. xx, (July-September), No. 3, p. 48; M.M. Sharif, *Muslim Thought its Origin and Achievement*, p. 32.

mainstream Christianity and from minor and heretical sects as well.¹⁴³ These translations were mentioned in the early writings of Ibn al-Nadīm al-Baghdādī (d. 380 H.),¹⁴⁴ al-Ya'qubī (d. 284 H.),¹⁴⁵ al-Mas'udī (d. 346 H.),¹⁴⁶ and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 H.).¹⁴⁷ On the other side in modern age worth and genuineness of translations of Christian scriptures has been doubted as the original language from which they were translated is not known, whether it was Greek, Syrian or Coptic. Thus, they are useless for critical studies due to lack of information about their original languages.¹⁴⁸ Following these lines Lazarus, not only questions the worth of Arabic translations prior to thirteenth century of Christian era, she even denies the existence of dated written gospel before that age.¹⁴⁹ In absence of Arabic translation, Muslim authors in her view 'relied mainly on oral transmission from Jews and Christians, and often copied the same verses from each other'.¹⁵⁰ A practice, which continued for generations and in her view they quoted verses of the Bible out of its context.¹⁵¹ Non-availability of Arabic gospels among Muslim authors was one of the reasons of her denial to ascribe *al-Radd* to al-Ghazālī.¹⁵² While investigating for the information about the original tongue from which the Arabic gospel appeared we find that the translation from Greek appeared in eighth

¹⁴³ Ebionites and Elkesaites were Christian sects who were declared heretical by the mainstream Christianity. Ebionites were Jewish Christians and less philosophical in their understanding, they were anti-Trinitarian and considered Jesus to be an angel and prophet but not a divine being. They had their own gospel. See Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p.21; Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1959), p. 35.

¹⁴⁴ See Ibn al-Nadīm al-Baghdādī, *al-Fabrīst* (Egypt: al-Maṭba'ah al-Raḥmāniyyah 1348 H.), pp.32-36.

¹⁴⁵ See Aḥmad b. Abū Ya'qūb, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir 1960), vol.1.

¹⁴⁶ See Abū al-Ḥasan al-Mas'ūdī, *Marūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawāhir* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah 1986), vol. 1.

¹⁴⁷ See Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ummam wa al-Mulūk* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah al-Istiḳāmah 1939), vol.1.

¹⁴⁸ See F. G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Macmillan and Co. 1901), p. 167; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.85.

¹⁴⁹ See Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992), p. 115.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.118.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

century of Christian era and its manuscript is present in Vatican.¹⁵³ Likewise, a translation from Syrian was made between 750 and 850 A.D.,¹⁵⁴ in addition, the Coptic version was most authentic versions among them.¹⁵⁵ According to al-'Amirī Arabic translation was made from Syrian tongue.¹⁵⁶ This information weakens the objection of Lazarus. Moreover, it must be kept in mind that the question of original language raised above is related to canonical¹⁵⁷ books only. Whereas Muslims perceived the issue from the different perspective for them the distinction between canonical and non-canonical was not of paramount importance, rather the important thing was 'the gospel a sacred book possessed by Christians'. In addition to it, there were diverse Christian sects living with Muslims, from mainstream to heretical sects, and each group had its own gospel. For example from the non-canonical literature of heretical sects, which was a good source of information for Muslims there were the Gospel of the Childhood, Protoevangelium of James, Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, Apocalypse of Paul, a sermon by Peter, by Simon, Infancy story of Thomas and so forth.¹⁵⁸ From above it can be concluded that Arabic gospels were easily available among Muslims though with variations but their concern was the 'sacred literature' of Christians and not the problem of original languages and their versions, which is an issue of modern age Christianity. Therefore, it can be concluded that looking in the Middle Ages with the

¹⁵³ It is Vatican, Arab 13, and Museo Borgino-Progaganda. See Cara De Vaux, Indjil, *First Encyclopaedia Of Islam* ed. M. Th. Houtsma, A. J. Wensinck, T. W. Arnold, W. Heffening and E. Levi-Provencal (Leiden: Brill 1987), vol. 11; F. G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p.167; Sidney H. Griffith, Gospel, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill 2002), vol. 2.

¹⁵⁴ See Cara De Vaux, Indjil, *First Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 11.

¹⁵⁵ See F. G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p.157.

¹⁵⁶ See Abū al-Ḥasan al-'Āmirī, *al-'Ilām Bi manāqib al-Islām* ed. Ahmad 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ghurāb (al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-Aṣālah 1988), p. 204.

¹⁵⁷ Canon or Kanon is a Greek word, which originally meant measuring instrument, and metaphorically, it meant rule of action, later it was used for the Bible in the middle of the fourth century of Christian era. Therefore, Canon technically is the list of holy books or list of Church's authoritative books. See Bruce M Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1987), pp. 289-293; William Barclay, *Introducing the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press 1972), p. 19.

¹⁵⁸ See Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 19; Cara De Vaux, Indjil, *First Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 111; J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2005).

question of modern critical studies is itself liable to objection, and undoubtedly it will lead to wrong results. As for Muslims their concern was the 'sacred books' as possessed by Christians and its historical lineage.

Apart from Arabic translations of gospels, another source for Muslims was the literature produced by the converts. These converts knew their previous religions well therefore their information was authentic. Among them was 'Alī Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. 247 H.?) who extensively quoted verses from both Testaments to prove the prophecy of Muḥammad (peace be upon him)¹⁵⁹ or was Samaw'al al-Maghrabī who quoted from Jew scriptures. Although Lazarus considers them biased and a source of misinformation rather than information, but at the same time admits that these converts were well versed in the original languages. Among them, she mentioned, was Samaū'al al-Maghrabī who knew original Hebrew, and Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī who translated from early Syriac tongue and anonymous author of *al-Radd al-Jamīl* from early version of Coptic language.¹⁶⁰ With this acceptance, for converts that they were well versed in original languages of scriptures, Lazarus contradicts her claim, as noted above, that written Arabic translation was not available to Muslim scholarship or was not reliable. Secondly though she denied *al-Radd* to be an authentic work of al-Ghazālī but her comment on his translation, 'and quoted it rather exactly'¹⁶¹ is significant. Moreover, this comment is in sharp contrast to Chaidiac's remarks, as according to him, al-Ghazālī relied on the secondary source and not on Biblical text directly, and in case of direct reading, it was a quick glance.¹⁶² Thus, it becomes clear that Muslims had direct access to Christian literature, with its division of canonical and non-canonical books, which gave them the opportunity to know the differences within Christian

¹⁵⁹ See 'Alī Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī, *al-Dīn wa al-Dawlah* ed. 'Ādil Nuwayhid (Beirut; Dār al-Afāq 1973), pp. 76-188.

¹⁶⁰ See Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*, p. 124.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p.168.

sects and the variations present in their books. Besides, the information provided by the converts further clarified the ambiguities present in it.

With this background of sources present with Muslims, let us turn towards the nature of scriptural studies. As stated above, the debate was revolving around 'distortion' in the books, which is directly linked with its revelatory status and authenticity.

Consensus among Muslims was that corruption took place in Christian books but they disagreed on whether it occurred within text by change of words or in its interpretation.¹⁶³ To identify the nature of 'distortion', the authorship, date and place of writing, original language, variants and transmission of the gospels were discussed which, in modern studies fall under higher criticism. These issues are more or less historically oriented, that is it helps in placing the book in its correct historical perspective. Besides it must be remembered that Muslims discussed these questions within their general studies on Christianity, there was no specific work on Bible emerged in the early phase. It is with *Shifā' al-Ghalil* by al-Juwaynī (d. 478 H.), and later with *al-Radd* by al-Ghazālī that specific books on scriptures appeared. Some of the major issues related to the gospels are as follows.

The Qur'ānic concept of Injil differs from the Christian understanding of 'gospels' in terms of its number and authorship. According to the Holy Qur'ān Injil was revealed to 'Isā (peace be upon him) therefore it was not many in number whereas for Christians gospels were penned down by others after Jesus, they were many and four among them were selected by the church. Undoubtedly, Muslim scholarship was well aware of this difference still they centered their discussion on Christian perception of the gospels. Therefore, we find generally Muslims discussed four Gospels except for 'Alī Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī who in his *al-Dīn wa al-Dawlah* while describing scriptures refers to

¹⁶³ See Jacques Waardenburg, *The Medieval Period in Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions*, pp.42-43.

'gospel' as one book.¹⁶⁴ However, it is not clear from his writing that the idea originated from his previous Christian understanding or from the Holy Qur'ān. About the authorship of the gospels, some Muslims followed the Christian claim that the direct disciples of Jesus authored them. Among them were al-'Āmirī (d. 381 H.),¹⁶⁵ al-Bīrūnī (d. 440 H.),¹⁶⁶ and al-Shahristānī (d. 548 H.),¹⁶⁷ whereas al-Jāhīz (d. 255 H.)¹⁶⁸, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 H.)¹⁶⁹ and al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415 H.)¹⁷⁰ refuted that. For them the authors were not the disciple of Jesus. About the author of Luke, al-Qāḍī mentioned, 'Luke himself admits that he never saw al-kalimah, who is Jesus for them, and met only those who served Jesus'.¹⁷¹ Other than Luke, too there is confusion about authors. No doubt, they are minor hints as compared to modern Biblical studies but still their worth as beginnings in the field cannot be negated. As far as the order of gospels is concerned according to al-Qāḍī it was John, Matthew, Mark and Luke,¹⁷² for al-'Āmirī it was Matthew, Luke, Mark and John,¹⁷³ whereas al-Ya'qūbī, al-Bīrūnī and Ibn Ḥazm arranged them as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.¹⁷⁴ Although al-Ya'qūbī was earlier but it seems that the reliance on canonical arrangement of gospels was late among Muslims.

¹⁶⁴ See 'Alī Ibn Rabban al-Tabarī, *al-Dīn wa al-Dawlah*, p. 101.

¹⁶⁵ See Abū al-Ḥasan al-'Āmirī, *al-'Ilām*, p. 208.

¹⁶⁶ See Al-Bīrūnī, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, p.25.

¹⁶⁷ See al-Shahristānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Nihāl*, ed. Muḥammad b. Faṭḥ Allah Badrān (Cairo: Maktabah al-Injilū al-Maṣriah n. d.), vol.1, p. 202.

¹⁶⁸ See al-Jāhīz, *al-Mukhbār fi al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, ed. Muḥammad Abdullah al-Sharqāwī (Cairo: Dār al-Ṣaḥwah 1984), pp.99-100.

¹⁶⁹ See Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-nihāl* (Egypt: al-Maṭba'ah al-Adabiyyah 1317 H.), vol. 2, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷⁰ See al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbūt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, ed. 'Abd al-Karīm 'Usmān (Beirut: Dār al-'Arabiyyah 1966), p. 155.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 155

¹⁷³ See al-'Āmirī, *'Ilām*, p 208.

¹⁷⁴ See al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol.1, p. 69; Al-Bīrūnī, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, p.25; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fi al-Milal*, vol.2, pp.2-3.

For the date of writing of the gospels, according to Ibn Ḥazm and al-Juwaynī Matthew wrote after nine years of Jesus.¹⁷⁵ Mark according to Ibn Ḥazm came after twenty-two years of Jesus; Luke was after Mark and John after sixty years of Jesus.¹⁷⁶ Al-Juwaynī mentioned two dates for Luke, twenty-two or twenty years, John after thirty years and Mark after twelve years of Jesus,¹⁷⁷ it seems that Ibn Ḥazm and al-Juwaynī relied on different versions.

Another important aspect in the history of gospels was the distinction made between oral transmission phase and its written form. It was pointed by al-Ya'qūbī¹⁷⁸ whereas al-Qāḍī mentioned as,

“It is stories of nation, men and women, of Jews, Romans and others who narrated what was said and done”.¹⁷⁹

After him, Al-Juwaynī explicitly differentiates between the two phases, period of verbal transmission and of written form.¹⁸⁰ For him distortion started in the first period, due to its longer span and carelessness of transmitters.¹⁸¹ To it al-Juwaynī added intentional and unintentional change by authors.¹⁸² Due to uncountable errors and contradictions in scriptures, for majority of the Muslim scholars the gospel authors were not trustworthy.

Original language of the Gospel of Matthew was Hebrew according to Ibn Ḥazm and it was translated in Greek, whereas Mark, Luke and John were written in Greek.¹⁸³

Differences in versions present among Christians is another important aspect in critical studies, which al-Bīrūnī, Ibn Ḥazm and al-Juwaynī discussed. Copy of Bible with

¹⁷⁵ See Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fi al-Milal*, vol.2, pp.2-3; al-Juwaynī, *Shifā al-Ghalīl fi Bayān mā Waqa' fi al-Tawrāt wa al-Injīl min al-Tabdīl*, ed. Michel Allard (Beyrouth: Dar el-Machereq Editeurs 1968), p. 59.

¹⁷⁶ See Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fi al-Milal*, vol.2, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷⁷ See al-Juwaynī, *Shifā al-Ghalīl*, p. 59.

¹⁷⁸ See al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol.1, p. 72.

¹⁷⁹ See al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīt*, pp. 155, 201.

¹⁸⁰ See al-Juwaynī, *Shifā al-Ghalīl*, p. 59, 73.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid. p. 67.

¹⁸³ See Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fi al-Milal*, vol.2, pp. 2-3.

Christians is different from the one with Jews, and the gospels within Christian sects varied.¹⁸⁴ Ibn Ḥazm and al-Juwaynī cited concrete examples of variations in versions present among Jews and Christians, like the lineage of Patriarchs or the coming of al-Masīh is different in these versions.¹⁸⁵

About transmission of the gospels Ibn Ḥazm discussed in detail, with the method of external criticism he proved that the transmission was not safe and early Christians lost the original books due to persecution as he said,

‘For some three centuries they remained under persecution andit was only after Constantine’s conversion that they gathered together and started preaching in public. During the period of persecution God withdrew his al-Injīl except for leaving some verses extant which were to be an evidence against their fabrication’.¹⁸⁶

In addition, as stated above according to al-Juwaynī oral transmission was the first phase in the life of the gospels and it was during this period, due to length of the period and carelessness of transmitters that the gospels underwent change and distortion.¹⁸⁷

Before them, al-Ḥasan bin Ayub, a convert from Christianity leveled this allegation; in his opinion, Christians themselves burnt the books of al-Masīh.

Apart from the above issues al-‘Āmirī noted two trends of theology present in the New Testament; one was of Paul and the other of rest of the disciples. According to him, Pauline teachings differ greatly from the religion taught by disciples.¹⁸⁸

In the end, few words must be added about the methods or tools used by Muslims,¹⁸⁹ al-‘Āmirī defined the principles or the methodology of ‘comparison’ in the study of other religions. For him it must be carried on between ‘equalities’ i.e. faith is to be compared

¹⁸⁴ See Al-Birūnī, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, pp.25-27; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fi al-Milal*, vol.2, pp.6-7; al-Juwaynī, *Shifā al-Ghāṭil*, pp. 47, 49, 53.

¹⁸⁵ See Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fi al-Milal*, vol.2, pp. 7-10; al-Juwaynī, *Shifā al-Ghāṭil*, pp. 51-55.

¹⁸⁶ Ghulam Haider Aasi, *Muslim Understanding of Other Religions* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute 1999), pp. 135-136.

¹⁸⁷ See above footnote no. 185.

¹⁸⁸ See al-‘Āmirī, *Ilām*, p. 208.

¹⁸⁹ See for detail Dīn Muḥammad, “Min Manāḥij ‘Ulāmā’ al-Muslimīn fi Dirāsāt al-Adyān”, *Hawliyyat Al-Jāmi‘ah Al-Islāmiyyah Al-‘Ālamiyyah*, 3(1995), pp. 79-121.

with faith, or *al-aṣl* (principle) in one religion to be compared with *al-aṣl* in another similarly *al-far'* (sub-division) with *al-far'* in another otherwise the results would be unsound,¹⁹⁰ and he practically applied these principles on six major religions. Ibn Ḥazm and al-Juwaynī delineated 'textual criticism' with internal and external criticism.¹⁹¹ Further the method of interpretation of the text i.e. *al-ta'wīl* was also used by al-Juwaynī.¹⁹² Al-Bīrūnī and al-Sharistānī are known as historians of religion, *Kitāb al-Hind* of al-Bīrūnī is still counted as an authentic source on Indian religions and *al-Milal* of al-Sharistānī is one of the earliest encyclopedias on the world religions. From above it becomes clear that the general trend of Muslim scholarship in these studies was rational and critical with exploring new methods for understanding the faith of 'others'. Thus to label them as polemics and to discard them on that basis is not justified particularly in the face of Waardenburgh comments. With this, we now move to the role of al-Nizāmiyyah in the study of 'other religions'.

Among the prominent figures of al-Nizāmiyyah who wrote on Christianity were al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazālī and al-Shahristānī. Here the discussion would center on al-Juwaynī and al-Shahristānī only.

Al-Imām al-Ḥaramīn¹⁹³ al-Juwaynī¹⁹⁴ discussed in his books *al-Shāmil fī Uṣūl al-dīn* and in *Shifā' al-Ghalīl* about the contradictions present in the gospels. In both these books,

¹⁹⁰ See al-'Āmarī, *Ilām*, p. 125.

¹⁹¹ See Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal*; al-Juwaynī, *Shifā' al-Ghalīl*.

¹⁹² See al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. 'Alī Sāmī al-Nashshār (Al-Iskandariyyah: al-Ma'ārif 1969), pp. 607-608.

¹⁹³ *Imām* of the two Holy cities that is Makkah and Madīnah, it was title of honour, which he earned during his stay there for four years.

¹⁹⁴ He was Abū al-Mu'ālī 'Abdul Mālik b. 'Abduillah b. Yūsuf, al-Juwaynī, Dīr ad-dīn, *al-Shāfi'i* was born in 419 H.. One of the great Asha'rite scholar, and unchallenged *Imām* of Shāfi'ite school who studied from his father *fiqh* then from Abū al-Qāsim al-Iskāf al-Isfarā'īni theology and on the death of his father he started to teach in his father's place while he was only 19. Later he taught at al-Nizāmiyyah of Nishāpūr for thirty years. This institution was constructed for him where he remained the sole director until his death. Among his books are *al-Nihāyyah*, *al-Shāmil*, *al-Burhān*, *al-Irshād*, *Ghiyāth al-Ummam*, *Mughīth al-Khalīq*, *al-Risālah al-Nizāmiyyah*. He died in 478 H. On his death his students who were 400 in number broke the pulpit and their pens in mourning. See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, vol. 5, pp. 165; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tabayīn Kadhib al-Muftarī*, pp. 278-285; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubāla'*, vol.

he used a different approach, in the former a very brief discussion at the end of theological refutation of divinity and crucifixion of Jesus; he discussed the interpretation of few problematic verses of the Bible, whereas in the later book, which is of small size, he proved the change in the text through textual criticism.

In *al-Shāmil* he mentioned that there are two types of verses about Jesus, some narrate his human nature whereas others, which are ambiguous prove divinity of Jesus as claimed by Christians. Al-Juwaynī argues that the second category, due to their irrationality, Christians themselves interpret them metaphorically.¹⁹⁵ Thus, as Christians accept the method of al-ta'wil so all the irrationalities must be interpreted to make them in accord with verses clearly disclosing his human nature.¹⁹⁶

The verses, which clearly depict human nature of Jesus are where he cried for help while being taken to the cross, or said that he was sent as a teacher, or that people disown their messengers.¹⁹⁷

Whereas the verses that prove divinity of Jesus, according to Christians are, who saw me saw the father,¹⁹⁸ or that he is the Word of God.¹⁹⁹ Christians, according to al-Juwaynī, do not take such verses literally. The literal explanation means that not the human Jesus but the divine being appeared to people, consequently Christians are forced to interpret these verses metaphorically. Thus, it was the human nature of Jesus, which appeared to people and no one saw his divine aspect. Similarly, Maryam gave birth to a human baby and not to the divine being. Al-Juwaynī argues that as Christians accept the method of interpretation therefore it is possible to interpret non-clear verses rationally. According to him, the word 'father' in the above verse can stand for Jibrā'il instead of God, as he is the far cause in Jesus' birth and was his guide and

18, pp. 468-477; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, vol.3, pp. 167-170; al-Yāfi'i, *Mir'āt al-Jannān*, vol.3, pp. 94-99.

¹⁹⁵ See al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil*, pp. 543-570.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 607-608.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 607.

¹⁹⁸ See John 12:44.

¹⁹⁹ See al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil*, p. 607.

teacher.²⁰⁰ Moreover, the word 'God' for Jesus is a metaphor, which reveals his high status among his followers. As Jesus was the spiritual guide who led his nation towards the right path to save them, being a spiritual guide he was elevated to the status of God in a metaphorical sense, as sun at times is termed as God.²⁰¹ The saying of Jesus where he claimed to be present before Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) again depicts his elevated status and not his divinity as understood by Christians. This interpretation will easily accommodate other such verses present in Injīl, where Sulaymān (peace be upon him) claimed to be present before the creation of the world.²⁰²

According to al-Juwaynī if the text has more than one meaning in that case literal interpretation can lead to contradictions, to avoid it the text must be seen in its contextual and linguistic framework.²⁰³ This will open the boundaries of al-ta'wīl for more possible rereadings within the contextual framework of their books and will eliminate the contradictions of the text. It can be said that it inspired al-Ghazālī who later on elaborated al-ta'wīl in *al-Radd al-Jamīl*.²⁰⁴

Coming to *Shifā' al-Ghālīl* where modern technique of textual criticism is applied, in it al-Juwaynī deals with the issue of al-tabdīl in revealed books of Jews and Christians; according to him they are not in their original form but are changed and corrupted.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 608.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 595.

²⁰⁴ Gabriel Said Reynolds while refuting authenticity of *al-Radd* focused on the dissimilarity of thought in *al-Radd* with *al-Shifā*. According to him, they are different from each other and if al-Ghazālī was the author of *al-Radd* than the influence of al-Juwaynī must have been there. See, "The Ends of al-Radd al-Jamīl and its Portrayal of Christian Sects", *Islamochristiana*, 25 (1999) p. 53. In reality, it is not necessary that the disciple must follow the footsteps of his predecessor; door of disagreement is always open. Still had Reynolds compared it with *al-Shāmīl* he must have realized the link in the thought of al-Ghazālī and al-Juwaynī.

²⁰⁵ There are different expressions in the Holy Qur'ān to express the distortion present in the books of Jews and Christians. For example *al-Tahrīf* (distortion) (2:75), (5:130, 41), *al-Tabdīl* (alteration) (2:59), (7:162), *al-Labs* (confusion) (2:42), (3:71), *Kitmān* (concealment) (2:42), (3:71), *Iltiwā'* (twist) (3:75, 78). What was exactly changed in the scriptures, text or the interpretation, there are two opinions among Muslim scholars. Ibn Ḥazm and al-Juwaynī are among those who favor that the text was altered and for Ibn Khuldūn and al-Ghazālī the interpretation of the text was changed, al-Rāzī combines the two, see

Authenticity of scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is fundamental. Any contradiction or change in them is detrimental to their revelatory status. Al-Juwaynī proved al-tabdīl in their books on the verdict of the Holy Qur'ān. Glad tidings for the arrival of Muḥammad (peace be upon him) was mentioned in their books,²⁰⁶ which they distorted thus turning their books unauthentic.²⁰⁷ Interestingly, for al-Juwaynī, Jews and Christians both deny the charge of distortion but condemn each other of altering the books.²⁰⁸ The point of contention between Jews and Christians are the verses about al-Masīḥ,²⁰⁹ whether al-Masīḥ was Jesus or not, each group claimed that the other has changed the verses related to him.²¹⁰

Al-Juwaynī in this book is precise and selected verses, which accept only literal interpretation for comparison to avoid difference of opinion or possibility of doubt.²¹¹ For example, the verses related to ancestry of Ibrāhīm and Jesus (peace be upon them) or those related to the historical incidences about the life of Jesus. Such historical facts can only be true or false and cannot accept more than one interpretation.²¹² A

Jean Marie Gaudeul and Robert Casper, "Nuṣūṣ Islāmiyyah fī Taḥrīf Ahl al-Kitāb Kutubuhum al-Muqaddasah", *Islamochristiana*, 6 (1980), pp. 61-104.

²⁰⁶ See (61:6), (2:146), (7:157), (6:20).

²⁰⁷ See al-Juwaynī, *Shifā al-Ghalīl*, p. 39.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁰⁹ *Al-Masīḥ* or messiah comes from the Hebrew word which means 'the anointed one', in Hebrew Bible (1 Sam 10:1; Ps 2:2) the term is applied to the Jewish king who on his inauguration was anointed with oil as a sign of God's favour, and was called as 'the Lord's anointed'. After the destruction of Judea in 587 B.C.E. by Babylonians, the term came to mean a future deliverer of Israel. The idea of future deliverer and a ruler who would establish the kingdom in the Promised Land, emerged due to the promise of God with king David that he will always have a descendant on his throne (2 Sam 8:14-16). By the time, books of the New Testament appeared the different understandings of messiah among Jews were present. Some expected a king like David, others considered him a supernatural being who will come as a judge, and for some he would be a priest who would interpret God's law for people. Thus there were various concepts regarding messiah among Jews as for Christians the term appeared late with the writing of the New Testament books, and it seems to be a combination of the idea of the future deliverer with the righteous man who suffers and this was applied to Jesus. See Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press 1997), p. 57.

²¹⁰ See al-Juwaynī, *Shifā al-Ghalīl*, p. 51.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²¹² Al-Juwaynī mentioned that some expounders of gospels tried to resolve the contradiction present in lineage of Jesus by giving two names for all the ancestors of Jesus, which according to him is not worth considering. See *ibid.*, p. 67.

difference in historical narrations for the same event means that either one or both of them are false, thus concluding that a change took place in the books.²¹³

In comparison of texts al-Juwaynī selected different versions of the scriptures present among Jews and Christians.²¹⁴ However, he mentioned that there are non-canonical books too present among Jews of Samaritans or the 'ancient books' with the disciples of Jesus.²¹⁵ Further, he pointed out that comparison with historical documents could bring results that are more accurate.²¹⁶ Due to variations present in these versions, al-Juwaynī questioned the authenticity of the Biblical text. Besides, presence of non-canonical literature raises the question why the need of selecting certain books from many was felt. It simply means that the change appeared in the very early stage. Modern distinction between Synoptic gospels and John is evident in al-Juwaynī's thought. In *Shifā* he compared the first three due to their similarity in content and style whereas in *al-Shāmil* while refuting divinity of Jesus he referred to John, the only gospel which explicitly mentions his divinity. This makes al-Juwaynī near to the contemporary world than to the medieval.

Further proper transmission from generation to generation is essential for the safety of the original text. Presence of variations or contradictions means unsafe transmission of the book. Al-Juwaynī used the method of external criticism and historical study, to prove unsafe transmission of these books. As for Jews, they lost their books in Babylonian destruction. Tawrāt with them was authored by 'Azrā al-Warrāq, an untrustworthy figure in al-Juwaynī's opinion.²¹⁷ Contrary to the status, which 'Azrā enjoys among Jews he was responsible for corrupting the books for political benefits.²¹⁸ On the other side distortion of gospels took place during the long period of oral

²¹³ Ibid., pp. 71, 73, 75.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 67.

²¹⁷ See *Shifā*, p. 45.

²¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 47-49.

transmission,²¹⁹ none of them was written in the life of Jesus, or soon after him, although Christians claim infallibility for their writers.²²⁰

With the use of internal criticism, he proved inconsistency within gospels. Moreover, he differentiated between intentional and unintentional changes present in the books.²²¹ Some of the examples of such changes are lineage of Jesus, which is mentioned twice, in Matthew and in Luke and in both of them, the chain of the ancestors is different, such a mistake cannot be unintentional.²²² In addition, wrong mathematical calculations and genealogical mistakes are present in Matthew.²²³ These and many more examples prove that they are changed and are not in their original form.

The other great figure of al-Nizāmiyyah was al-Shahristānī²²⁴ who is famous for *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*.²²⁵ It is a concise encyclopedia on the history of religions and Muslim sects. The book is significant because it provides principles to develop historical research in study of religions. Al-Shahristānī is therefore among the pioneers in this field but like all foundational works, it too has certain flaws. Apart from Muslim sects, various religions discussed by him are for example Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, religion of Arabs prior to Islam, worship of Idols, stars, spirits and philosophies. His methodology is historical descriptive and non-judgmental²²⁶ however, criticism of other religions or sects²²⁷ is not absent from his work.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 57.

²²⁰ Ibid., pp. 57, 83.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 67.

²²² Ibid., pp. 59-67.

²²³ Ibid., pp. 61-63.

²²⁴ Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm b. Aḥmad Abū al-Faḥ al-Shahristānī was a famous theologian and historian, who taught in al-Nizāmiyyah of Baghdad for three years from 510 to 513 H.

²²⁵ It has been translated in many modern languages for example in German, English, Turkish, Persian, and Urdu and has been published many times from different places like Rome, London, Istanbul, Bombay, Lahore, and Cairo. See al-Shahristānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, ed. Muḥammad b. Faḥ Allāh Badrān, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Anjūlū al-Miṣruyyah n.d.), vol. 1, p. 13 (Introduction).

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

²²⁷ For example see *ibid.*, p. 153, 163, 194, 195, 202

He is not chronological but is thematic in historical presentation and divided the world religions in two major divisions; those who received revelation and those who did not. Religions with revelation are given preference over those who follow their own opinions in his arrangement.²²⁸ Therefore Abrahamic faiths appear first than those who had some form of revelation i.e. Zoroastrians or al-Ḥunafā' and in the end are philosophers, Idol worshippers and Hindus, as they are the people who follow their whims and desires.²²⁹

It is not important for a book of history to follow chronological order, the division of religions can be thematic, or geographical or based on ethnicity. As far, the religions, which received revelation al-Shahristānī, limited them to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This perhaps reflects partial understanding for the concept of revelation. He excluded many nations from receiving any form of revelation like Greeks, Hindus and others.²³⁰ This position of al-Shahristānī cannot be justified in the face of the Qur'ānic verses: "and a guide to every people." (13:7), "We never chastise, until We sent forth a Messenger." (17:15), "not a nation there is, but there has passed away in it a warner." (35:24).

Further, al-Shahristānī discussed the emergence of religions and their division in sects²³¹ the reason behind it is the difference among people to stick to reason or to revelation. This difference started from the times of creation of Adam when Satan discarded the order of God to bow down before Adam. He refused using reason and claimed his superiority over Adam for being created from fire, and stood against the command of

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 42-43.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Muslim theologians through out their history had declared Hindus as deniers of revelation for reasons, which need to be checked again. Muhammad Modassir Ali had revisited this position of Muslim understanding. According to him, Hinduism is a religion, which has strong religious foundations with enough space for concepts like revelation in it; but at the same time, there is a vast difference in religious terminology and notions present in it and Islam. Once these misconceptions, which passed on in Muslim theology, are corrected it becomes quite evident that Hindus recieved revelation. See Muhammad Modassir Ali, 'The Concept of Revelation and Prophethood in Hinduism: A Critical Islamic View' (Master's Thesis), Islamabad: International Islamic University, 1420/1999.

²³¹ See al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, pp. 20-21.

God. Through the story, al-Shahristānī highlighted how pure reason can mislead unless revelation keeps it within chains.²³² Although al-Shahristānī presented the story in form of an interesting dialogue between God and Satan, however it may be questioned that is it the only reason for differences among nations? Perhaps he was taken over by the prevailing controversies of al-Mu'tazilah and al-Ashā'irah.

Another distinguished feature of al-Milal is that it provides definitions for basic terminologies in his introduction for example *Dīn*, *Millah*, *Nihlah*, *Islam* and so forth. *Dīn*, according to him, is not only a religious term but it has social and political dimensions as well which he makes clear through the terms *Millah*, *Minhāj* and *Shir'ah* and their relation with it.²³³ In this way, al-Shahristānī pointed out how religious ideas influence the institutions of society and in turn is influenced by them. In modern studies it is an important aspect of religious studies as now religion is studied through the perspective of sociology, psychology and the role it plays in politics.

Concluding the above discussion it may be noted that al-Nizāmiyyah played a dominant role in the field of education, in deed it was an effective tool to resist religious deviations and fanaticism by inculcating moderate tendencies. Moreover, it produced scholars of high repute who are famous not only among Muslims but are recognized worldwide, their works particularly on other religions are great asset.

²³² Ibid., pp. 23-27.

²³³ Ibid., pp. 44-47.

BULTMANN

LIFE AND THE BACKGROUND

LIFE OF RUDOLF BULTMANN

Rudolf Bultmann is one of the most influential figures of the post Reformation Protestant theology and a leading scholar of Biblical studies particularly of the New Testament. His writings have a great significance both in terms of quantity and in terms of quality as he wrote extensively, and dealt with various issues of theology and Biblical studies. He is among those few whose writings stirred a debate in scholarly circles within his life. A brief introduction of this great personality as outlined by him in his autobiography is as follows.

Rudolf Karl Bultmann¹ was born on August 20, 1884 in Wiefelstede,² which was at the time of his birth a village of the grand duchy of Oldenburg.³ He was the eldest son of Arthur Bultmann and Helene. The family for generations served German Evangelical Church in Lutheran tradition as pastors. His grandfather was a missionary to Africa and was born in Freetown, Sierra Leone in West Africa and his maternal grandfather was a pastor in Baden. Therefore, he grew up in a family of deep religious inclinations. His father gradually moved towards Protestant liberalism and led his son to join the annual gatherings of 'The Friends of Die Christliche Welt';⁴ this change had a

¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Autobiographical Reflections in Existence and Faith*, tr. & selected by Schubert M. Ogden (London & Glasgow: Collins 1973), Second Impression, pp. 335-341; Roger Johnson, *Rudolf Bultmann interpreting faith for the modern era* (London: Collins 1987), pp. 9-10; David L. Edwards, *Rudolf Bultmann: Scholar of Faith*, www.religion-online.org. (accessed on 11/9/2008); Matt McLaughlin and Rob Smid, art. Rudolf Karl Bultmann in *Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology*, [http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_760_bultman.n.htm#Rudolf Karl Bultmann \(1884-1976\)](http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_760_bultman.n.htm#Rudolf%20Karl%20Bultmann%20(1884-1976)) (accessed on 11/9/2008). According to Roger Johnson, there is no biography of Bultmann, and the reason for it as stated by him is, 'Bultmann was an extraordinarily modest man who did not wish to call attention to himself'. However, it is a virtue in a man but it led to lack of information about this great man. See *Rudolf Bultmann interpreting faith for the modern era*, p. 332.

² Wiefelstede is a municipality in the Ammerland district in Lower Saxony Germany, and is approximately 15 km from Oldenburg.

³ Oldenburg is an independent city in Lower Saxony Germany, and is situated between the cities of Bremen and Groningen, near Hunte River. In 1893, a canal was constructed to connect Hunte and Ems Rivers, which connected the port of Oldenburg with North Sea, and this increased greatly the economic importance of the city.

⁴ It was a liberal Protestant journal, and Bultmann published his early essays in it.

significant impact on Bultmann's thought as will be seen later.⁵ Economically the family was modest; his father owned a farm near Bremen, and Bultmann lived early years of his life in the country.

EDUCATION

His educational career started with the elementary school in Rastede, which he attended from 1892 to 1895. Then from 1895 to 1903, he attended the humanistic gymnasium at Oldenburg where his father was pastor in Lamberti Church since 1897. R. Bultmann showed immense interest in his studies at elementary school and at gymnasium, areas of his interest were religious studies, Greek language and history of German literature. After completing studies at gymnasium, he joined Tübingen University,⁶ and then Berlin⁷ and finally Marburg University⁸ where his major subject was theology, and he attended lectures on philosophy and its history, and was interested in theatre and concerts too. The hallmark of these three institutions is their strong committedness to liberal theology, which no doubt influenced Bultmann. In theology, he studied under Karl Müller, the church historian, at Tübingen, and Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), the Old Testament scholar who introduced the method of Form Criticism to him. Moreover, he studied with Adolph Harnack, the historian of dogma at Berlin, Adolph Jülicher and Johannes Weiss, scholars of the New Testament, and Wilhelm Hermann (1846-1922). Latter emphasized on religious experience more than on doctrine, and followed neo-Kantian epistemology by differentiating in 'fact'

⁵ See Roger Johnson, *Rudolf Bultmann interpreting faith for the modern era*, p. 9; Matt McLaughlin and Rob Smid, art. Rudolf Karl Bultmann in *Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia*.

⁶ Count Eberhard V founded the University of Tübingen in 1477, which is located in the city of Tübingen, Baden-Wurttemberg Germany. In the beginning, the Church endowed it, and it had four faculties: of theology, law, medicine and philosophy.

⁷ It was founded in 1810 by educational reformer and linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt with the faculties of law, medicine, theology and philosophy. Among the famous thinkers associated with this institution were Johann Fichte, F. Schleiermacher, Hegel, Schelling, Albert Einstein and Max Planck.

⁸ Landgrave Philip 1 of Hesse founded the University of Marburg in 1527. Famous theologians and philosophers associated with it were F. Heiler, W. Herrmann, R. Otto, Paul Tillich, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Martin Heidegger, Karl Barth, and Annemarie Schimmel.

and 'value'. Bultmann followed this distinction and considered history as fact and faith as value.⁹ Among his teachers, Johannes Weiss was the one who encouraged Bultmann to opt and prepare himself for the future of research and teaching in the field of the New Testament.

In educational achievements, he passed first theological exam under the High Consistory in Oldenburg in 1907, then worked for a year as a teacher in gymnasium, after getting scholarship he was able to pursue his studies in Marburg and earned the doctorate degree of lic. theol. in 1910, the title of his dissertation was 'The Style of Pauline Preaching and the Cynic-Stoic diatribe' under the supervision of Johannes Weiss who also proposed its theme. In addition, in 1912, he completed his post-doctorate research on the exegesis of Theodore of Mopsuestia, which was proposed by Adolph Jülicher and with this; he qualified for a position of lecturer in the New Testament studies in Marburg.

PROFESSIONAL LIFE

After completing post-doctorate research, he taught at Marburg as Instructor until 1916. During these years, he was closely associated with Wilhelm Heitmüller and Martin Rade, who was zealous reader and editor of the journal, *Die Christliche Welt*, and was a member of 'The Association of the Friends of *Die Christliche Welt*'.

It was in the company of Wilhelm Heitmüller that the works and method of history-of-religions school¹⁰ was opened to Bultmann. As for 'the association of friends' here Bultmann had the opportunity of meeting free thinkers from the Protestant camp and

⁹ See Anthony C. Thiselton, *Biblical Interpretation in The Modern Theologians An Introduction Christian Theology since 1918* ed. David F. Ford & Rachel Muers (USA: Blackwell 2005), p. 291.

¹⁰ The history of religions school is the translation of German term *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* which was founded in 1890, and was known as 'little Göttingen faculty'. This school focused on comparative and historical methods of studying religions. According to it, the Biblical ideas were the product of its own culture, therefore origins of Christianity must be studied in relation to other religions and movements present in that age. In the beginning of twentieth century, this school influenced greatly Biblical and Christological studies. Albert Schweitzer is the representative of this school who is well known for his *Quest of the Historical Jesus*. They criticized the Biblical interpretations of liberal Protestant theologians like that of Albrecht Ritschl.

to participate in their discussions. These discussions stirred theology and the church to a great deal before and after the First World War.

In autumn of 1916, he went to Breslau, joined as Assistant Professor, and stayed there until 1920. Here he got married and had children, due to war, the situation was not very good and so he faced hard times during these years.

In 1920, he went to Giessen as full Professor and as successor of Wilhelm Bousset where he enjoyed the lively academic life with exchange of ideas with theological faculty and on the campus generally.

In the autumn of 1921, he returned to Marburg, which for him was his scientific home, joined there as a full Professor, and succeeded Wilhelm Heitmüller as the chair of the New Testament studies. He remained there until his retirement in 1951 and after that became Professor of emeritus and continued to participate actively in theological discussions there until his death in 1976.

During his stay at Marburg, life was not easy due to political upheavals; outbreak of Second World War in 1939 and the Hitler regime both adversely affected the university life, particularly the latter one as Hitler regime forced many to emigrate and was very hard for others. Therefore, Bultmann and his friends greeted Americans allies and considered it a positive political change. In spite of political disturbance, these years of his life were more productive in terms of books, to which we will turn shortly.

Secondly, during this period he had the opportunity to participate in discussions with the circle of scholars present at the campus. Among them were Adolf Jülicher, Hans von Soden, Gustav Hölscher, and Walter Baumgartner. Above that were those who came to Marburg on invitation to deliver lectures, e.g. Karl Barth and Friedrich Gogarten or Martin Heidegger who stayed and lectured from 1922 till 1928 and with them Bultmann have good chance of exchanging views. Similarly, he interacted with Hans-Georg, Gadamer scholars from philosophy department and lectured in Holland, Switzerland, Sweden and America which enriched him immensely.

MAJOR THREADS OF HIS THOUGHT

In Germany, liberal theology¹¹ and critical post Kantian philosophy¹² dominated the higher education, which influenced Bultmann in his early years. Liberal theology was concerned with historical critical method particularly in reconstruction of historical Jesus, it also concentrated on the moral aspect of religion with its confidence in humanity as partners with God in building the Kingdom.¹³ Later on Bultmann realized the limitations of liberal theology, which made him to move away from it. From the factors which forced him to think over his affiliation with them were their over emphasis on the historical reconstruction of doctrines particularly that of Jesus Christ, or on the moral aspect of religion only. Moreover, the destruction brought up by the World War (1914-1918) led doubts over moral goodness of God and the ability of man to build in an ideal society in liberal thought.¹⁴ Although Bultmann moved away from the liberal theology,¹⁵ he retained the historical critical method of studying religion. It was under Wilhelm Heitmüller that he learnt to understand and compare the New Testament literature in the light of other religious movements of early Christian age e.g. Jewish apocalyptic or Gnosticism.

WORKS OF BULTMANN

Bultmann wrote extensively but his major contributions is in the field of theology and the New Testament mainly started after 1920 and continued well after his retirement from Marburg. From his important writings are; the series of Kerygma and Myth which is the translation of his essays Neues Testament and Mythologie (The New Testament and Mythology). It also includes criticism, which was raised on Bultmann

¹¹ For detail see down footnote no. 43.

¹² See down page no. 58.

¹³ See Roger Johnson, *Rudolf Bultmann interpreting faith for the modern era*, p. 332.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ His criticism of liberal theology is elaborated in his sermon preached on Pentecost Sunday 1917. It was published in the same year in the liberal Protestant journal *Die Christliche Welt* and was translated by Schubert M. Ogden under the title 'Concerning the Hidden and the Revealed', which appeared in *Existence and Faith* and in Roger Johnson, *Rudolf Bultmann interpreting faith for the modern era*.

from his contemporaries on demythologization. Among his critics were Julius Schniewind, Ernst Lohmeyer, Helmut Thielicke, Karl Barth and Karl Jaspers. In 1951, Bultmann delivered lectures in Yale University, which were published as *Jesus Christ and Mythology*. Afterwards in 1955 he delivered Gifford lectures at Edinburgh University on history and eschatology that were published as *The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology*. His *Die Geschichte der Synoptischen Tradition* (The History of the Synoptic Tradition) is not directly related to the theme of demythologization but is important in the New Testament studies. Some of his essays were collected and translated; from these are *Existence and Faith*, *Christ without Myth*, *New Testament and Mythology* translated by Schubert M. Ogden. *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Settings* translated by R. H. Fuller, Louise Smith and Erminie Huntress Lantero translated *Jesus and the Word*, and Louise Smith alone *Faith and Understanding*. Charles W. Kegley translated *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, Harold Knight translated his Sermons at Marburg as *This World and Beyond: Marburg Sermons*. In these essays, the most relevant to the theme of demythologizing is *Theology of the New Testament* translated by Kendrick Grobel, *Kerygma and Myth* and *Gospel of John: A Commentary* translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray.

In order to have a clear picture of interpretation of Bible by Bultmann it would be appropriate to have a brief look at the historical development of Biblical Studies in the Protestant circles but before that, let us have a bird's eye view of the age of Bultmann.

THE AGE OF BULTMANN

Political and social situation of Germany in the times of Bultmann were unstable, the two world wars, which Germany experienced greatly damaged the life. In the First World War Germany faced mass destruction with death rate that reached to millions and hyperinflation of 1920s, which resulted in high unemployment rate thus causing economic crisis. Later on in the Second World War under Hitler regime, again there was mass killing and vast destruction, which led the country to political and

economical deterioration. Stories of Hitler's concentration camps where millions were killed depict the terror and social disorder of that age. With the defeat in war, Germany was divided in west and east halves. Post war situation was equally grave as after the first war there was moral, social, economical and political decline in the country. Added to it was the large-scale killing, unemployment, economical crisis or the great depression with social disintegration, all these factors made life very grim.¹⁶ Due to general devastating conditions, it is natural that it influenced the common man. Bultmann too referred to this situation in his autobiography that he faced hard times after the outbreak of the Second World War, and lost his brother in a concentration camp. About the life in university and in community, during the Hitler regime, as commented by Bultmann was poisoned by mistrust and denunciation, therefore he with his friends welcomed the American allies as liberation for them.¹⁷ Hunger, poverty and badly shaken social political setup had consequences that were felt in all spheres of life, religious or the intellectual sides were no exceptions from it. In religious life, extreme attitudes emerged. There was anti religious, and anti church attitude, which surfaced with a wide gap between religion and politics, considering that the religion and the Christian standards are outdated. Material goods and the technological developments became standards and virtues of life. On the other hand as a reaction to it adherence to religion and to church turned stronger with emphasis on the community work, dogma, Bible and liturgy.¹⁸ Extreme attitudes in religio-theological world were not just a result of a sudden change or an aftermath of the war rather its roots lay in the changed conditions of religious and intellectual life of eighteenth and nineteenth century as well. These changes, as will be seen in what

¹⁶ See for detail David Welch, *Modern European History 1871-2000* (London & New York: Routledge 1999), second edition; Stephen J. Lee, *Aspects of European History 1789-1980* (London & New York: Routledge 1982); Giles MacDonogh, *After the Reich The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation* (New York: Basic Books 2007), pp. 1-10; Birdsall S. Viault, *Modern European History* (New York: McGraw Hill 1990).

¹⁷ See Rudolf Bultmann, Autobiographical Reflections in *Existence and Faith*, pp. 337-338.

¹⁸ See Karl Bihlmeyer, *Church History*, tr. E. Mills & France J. Muller revised by Hermann Tuchsle (Germany: The Newman Press-Westminster 1966), vol. 3, pp. 480-484.

follows, greatly influenced Bultmann's thought therefore it would be appropriate to have few words on some of the important trends of his age.

It may be noted at the outset that German religious thought in the modern age was very rich and had a great impact on the overall western thought. In addition, as our concern is German thought generally and its relevance to Bultmann particularly so we will try to remain within its boundaries as far as possible. As it is out of scope to encompass all the trends therefore only few movements with their key figures and concepts would be mentioned here. Some of the major movements of eighteenth century, which remained in swing and shaped the thought of coming centuries were, Pietism, Enlightenment, and Romanticism. Pietism, in few words can be defined that it is not a system of thought but a system of ethical teachings. It is a theological revival where attention is paid to 'heart felt religion'; it is a reaction to intellectualism and rationalism. Because of it, the center of attention is the 'feeling' or the 'emotional aspect' of religion. The 'Word' must penetrate the heart; concisely it is the inner experience of the heart or the soul and without this experience, there is no true faith.¹⁹ Among the famous representatives of the movements were Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf (d. 1760) from Germany and John Wesley (d. 1791) was from England. Zinzendorf stressed on the role of feeling in religion against rationalism. Faith for him should be based on personal relationship between Christ and the believer, in other words he called for 'the living faith'. His thoughts later on paved the way for Romanticism in Germany where Friedrich Ernst Schleiermacher (d. 1834) developed this shade of thought further in religion.²⁰ Later on over emphasis on the 'Word' or

¹⁹ See Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1972), vol. 1, pp. 26-27

²⁰ See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell 2001), third edition, p. 83.

scripture turned to be a negative aspect of pietism, as they tried to hold fast to literal dogmatic interpretation of the scriptures.²¹

Enlightenment or *Aufklärung* in German can be defined loosely only as it is a combination of various ideas and characteristics, but the dominant feature of it is the supremacy of reason. Reason is the sole judge in evaluating the soundness of religion and its concepts; any irrational element in revelation is simply to be eliminated. In it, reason or understanding means the same. It valued only the logical component of religion or Christianity, as it could be verified rationally. According to rationalists simple reason or the common sense is the only criterion for judging the validity of Christian doctrines.²² Therefore religious truths, in their opinion, could be derived from reason alone and revelation was only confirming the natural religion. Apart from it, moral values and ethics were given a high place in it and rigid dogmatism was negated. Major issues discussed by the representatives of this thought revolved around miracles, revelation, concept of sin and evil, interpretation and status of scriptures and the significance of Jesus Christ.²³

The issues of miracles, revelation and significance of Jesus Christ are interlinked and provided the basis for the new understanding of the universe and led to the discussion of quest for the historical Jesus. In traditional Christianity, miracles related to Jesus had great importance. Nevertheless, as these happenings were against the normal functioning of nature so their worth and authenticity were questioned by the rationalists. Due to the scientific discoveries, Biblical accounts were considered outmoded particularly after the discovery of Newton's laws of cause and effect, which proved the mechanical working of universe where miracles could not be adjusted.

Among those who rejected the possibility of miracles was David Hume, for him truth

²¹ See Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1959), pp. 444-445.

²² See Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1937), pp. 13-14.

²³ See Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1, pp. 31-41; Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology An Introduction*, pp. 93-95.

of miraculous events depends on their occurrence in our own age. As there is no such evidence, therefore their possibility is out of question. Dependence for reliability should be on human testimony and not on Biblical narrations.²⁴

The concept of revelation or the faith in the person of Jesus Christ as a supernatural occurrences as believed in traditional Christianity was also denied in the age of Enlightenment. The traditional figure of Jesus in the New Testament was that of a supernatural redeemer of humanity, which was unacceptable to the Enlightenment rationalism. For them there were differences present between the picture of Jesus of the New Testament and the real facts of history about him. Behind the miraculous figure was a simple man of history. Prominent scholars who rejected the traditional Christian faith on miracles and Jesus were Hermann S. Reimarus (d. 1768) and G. E. Lessing, for them they contradict reason therefore are unacceptable. According to Reimarus, there is a possibility of going behind the narratives of the New Testament and to uncover the simple and human picture of Jesus, which would be acceptable in the present age. Moreover, for him the early followers altered the picture of Jesus for political gains.²⁵ Lessing denied the historical worth of the New Testament narrations, as their authenticity could not be proved. In addition, historical events do not provide basis for faith, there is a gulf present between faith and history. It is impossible to bridge the gap, so an historical event cannot be the basis of faith. For him only human reason is capable of acquiring accurate knowledge and not the history of the first century. Moreover, Lessing also questioned the relevance of Biblical accounts for the modern age, which is of existential nature.²⁶

Coming to the third movement that is Romanticism, this emerged in 1790s in Germany as a protest against formalism and rationalism of Enlightenment. It called for freedom, simplicity, and universality in concepts. It also claimed for moral asceticism

²⁴ See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology An Introduction*, p. 93.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 387-388.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 385-386.

and discipline on the one hand and for dynamics, power and fullness for life on the other. It stressed on the individuality of man but in a different way from rationalists. In rationalism, the emphasis was on the individual reason whereas in Romanticism it was on individual imagination and personal feelings. Romantics gave importance to 'feelings' in the self or in humanity, and for them relation of man with world is not based on reason rather on his 'inner heart with feeling and impulse'. Thus, it is the aesthetic approach towards the world and is not rational in spirit.²⁷ Another important aspect of Romanticism is its concept of history as expounded by Herder (1744-1803). Here scientific investigation is the tool to study history, thus no historical account is trusted unless passed through historical scientific investigations, which means that it must be supported by proof or reason for its happening. Scientific methodology was applied to mundane and sacred history alike. In its relation with religion, for Herder, God is within living human experience, and religion is the 'highest humanity of man'. Hence, religion is located within humanity, or history of humanity is the history of revelation. Romantics applied the scientific methodology to Biblical narrative, dogmas and church history and in all these cases, the results of the scientific investigation were in sharp contrast to the accepted traditional concepts.²⁸

From above it becomes clear that Christian thought in this age was very different from the traditional Christian thought. In traditional Christianity God could interfere in the universe and revelation was a supernatural phenomenon whereas modern age rejected it out rightly and accepted only the natural working of the world. Human reason had the authority to judge revelation. In short, it was man whether in form of rationalism or feelings and emotions, who became the center and judge of religious concepts and not God the revealer of these ideas. The center of focus was shifted from God to man and

²⁷ See Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1, pp. 52-53; John Kent, *The Enlightenment* in *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology* ed. Peter Byrne & Leslie Houlden (London & New York: Routledge 1995), p. 253.

²⁸ See Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1, p. 54; William Adams Brown, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1913), pp. 124-127.

this shift is later on reflected in the thought of Bultmann. Moreover features of rationalism and feelings continued to influence coming centuries.

Coming to the prominent figures of the post-enlightened age, we have Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), one of the most influential figures in philosophy and theology who influenced the coming generations. His greatest contribution was theory of knowledge in which he attempted to synthesize reason and experience or in other words pure rationalism and pure empiricism as was expounded in *Critique of Pure Reason*.²⁹ Prior to Kant, in Christian thought, there was distinction between the entities and the knower. Entities, physical or spiritual, had independent existences outside the knower and were unaffected by his thought. This distinction caused a gap between a knower and the known or the subject and the object, thus giving an incomplete picture for the process of knowledge. Whereas for Kant the mind or the knower works in two ways at the same time in gaining knowledge that is, it perceives knowledge and contributes to it as well. In this process, the mind moulds and shapes the raw material of experience in a fixed pattern thus with it he provided a link between the subject and the object. Moreover, Kant negated the traditional concept that God was independent of all finite beings, with perfect attributes but incomprehensible by man and He had relation with man through revelation or church.³⁰ He also denied the traditional arguments to prove the existence of God. The knowledge of the world, which is finite in magnitude, cannot lead to knowledge of God who is transcendent. However, his denial was in his words 'to make room for faith' so for him religion was not to be established on pure reason gained through senses but on moral laws. In this way, Kant denied the traditional way of knowing God and revelation but shared with natural religion the concept of moral laws as a basic component of religion.³¹

²⁹ See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology An Introduction*, p. 89.

³⁰ See William Adams Brown, *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. 113-119; Garrett Green, *Modernity in The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, p. 170.

³¹ See John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity interpreted through its development*, p. 181; Emil L. Fackenheim, *Immanuel Kant, Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West* ed. Ninan

With this, we turn to the nineteenth century and one of the most important figures of this age was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), professor of theology at Halle and Berlin and is known as 'the father of modern theology'.³² He proposed a different concept of religion in reaction to dry argumentation of rationalists and moral religion of Kant. For him religion is not confined to speculative reasoning about physical or metaphysical world neither is it confined to practical aspect of ethics or the beliefs and dogmas rather it belongs to 'feelings'. Religion for him is the direct touch of the soul with the Divine, as quoted by Mackintosh,

"Pious contemplation is the immediate consciousness of the universal existence of all finite things in and through the Infinite, and all the temporal things in and through the Eternal".³³

His focus was on psychology of religion that is the feeling of absolute dependence upon God, than on rational or historical aspect of religion. In Christianity, for him, the historical event is not pivotal rather it is the Christ figure. Man experiences dependence on God in the redemptive act of Christ which is the core of Christianity.

On the other side, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) stands in a sharp contrast to Schleiermacher who emphasized on reason and knowledge. Hegel was not a theologian like Schleiermacher, but a philosopher of Kantian tradition. He accepted that 'feeling' is an important factor in religion but for him it is a lower stage of consciousness whereas reason is above it, in other words 'feeling' is a primary stage of contact between the finite and the infinite where understanding takes place.³⁴

Nevertheless, it is an imaginative stage and reason is above it. Reason was most supreme in his thought and he equated reality with reason therefore to understand Hegel it is

Smart, John Clayton, Steven Katz & Patrick Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), vol. 1, pp. 17-32.

³² For details on Schleiermacher's theology see Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*; John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity*; William Adams Brown, *The Essence of Christianity*.

³³ Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 44.

³⁴ William Adams Brown, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 194.

important to know his concept of reason. As said above that he was influenced by Kantian philosophy particularly the dualism of phenomena and noumena but he looked for one reality, which is Absolute, or God.³⁵ In philosophical terminology, he wanted reconciliation between opposites, between Christianity and science, or theology and philosophy where reason is to play a major role.³⁶ However, knowledge gained through reason is not static but is moving upwards in dialectical terms. This principle of change he applied on all spheres of life, including religion, nature and history. Therefore, God is the outcome of the unending dialectical movement. Later on, Tübingen School of the New Testament applied the principle of dialectical process on the New Testament studies as will be discussed shortly. In addition to it, Hegelianism discarded symbols in religion; they are contradictory and childlike concepts. Instead, religious ideas must be explained rationally and philosophically to reconcile the contradictions present in religion.³⁷ Thus, reason distinguished between rational and irrational elements in religion, a dominant characteristic of the Tübingen School, which influenced Bultmann.

Few words here may be added about Tübingen School as it had significant influence on German thought and on Biblical studies particularly.

Tübingen School was founded on the teachings of Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860) the name of the school is derived from the prestigious seat of learning of Germany, Tübingen University where Baur taught from 1826 until his death. In Baur's opinion, central task of theology was historical, which must be studied in the scientific and critical spirit of the present age. Science is the tool for judging the truth of any claim, and Christian theology has no choice except to submit its historical claims to it. Christianity being an historical religion cannot ignore the demand of historical critical examination. Its importance in the wordings of Peter Hodgson is,

³⁵ Ibid., p. 188.

³⁶ See John Dillenberger & Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol., 1, pp. 87-88.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 105-106.

"Since Christianity itself, as an historical manifestation, belongs to the past, the highest task (for the present), on the solution of which everything else depends, can only consist in the ever purer and less prejudiced investigation of what Christianity originally and essentially is. The more certainly progress in this way is strengthened through an awakened and more active sense for historical research...the more...the conditions are provided under which dogma can approach a new and rich epoch of its development".³⁸

Baur's own investigation was limited to historical critical scrutiny of the New Testament, church and dogma. He was not a theologian but an historian and carried his investigations in that mood.

Further, Tübingen School followed Hegelian dialecticalism in historical investigation. In their opinion, earlier followers of Jesus differed greatly after his death thus forming groups with opposing ideas. Followers of Peter (thesis) opposed Paul and his followers (antithesis) which later on emerged in a synthesis of Catholicism.³⁹

Influence of Baur is well seen in David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), student of Baur who applied historical critical method for reconstructing historical Jesus. Strauss views were rejected by his contemporaries both orthodox and rationalists. He too, criticized orthodox and rationalists both, orthodox due to their acceptance of superhuman elements in Jesus' life uncritically, and rationalists by giving naturalistic explanations to them. For him origins of Christianity must be explained in pure historical terms and not in dogmatic way. Historically miracles cannot be adjusted, as history is a flux of cause and effect and miracles fall outside it, therefore they must be rejected. Miracles are not facts but are myths and they represent the thought pattern of the age in which they emerged, they are the expressions of the early age. In the modern age to consider

³⁸ Peter C. Hodgson, *The Formation of Historical Theology A Study of Ferdinand Christian Baur* (New York: Harper & Row 1966), p. 88.

³⁹ See Ninan Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1969), pp. 482, 500.

them as 'historic narrative' would be ignorance.⁴⁰ On these premises, Strauss rejected the superhuman elements from the life of Jesus and termed them as myths.

Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) a German theologian who followed Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegelian philosophy and Baur's school of thought, for him most important aspect of religion is its practical or pragmatic side, which is best exemplified in the model of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the role of theology is the historical elaboration of the life of Jesus with the critical historical tools. The important thing in his thought was the question of essence of Christianity. For him, the essence of Christianity lies in the principle of Justification and Reconciliation that is the redemptive act of Jesus and the kingdom of God.⁴¹ Among Ritschlians, the desire to know the essence of Christianity was one of the central questions. Wilhelm Hermann (1846-1922) of Marburg and Adolph von Harnack (1851-1930) of Berlin were the leading liberal theologians engaged with the issue of essence of Christianity.⁴²

It may be concluded from above that some of the significant concerns of Tübingen School were; the scientific study of history where history was perceived as a closed system working on the principles of cause and effect with no interference from outside. Secondly all supernatural elements present in Christianity were considered 'myths' and thirdly a distinction was made between the essence of Christianity and the mythical elements in it with an effort to go behind the mythical picture and to extract the real message. Bultmann too worked in the same direction although he was not interested in historical reconstruction of Jesus in the manner of Tübingen School.

With this we move on to liberal theology, which flourished in the last decades of the nineteenth century and continued in the early part of the twentieth, it is significant because most of the dominant trends of the previous age converged in it, besides that

⁴⁰ See Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University 1966), pp. 113-114.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

⁴² See William Adams Brown, *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. 264-267; Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 494.

Bultmann was associated with it in his early age. It refers not to one particular concept rather to a range of ideas that distinguish it from other philosophies. In broader terms, it is as an attitude more than a philosophy, which is the outcome of socio-political and religious background of the preceding age. Some of its basic features are that it emphasized on individuality and freedom of thought with open mindedness, tolerance and devotion to truth. Moreover, it shared the scientific and critical spirit of the age in religious and Biblical studies. God for them is not a transcendent being but is immanent in nature and that all religions are equal, none can claim absolute truth.⁴³ In religion, they mainly focused on its 'essence' and not on outer or the dogmatic aspect. In their view, putting aside the shell and extracting the kernel from it is in alliance with the modern knowledge. In Christianity its core teachings lies not in the dogmatic formulations, nor in the tradition of the fathers or the church. Rather its essence is present in the teachings of Jesus and not in his redemptive act or in the concept of sin.⁴⁴ Thus, Adolf von Harnack reduced the teachings of Christianity to two principles only i.e. fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man.⁴⁵ The other important feature of liberalism is the historical critical study. Jesus and his teachings being central in the liberal thought, this led them to investigate critically life of Jesus. Liberal theology flourished in pre-world war times thus was optimistic in its outlook. Economical progress and relative political stability with scientific development led the modern man to have faith in his potentials for achieving higher targets of peace and growth. Nevertheless, two world wars reversed the situation; it questioned the optimistic shade of liberal theology, and eventually caused its decline.⁴⁶ The results of the world war were devastating and brought a great havoc in all spheres of life. Due to stark economic and social situation, pessimism and fear prevailed,

⁴³ See Keith Clements, *Theology Now*, in *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, p.279.

⁴⁴ See ed. Anthony C. Thiselton, *Liberal Theology in Encyclopedia of the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: OneWorld 2002).

⁴⁵ See John Dillenberger & Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity*, pp. 208-210.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 214.

instead of optimism and freedom of liberalism the philosophy turned towards the problems of threatened and shaken life. The problematic human existent became the issue of the existential philosophy. Existentialism is not a unified set of philosophical ideas but is in the words of John Macquarrie 'style of philosophizing',⁴⁷ still there are certain common themes present in it. Basic characteristic of this philosophy is that it starts with man and not with nature. Man who understands and is aware of his existence is distinctive from other types of beings, and is aware that one day he has to face death. It is also concerned with man as a subject and not as an object, in other words it is protest against the view, which consider man as a 'thing' and not as an individual existence. Man should be given importance as a thinking being, and as an initiator of action, center of feelings and emotions. Existentialism does not give much space to logic and epistemology; it is concerned with freedom, decision and responsibility of man, and talks about finitude, guilt, alienation, despair and death.⁴⁸ Though the origins of Existentialism lies with the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (d. 1855) but it was the ideas and vocabulary of Martin Heidegger (d. 1976), another influential figure of this philosophy, which were taken up by Bultmann in his interpretation of the New Testament. The reason behind it in Bultmann's view is that the concepts of the New Testament when expressed in Existential philosophy suits best the modern secular man. One of such borrowing is Heidegger distinction between 'authentic existence' and 'inauthentic existence', which Bultmann interpreted in the light of the New Testament.⁴⁹ It is one of the key concepts for Bultmann, where 'inauthentic existence' is the life of unbeliever who refuses to recognize his dependence on God for his salvation and on the other hand 'authentic existence' is just the opposite

⁴⁷ John Macquarrie, *Existentialism* (London: Hutchinson 1972), p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5; David E. Roberts, *Existentialism and Religious Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press 1957), pp. 6-9; Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology An Introduction*, p. 190.

⁴⁹ See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology An Introduction*, p. 190.

of it who recognizes his dependence on God. Further, 'sin' according to Bultmann is the denial on the part of unbeliever.⁵⁰

These were few relevant religious trends prevailing prior to and in the times of Bultmann, with this we come to Biblical studies, here we will concentrate on the status of Bible which would be followed by the historical sketch of its interpretation.

STATUS OF BIBLE

Western civilization faced a dramatic change in the status of Bible, traditionally it enjoyed a revelatory position, which remained so in the early period of Reformation but changed to the status of a common book of history and literature by nineteenth century. Historically the seeds of change go back to Renaissance, an age marked with reawakening of thought. From the factors of reawakening were the decline of church authority, emergence of the city states, scientific discoveries, humanism⁵¹ with its interest in classical languages and in other religions particularly paganism.⁵²

James D. G. Dunn's analysis about the change clearly depicts the psychology of the age. Firstly, there was the intellectual awareness, which gave a sense that the 'present' is not only distant but is also different from the 'past'. Secondly, the realization that the languages of the ancient text have changed a great deal with the passage of time therefore the field of historical philology must be developed.⁵³

As said above one of the factors of change was humanism with the slogan 'back to the original sources', which bypassed the reliance on theology, biblical commentaries or

⁵⁰ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, pp. 19-20; *Jesus Christ and Mythology* pp. 39-40, 53-54.

⁵¹ Humanism is a philosophical and literary movement, which originated in second half of the 14th century in Italy and spread soon in other parts of Europe. The word 'humanism' came from *studia humanitatis* or *humaniora* that is liberal arts, which focused on grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy. The movement was rooted in the love of classical antiquity. This greatly influenced the Renaissance and the Reformation periods, which is reflected in the desire for the original scriptures and to make it authority instead of the Church. Thus, emphasis on the study of original language and criticism on religious and social abuses of the church helped the Reformation to achieve its goals.

⁵² See Agnes Imhof, Renaissance in *The Brill Dictionary of Religion* ed. Kocku von Stuckrad, tr. Robert R. Barr (Leiden: Brill 2006), vol. i-iv, p. 1623.

⁵³ See James D. G. Dunn, Scholarly Methods in the Interpretation of the Gospels in *Auslegung der Bibel* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck 2000), p. 106.

the church impositions and approached the text directly.⁵⁴ This was the antecedent of change in biblical status and scholarship. Bible was taken out of the church and its authoritative interpretation and the attention was diverted to recover the original text. Thus, Bible was put in its own historical setting with a careful study of linguistics, grammar and the text.⁵⁵ The desire to recover the original text resulted in a first Greek translation of the New Testament by Desiderius Erasmus (d.1536) in 1516. Although the translation of Erasmus was not up to the mark, as he had access to only four manuscripts of the New Testament but it delineated the course of further studies in the New Testament scholarship.⁵⁶

The spirit to reconstruct the original text of the Bible remained in full swing during the reformation period, which is well reflected in the words *sola scriptura* (scripture only), or in the statement, 'the reformers dethroned the pope and enthroned the Bible'.⁵⁷ Thus, in reformation Bible became the center of Christian life instead of church or pope. To have easy access reformers realized the need for translation, which was mostly done from the original Greek and Hebrew versions⁵⁸ with the aim to purify the text from later additions or corruptions.

Slogan of *sola scriptura* was so powerful that anything outside Bible was simply rejected whether it was faith or sacraments.⁵⁹ Old questions of inspiration, canon, text, and interpretation were probed again with new tools unknown in the middle ages.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ See Alsiter McGrath, *The Transition to Modernity in Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Peter Byrne & Leslie Houlden (London & New York: Routledge 1995), p. 238.

⁵⁵ See James D. G. Dunn, *Scholarly Methods in the Interpretation of the Gospels*, p. 106.

⁵⁶ See Alsiter McGrath, *The Transition to Modernity*, p. 238; James D. G. Dunn, *ibid.*, p. 107

⁵⁷ See Roland H. Baiton, *The Bible in the Reformation in The Cambridge History of the Bible The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: University Press 1963), p. 1.

⁵⁸ See Cornelis Augustijn, *The Sixteenth-Century Reformers and the Bible*, *Concilium*, 1(February, 1991), pp. 58-66.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; See Norman Sykes, *The Religion of Protestants in The Cambridge History of the Bible*, pp. 179-181.

⁶⁰ See Roland H. Baiton, *The Bible in the Reformation in The Cambridge History of the Bible*, pp. 6-24; James D. G. Dunn, *Scholarly Methods in the Interpretation of the Gospels*, p. 107.

Added to it was the rational spirit of the age where reason was placed higher than faith, and a desire to liberate it from any established authority with the sole aim to establish truth.⁶¹ Thus, reason was the measure for ascertaining truth. Deism⁶² a rational movement of this age questioned the validity and meaning of Biblical revelation. For them revelation must be understood in the light of reason otherwise it is to be rejected.⁶³ Moreover, the deist circles emphasized on the individual intellectual freedom, criticized miracles and all the irrational elements of Bible. Thus, rationalism questioned the historical worth and place of Christianity, possibility of miracles and authenticity of Christ event. These objections weakened the status of Bible even within Protestant circles. Their earlier stance, 'The Bible, I say, the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants'⁶⁴ lost its spirit. The simple faith of early Protestants on Biblical revelation changed into anti-Christian rationalism.

Apart from above, scientific discoveries too played a role in diminishing the authority of Bible. The tension between science and theology was on its peak in this age and science rejected the authority of the church and tradition and freed itself from their impositions. Scientific principles were applied in all spheres including religion or history. As expressed by Spinoza (d.1677) that the truth of any passage lies in its meaning and it must not be distorted to fit in an assumed 'truth'.⁶⁵ To bring down Bible on a level of any historical document meant to discard preassumed truths, for example 'supernatural events' related to Jesus Christ. Due to it historians started to

⁶¹ See James D. G. Dunn, *Scholarly Methods in the Interpretation of the Gospels*, p. 108; W. Neil, *The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible 1700-1950* in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, p. 238.

⁶² Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648) the father of Deism postulated a philosophy of natural religion that basis of all religions are common, which are above time and space and can be known through human reason. These common notions are 1) existence of God, 2) worship of God, 3) moral values, 4) evil to be abolished 5) reward and punishment after death.

⁶³ See Garrett Green, *Modernity in The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, pp. 167-168; W. Neil, *The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible 1700-1950* in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, p. 247.

⁶⁴ See Norman Sykes, *The Religion of Protestants* in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, p. 175.

⁶⁵ See John Kent, *The Enlightenment*, *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, p. 257.

abandon the conception that human history is working under the divine intervention rather history for them was a record of past events free from divine influence.

In nineteenth and twentieth centuries secular materialistic approach was more powerful. On the one side, scientific discoveries were not in accord with Biblical narratives and on the other people were deeply influenced by scientific notions, which were secular in nature. Science only accepted facts, verified by experimentation, observation, or derived through deduction or induction. In addition, it had the option of 'true' or 'false' only, being literal in nature.⁶⁶ Common people adopted notions of science and applied on every aspect of life including religion and Bible.

From above it becomes clear that the status of Bible changed with the passage of time. It lost its sanctity and authority, which it enjoyed in the pre-modern and early modern age. Presently, Bible has come down to the level of common book of history or literature, which is full of inconsistencies and irrational elements. Supernatural events mentioned in it are myths or fanciful stories and not facts as divine intervention in the natural course is not possible. The changed position of Bible naturally influenced its interpretation as will be clear from what follows.

INTERPRETATION OF BIBLE

In recent Biblical studies, interpretation has gained importance as compared to the other areas of its history, philosophy or literature. It is the 'meaning' and particularly meaning for the modern man, which is the key issue in the modern studies. As expressed by James D. Wood it is,

"(there is) a growing demand for the message of the Bible, and has asked to what extent the Bible is God's word to the modern man."⁶⁷

As interpreting the message of the Bible is the field of theology, thus there is a shift from historical critical studies in Biblical studies to the theological ones in recent

⁶⁶ See W. Neil, *The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible 1700-1950* in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, pp. 255, 268.

⁶⁷ James D. Wood, *The Interpretation of the Bible* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. 1958), p. 1.

studies. Realizing its importance and need Bultmann interpreted Bible keeping in view the demands of the modern man, which he termed as demythologizing.

Interpretation of a religious text is a complex process particularly in case of a wide gap present between the initial stage of its emergence and interpretation in the present age as in case of Christianity. There are many factors involved in interpretation, which are decisive in determining the direction of interpretation. From these factors are those related to the text or those that influence from outside. Among the former are identification of 'religious text', and the relation of text with meaning. This relation between the text and the meaning can be from two sides, one is from the side of author, that is 'author intended reading' and the other is 'reader response'. In other words, the words of the text signify something but what is signified, and who has the authority to select the 'signified' or the 'intended meaning' from different alternatives, and the principles on which the selection is made needs to be known. Identification of the text is vital among all, as it is the center around which the reading and meaning revolve. More so, for a religious text, it is the identification, which elevates it and makes it authoritative. In addition, this determines the direction of 'reading' and 'meaning' of the text. In fact, these three components have been discussed at length in the modern age.⁶⁸ From the external factors that exert their pressure and often direct the interpretation in a particular direction are religious, social, political and philosophical. Therefore, interpretation is never carried in a vacuum, but the way people think, perceive or understand things manipulates it. In short, it is their worldview, which determines the direction of interpretation.⁶⁹ From an overview of the history of Biblical

⁶⁸ See for detail Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the human sciences Essays on language, action and interpretation*, ed., tr., & introduced by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: University Press 1994); Paul Ricoeur, *The Canon Between the Text and the Community in Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis* ed. Petr Pokorny and Jan Roskovec (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck 2002); Rowan Williams, *Historical Criticism and Sacred Text in Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom scripture and theology* ed. David F. Ford & Graham Stanton (London: SCM Press 2003).

⁶⁹ See David Jaspers, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox Press 2004), p. 3.

interpretation, it becomes evident that the worldview of each age was the decisive factor in its interpretation. Before going in the history of Biblical interpretation it would be appropriate to look at the important key terms related to it.

Hermeneutics is a specific term for interpretation of any text.⁷⁰ It is derived from the Greek *hermeneuein* which means to 'translate' or to 'interpret' or from *hermeneus* meaning an interpreter or expounder, the later term is in turn derived from Hermes, name of a Greek god. Hermes was the divine messenger of the gods to people, whose work was to receive the message and then to deliver it to people in a comprehensible manner. Therefore, the task of Hermes was receiving, perceiving and delivering the message to others; this gave Hermes high status in the ancient thought, he was the personification of knowledge itself. This position of Hermes largely parallels the meaning of Hermeneutics where interpretation of the text refers to expounding deeper meanings for people of a different time and place.⁷¹ To interpret for the different time and place requires that the intended meaning of the author is conveyed to the hearer without change in a comprehensible manner. From above it may be deduced that in Hermeneutics three things are important, sacred text, understanding on the part of interpreter and understanding on the part of hearer, which as stated above are 'text', 'reading' and 'meaning' are the main parts of Hermeneutics. Thus, interpretation is a process of understanding, whereas exegesis another term, which is closely connected to Hermeneutics means 'exposition' or 'explanation'⁷² and is more related to methods and approaches used in explanation of a text.⁷³ From the difference in the two terms, it is evident that exegesis is related to explanation and the methods of explanation whereas

⁷⁰ Here in this thesis, 'interpretation' would be used instead of hermeneutics for the sole reason that interpretation is a broader term and has been preferred more in recent academic circles.

⁷¹ See Christoph Auffarth, 'Hermeneutics' and by Dylan Burns, 'Hermetism/ Hermeticism' in *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*; Van A. Harvey, 'Hermeneutics' in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan 1987), vol. 6, p. 279.

⁷² See Christoph Auffarth, 'Exegesis' in *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, p. 693.

⁷³ See Frederick W. Danker, 'Biblical Exegesis: Christian View' in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol.2, p. 142.

Hermeneutics is a step ahead of exegesis; it requires a deeper reflection on its three components and their integration for the correct and fruitful interpretation.

Without going in details of Hermeneutics due to limitation of space,⁷⁴ let us have a glimpse of the historical shifts in Biblical interpretation in 'text', 'reading', and 'meaning'. A major change in interpretation over centuries is from 'author intended meaning' to 'reader response'. For the sake of convenience, the historical perspective in what follows would be divided in two main divisions; pre-modern and the modern age, further modern period would be sub-divided in pre and post nineteenth century.

At the outset, it may be noted that defining limits of Christian books or its canonization, is a late process as compared to interpretation. Later with defining the Christian text its interpretation entered a new phase as would be clear from what follows. As said above text is the pivotal point around which interpretation revolves. Here late emergence of the exact text must have altered the direction of interpretation. Besides, decline in the sanctity of the Bible in the modern age further influenced its interpretation. Thus, from the very beginning Christianity faced problems about their text and its interpretation and as both these factors are interlinked so change in one automatically brings a change in another.

There is a long history of Biblical interpretation in pre-modern age to cut the long story short, few examples of Biblical interpretation of this period would be cited. In the very beginning, before the formation of the New Testament, Christians took the Jewish books as their own scriptures while giving a new meaning to it. This modification in text was only in reading or meaning and was not in the words of the text, thus the alteration was in what the words signified. The text had a specific meaning in the traditional Jewish interpretation; Christians by interpreting it altered the meaning to something different. Early Christians considered themselves as distinct from Jews, and

⁷⁴ For a detailed study of Hermeneutical approaches in the religious studies, see Sadia Mahmood, "The Influence of Modern Hermeneutical Approaches to Study of Religion on Contemporary Islamic Thought: A Case Study of Woman in Islam" (Master's thesis), Islamabad: International Islamic University, 2003.

this led them to have a different understanding of the book. This change started from Jesus himself who followed the Jewish text, but gave a different and new interpretation to it. In the Sermon on the Mount as narrated by Matthew Jesus interpreted the Ten Commandments in a different way, it was shift from mere ritualistic mode to the ethical mode.⁷⁵ In Judaism there was undue importance given to rituals whereas Jesus while keeping the words of the text interpreted where human relations were given more importance, so as it comes in the Sermon,

"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment. But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire."⁷⁶

In the above passage the wordings 'you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, you shall not murder...but I say to you....' are significant in showing the change in reading of the text.

St. Paul too interpreted the Old Testament in a very different way; in his letter to Galatians the wives of Abraham represented two covenants.⁷⁷ In this new interpretation words remained unchanged while new meaning was given to them. Here Jesus or St. Paul never questioned the authority or sanctity of the scriptures. For Jesus, as narrated by Matthew, the law is not to be abrogated but to be fulfilled.⁷⁸ Even St. Paul, who violated the law for the Gentiles, based his teachings of risen Christ on scriptures.⁷⁹ He

⁷⁵ James Barr mentioned many examples where Jesus interpreted the Old Testament in a new or a radical way, from them are the concept of Incarnation, ethical teachings particularly those related to family and use of parables. See *Holy Scripture Canon, Authority, and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1983), pp. 16-18; David Jaspers, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, p. 30; Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan Company 1966), pp. 18-19.

⁷⁶ Matthew 5:21-22.

⁷⁷ 1 Galatians 4: 22-26; another example of re-reading by St. Paul is in 1 Cor. 10: 6 here Exodus is taken as warning for Christians.

⁷⁸ Matthew 5: 17.

⁷⁹ 1 Cor. 15: 3-4.

did not negate divine origin of the Old Testament; he only nullified the formalism of the law for the Gentiles. Hence, the process of rereading started very early in Christianity, but the divine authority of the scriptures was not doubted, and the principle of interpretation was based on faith.

In the next phase when the Christian writings started to appear, they were numerous and the church selected few among them. In this new phase the church as an institution had the authority to select and sanctify books. In words of Barclay, 'it was not the Bible which made the church; it was the church which made the Bible.'⁸⁰ With this selection, the church fixed the text or canonized it for the coming generations and the situation remained so in Christianity until the emergence of Protestant movement when again the question of text was raised.

In this early phase, role of the church was decisive in selection and interpretation of Bible, in other words it was 'faith' dominated. Whether it was the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, unity of the two testaments, or Christology, all were under the authority of the church.⁸¹ This means that the text and its meaning were determined by the church, any interpretation outside the accepted criterion of church was simply rejected. Role of the church reached its fullness in the middle ages. To cite few examples from this period where faith is the determining element in interpretation and is imposed by the church is the genealogy of Jesus mentioned by Matthew. Although there are problems in this genealogy as it is about Joseph who later married Mary and is not of Jesus,⁸² but it is interpreted to provide an evidence for blood relation between Jesus and Abraham. Another example is the birth of Jesus interpreted in the light of the signs mentioned in the book of Isaiah,

⁸⁰ William Barclay, *Introducing The Bible*, p. 19.

⁸¹ See Charles Kannengiesser, *The Bible as Read in the Early Church: Patristic exegesis and its Presuppositions*, in *Concilium The Bible and its Readers*, ed. Wim Beuken, Sean Freyne and Anton Weiler (Feb. 1991), 1, pp. 29-34; Jaroslav Broz, *From Allegory to the Four Senses of Scripture Hermeneutics of the Church Fathers and of the Christian Middle Ages in Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, p. 302.

⁸² See Matthew 1:1-17.

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel”,⁸³

Thirdly, sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham as mentioned in Genesis⁸⁴ prefigured crucifixion of Jesus on the cross as a sacrifice.⁸⁵

These and many other examples show how church directed the interpretation, as in the words of Kannengiesser interpretation was ‘in the church and for the church’.⁸⁶ Thus, the meaning was imposed by the church though it was faith oriented. In the above examples by developing a historical continuity between the two testaments, church wanted to strengthen its roots with Judaism.

Later on there was further development in interpretation with the emergence of Alexandrian and Antioch schools around second and third century of Christian era. Alexandria was a highly learned and a cosmopolitan city where Judaism and the Greek philosophy were equally dominant whereas Antioch was a Jewish populated Syrian city. Difference in them was over interpretation that whether it should be literal or allegorical. Alexandrian school, followed Philo, and opted for the allegorical method by synthesizing Jewish thought with Greek philosophy. Philo interpreted Hebrew Bible in the light of philosophy, for him the text carries more than one meaning, therefore, allegorical method is appropriate for interpretation, in that he used grammatical, linguistics, punctuation and symbolism.⁸⁷

Following these lines Clement of Rome (d. 214) and than his disciple, Origen (185-254) incorporated the philosophical ideas and the Jewish thought in their interpretation, considering that the text has more than one meaning therefore followed allegorical method. For them scriptural language was symbolic, even the universe is full of symbols where things have double meaning, one is apparently known to all and other

⁸³ Isaiah 7: 14.

⁸⁴ Genesis 22.

⁸⁵ See David Jaspers, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, pp. 30-31.

⁸⁶ See Charles Kannengiesser, *The Bible as Read in the Early Church: Patristic exegesis and its Presuppositions*, in *Concilium*, p. 30.

⁸⁷ See James D. Wood, *The Interpretation of the Bible*, pp. 50-51.

is mystical or spiritual which the perfect can know only, interpretation of these symbols is based on faith in Christ.⁸⁸

On the other hand, the school of Antioch emphasized on the literal sense and took help of grammar and history in interpretation. To the extent that for them anthropomorphic expressions of God were literally true, thus 'the arm of God' literally meant that God has an arm.⁸⁹ From both schools the interpretation incorporated new elements in it due to cultural and intellectual factors; still the decisive factor was the authority of the church in determining the meaning of the text.

One of the greatest figures in Christianity is of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who was influenced by Greek philosophy particularly Neo-Platonism, Jewish tradition and the allegorical method of Alexandrian school. Additionally, the saying of St. Ambrose of Milan, 'the letter kills but the spirit gives life'⁹⁰ helped Augustine to have a new vision of the Old Testament and led him to Christian faith.⁹¹ All these elements are quite clear in his interpretation.

Apart from it, Augustine emphasized on the authority of the church and the love for neighbor, as he expounded in *On Christian Doctrine* as,

"Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbour, does not yet understand them as he ought".⁹²

Moreover, for him theological framework was important for interpretation where scripture is authority,⁹³ other than that he merged the literal and the allegorical

⁸⁸ See David Jaspers, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, pp. 37-38.

⁸⁹ See Robert M. Grant, *History of the Interpretation of the Bible: Ancient Period* in *The Interpreter's Bible*, pp. 110-111; Frederick W. Danker, *Biblical Exegesis: Christian View* in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol.2, p. 144.

⁹⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:6.

⁹¹ See Robert M. Grant, *History of the Interpretation of the Bible: Ancient Period* in *The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 112.

⁹² St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* book 1, chapter 36, p. 1200, in online Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.pdf>, accessed on 25/09/2010.

⁹³ See *ibid.*, book 1, 37.

methods, which resulted in multiple meanings for the text. Thus, he followed a middle path between Alexandrian and Antioch schools, giving importance to both the literal and allegorical methods while preferring the literal more,⁹⁴ as he said,

“In regard to figurative expressions, a rule such as the following will be observed, to carefully turn over in our minds and meditate upon what we read till an interpretation be found that tends to establish the reign of love. Now, if when taken literally it at once gives a meaning of this kind, the expression is not to be considered figurative”.⁹⁵

Closely related to figurative expressions is the concept of ‘signs’ which he detailed in *On Christian Doctrine*. For him the words in themselves are only pointing towards something, they are signifiers and not the referred things themselves. Since words can be literal or figurative, the problem arises how to differentiate between them. For that grammar, linguistics or the context can determine the meaning, but most important is the faith and authority of the church.⁹⁶ Thus, faith was the most prominent factor throughout early and the medieval period and any interpretation crossing the authority of the church was simply rejected.

Coming to the middle ages, the interpretation of the Bible followed the same pattern i.e. it was faith based. Secondly, the influence of Alexandrian and Antiochian schools continued during this period, where the former was more powerful. Apart from it, in middle ages, John Cassian of early fifth century advocated fourfold interpretation, which dominated the scene. Cassian interpreted the scripture literally and spiritually, the later he subdivided according to the Biblical saying,

“What will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ See David Jaspers, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, p. 40.

⁹⁵ St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* book 3, chapter 15, p. 1281 in online Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.pdf>, accessed on 29/10/2010.

⁹⁶ See David Jaspers, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, pp. 40-41.

⁹⁷ 1 Corinthians 14: 6.

From it, he deduced the four senses in Biblical interpretation, allegorical, topological, anagogical and historical.⁹⁸ These four senses became standard of interpretation in the middle ages,⁹⁹ and helped in reducing the tension between literal and allegorical interpretation. This division is comparable to four-sense interpretation among medieval Jews but for them it was an ancient practice.¹⁰⁰ The Jewish method is denoted by the term PaRDeS, which is from peshat 'the plain sense', derash 'homiletically meaning', remez 'allusive meaning' and sod 'hidden or mystical meaning'.¹⁰¹

In middle ages we have Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) one of the greatest theologian and interpreter of the Bible; he added reason with faith in interpretation. However, reason for him was not as understood in the modern ages rather the one, which worked within the paradigm of faith, for him faith and reason, were complementary. The complementary nature of the two in Aquinas thought resides in the fact that the two leads to the knowledge of God and do not contradict each other. The knowledge of God is possible either through nature i.e. through creation, or by analogical reasoning but still there are truths which human reason alone cannot comprehend and for that God revealed the truth so that man can know Him, and this was the stance of church in interpretation. Therefore, the two ways to know God complement each other as God is the originator of both types of knowledge. Whereas the interpretation of the revelation must be through church any interpretation, which is not in accord with the

⁹⁸ See John Cassian, *Conferences*, conference xiv, chapter 8, p. 405, f.n.8 in online Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/cassian/conferences.pdf>, accessed on 16/09/2009. These four senses were composed in a form a rhyme which was often repeated in medieval age, it was:

The letter teaches events
Allegory what you should believe
Tropology what you should do
Anagogy where you should aim.

⁹⁹ For the detail on the fourfold interpretation and its philosophy see Christopher Ocker, *Medieval Exegesis and the Origin of Hermeneutics*, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999) p.338; John T. McNeil, *History of the Interpretation of the Bible: Medieval and Reformation Period* in *The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 116; Jaroslav Broz, *From Allegory to the Four Senses of Scripture Hermeneutics of the Church Fathers and of the Christian Middle Ages* in *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, pp. 307-309.

¹⁰⁰ See James D. Wood, *The Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 73.

¹⁰¹ See George Robinson, *Essential Judaism* (New York: Pocket Books 2000), p. 303.

church, will not reveal the truth, as reason alone is unable to know the truth unless unfolded by the revelation. In interpretation, first comes the literal sense than spiritual sense. Their relation as stated in *Summa Theologica* is,

“The author of Holy Writ is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things themselves. So, whereas in every other science things are signified by words, this science has the property, that the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification. Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it”¹⁰²

The simple words signify the literal or historical sense, whereas the spiritual sense is deduced from the signification of the simple words¹⁰³ and that must be according to the teachings of the church. According to him, Bible is the only book, which has divine and human authorship so it contains both literal and spiritual senses but literal is the doorway of spiritual and they both do not contradict each other.¹⁰⁴ Thus, Aquinas followed church in his interpretation, where reason and faith complement each other in a way that reason followed faith. With this, we move now to the modern era, a period marked with major shifts in the religious thought.

As said above socio-political factors play a role in the understanding and the interpretation of the scriptures so was the case in the changing world of the modern age. Change in social cum political life in the modern age brought a change in religious outlook. However, it took a long span, but from the very beginning modern age stood in a sharp contrast to the pervious ages. Very broadly, significant characteristic of the modern age is that it is reason oriented where reason stands in opposition to faith.

¹⁰² St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica* 1,q.1, art. 10, in online Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.pdf>, accessed on 12/09/2010.

¹⁰³ See James D. Wood, *The Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.81; St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica* 1,q.1, art. 10.

With this attitude, it shed new light on the old questions with new methodologies. Settled issues of canon, principles of interpretation, and the role of church began to appear again. Boundaries of canon and the issues of inspiration and authority of the scriptures were the areas probed again from different dimensions with new techniques. Identification of the text led the scholars to reconstruct the correct form of the text and develop the skill of textual criticism and to compare the existing text with the oldest manuscripts to arrive at the oldest text possible. The question of inspiration made them to consider that whether whole Bible was divinely inspired or is mixed with human words, and if so on what criteria the two can be differentiated. Moreover previously church guided the underlying principles in interpretation but in the new circumstances 'faith' lagged behind giving place to other secular methods like that of philology, science, study of history, archeology and so forth to have dominance in reading and interpreting text. In the nutshell, it was the age of reason and science and they were foundations for all Biblical studies.

Coming to the details of the modern age, pre-nineteenth century witnessed the great revolution of reformation, which revolutionized the nature of Biblical studies and its interpretation. Although it inherited, some of the principles related to text and its interpretation from the previous age but differed radically in their implementation. Example of it is Martin Luther (1483-1536) a prominent figure of this era who while retaining certain principles of the middle ages unlocked the door for future changes. As for the reading or interpreting, he emphasized that it must be faith oriented, to start it with a prayer. Similarly, in the beginning he accepted the fourfold principle of interpretation but later on rejected the allegorical and analogical, retaining only the literal and the moral sense of the text. In rejecting them, he in fact wanted to discard the impositions of the church and to establish a free interaction of the reader with the text. Literal meaning helps in having a direct understanding or direct relation with the

text away from the church.¹⁰⁵ Thus, Luther realized that direct relation with the text is the first step in its understanding and interpretation and literal meaning is most suitable for that. In fact, before him, scriptures with canonization acquired the status of a theological or legal document within church. This resulted in a gap between the scripture and the reader thus making their relation impersonal. Luther tried to restore the personal relation between Bible and the reader, by giving importance to experience and not to the historical, theological or the teachings of the church.¹⁰⁶ Undoubtedly with this Luther was able to take Bible out of confines of the church and to give it to the common hands still the quality of this relationship was religious as it was 'experiential, or inspirational, as if Christ talks to the reader directly'.¹⁰⁷

It is evident from above that though Luther maintained the link with the preceding age but his modifications in interpretation had far-reaching effects. From them was that after rejecting the authority of the church and establishing the personal relationship with the text its interpretation was open to anyone. For him, any pious Christian can interpret it, 'unless sound reason or the scripture prohibits it'.¹⁰⁸ Thus, 'human reason and scripture' guided interpretation; however, he did not define their *modus operandi*. Besides, when interpretation was open for everyone that resulted in unlimited interpretations, on what basis to prefer certain interpretation among the competing ones, Luther was not very clear about it. Additionally, in the following centuries, these principles moved in directions not anticipated by Luther as 'human reason' became the sole authority later on. Whereas interpreting scripture through scripture required further clarifications particularly after rejecting the authority of the church. Luther's own understanding was simply that after leaving the tradition the text would be automatically clear. The plain or the literal text would speak for itself; within it, he also incorporated the historical and the grammatical meanings. Here again he added the

¹⁰⁵ See David Jaspers, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, pp. 57, 59.

¹⁰⁶ See James D. Wood, *The Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁷ See David Jaspers, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁸ See Roland H. Bainton, *The Bible in the Reformation* in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, p. 2.

component of faith that the Holy Spirit would determine the correct from the incorrect interpretation.¹⁰⁹ In summary, he established the principle of sola scriptura on faith as against the tradition of the church.

With the principle of sola scriptura the question of identify canon was also dealt with by Luther, to mark the limits of scripture he took two steps; one was to translate the text from Hebrew or Latin,¹¹⁰ and the other was to formulate a criterion to identify the text. According to him, the criterion to know the scripture was Christological. The gospel was the message of Christ whether in the Old or in the New Testament and that was scripture, which is to be included in canon,

“Christ is the center around which all scripture revolves and that the entire Bible has meaning by virtue of, and in proportion to, its emphasis upon the gospel of Christ”.¹¹¹

As already, stated social and cultural setup of life shapes at times the religious understanding of people. Advancement in technology particularly with the invention of printing press Bible reading became common as compared to the middle ages.

Consequently, this enhanced the individual reading and interpretation.

It is clear from above that although Luther in his interpretation denied the tradition of the church but remained within the boundaries of faith and his interpretation was Christological and subjective. At the same time, he opened new areas, which eventually led to great changes in the Biblical interpretation. Later new methodologies emerged, which were secular in nature and led Biblical studies to advance in a free land, unknown to previous generations. Above this, it also gave freedom to individual interpretation, a precept totally unknown before. No doubt, this freedom matched the modern age but in coming generations, it proved to be two edged.

With this, we enter in the age of reason where ‘human reason’ was elevated to the highest status and became the sole standard for judging everything. Here reason, unlike

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹¹⁰ See page no. 60 above.

¹¹¹ See Samuel Terrien, *History of the Interpretation of the Bible: Modern Period* in *The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 123.

Aquinas, was not faith oriented, rather stood in opposition to it. With a dominant anti-religious shade, it greatly altered the outlook of people.¹¹² It was human centered age, to what Descartes pointed, 'I think therefore I am'. Thus, with it unaided human reason became the decisive factor and not faith in reading or understanding the text,¹¹³ making interpretation a secular and an academic discipline while checking the Biblical narratives rationally, historically and scientifically. With the passage of time Bible lost its divine status, instead it became a book of ancient stories giving information about the oriental past. In this situation, the historical investigation of Bible resembled largely excavations in archaeology where layer after layer was removed in order to reach the historical facts.¹¹⁴ Important issues in historical investigation were the life of Jesus, and the origins of the early Christianity. The German scholar H. S. Reimarus (1694-1768) pioneered 'the quest of historical Jesus' to find 'historical facts' about Jesus with the tools of reason and philology.¹¹⁵ Thus, now reading of the text became anti-theological and anti-religious with historical and rational tools. Apart from history, literary approach too was applied in the same spirit to the Biblical narratives by comparing them with ancient literary models of the oriental nations.¹¹⁶ Undoubtedly, history and literary approaches are essential but in the anti-religious setting of the enlightenment age, they became biased.

Coming to nineteenth century where omniscience of human reason and anti-religious trends became more powerful with the development of science. The discoveries in biology, physics, astrology, history and archeology and so forth were major achievements of the age. Scientific development had an influence on religious

¹¹² See David Jaspers, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, p. 63; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church Today*, *The Irish Theological Quarterly*, 62 (1996), p. 85.

¹¹³ See David Jaspers, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, pp. 63-64.

¹¹⁴ Robert Alter in his book *The Art of Biblical Narrative* used the term 'excavation' for the historical inquiry of Biblical text, as quoted by John Barton, see *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville London: Westminster John Knox Press 2007), p. 39.

¹¹⁵ See Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *The Gospels as Fraud*, taken from the Wolfenbüttele Fragments in *The Historical Jesus Quest*.

¹¹⁶ See David Jaspers, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, p. 72.

thought generally and on interpretation of the Bible particularly. Western science being naturalistic and materialistic opposed everything out of its sphere for example metaphysical truths. The results of scientific investigation increased the gulf between religion and people thus boosting anti-religious tendencies further. Taking the example of evolutionary thought of Darwin and its impact on Biblical interpretation we find that the idea of evolution does not match the Biblical narration of man's creation. Now if Biblical narratives were untrue scientifically what would be their status and how would they be interpreted?¹¹⁷ Faced with this confused state, man of nineteenth century opted for the scientific understanding as the only correct choice. This state of affairs naturally had undesirable consequences regarding Biblical worth, as everything 'unscientific' in scriptures was brushed aside as myth. Thus, scientific principles became the norm to judge the truth of Biblical accounts. Differentiating between scientific and mythical elements in Biblical narrations was one of the major concerns of Tübingen School and of Bultmann in his demythologizing.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) who is the father of modern interpretation in nineteenth century, concentrated on the relation between reader and text. There are two important components in his theory, one is grammatical with linguistics and second is psychological or interaction between reader and the text.¹¹⁸ In his view for a correct interpretation both components must play their role, understanding of cultural and historical background of the author is important but there must be an intuitive insight of the author's intention. In other words, the task of the interpreter is to understand the text in a better way as compared to its author. What he meant is that the reader today is in a better position to understand the text as compared to the author; the writer might not have fully comprehended what he wrote. The reader today has the skills of linguistics and other scientific methods, which were not available

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 85; Richard S. Briggs, What does Hermeneutics have to do with Biblical Interpretation? *HeyJ* 47(2006), p. 58; Van A. Harvey, Hermeneutics in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 6, p. 281.

before, therefore he is in a better position to understand the text. Secondly being historically and culturally away from the time of the text the reader is able to stand away and to appreciate in a better way the intention of the author as compared to the author himself.¹¹⁹ This new principle of interpretation is to some extent creative in nature as compared to simple methods used in linguistics and historical study. However, it requires scholarly tools on the one hand and a strong sense of imagination on the other to penetrate in the thoughts of the author. In fact to what extent a modern reader can penetrate in the thoughts of the author with critical scientific tools can never be guaranteed. In fact, superiority of the modern man over his primitive counter-part, and that the former is well equipped with scientific tools is the underlying assumption of evolutionary thought. This became an accepted fact in the modern age and is well reflected in Bultmann's thought.

Biblical criticism of nineteenth century is another feature, which dominated Biblical scene with its tools of rationality, scientific and historic study and remained in vogue till the end of the century.¹²⁰ Biblical criticism being historical in nature concentrated on genetic questions related to the text, it dealt with the issues of authorship, date, writing, content and its integrity using scientific tools in its study. Thus, the process of composition and development of text was more important for a critic as compared to its final form. Regarding interpretation, this helped in retrieving the original text in order to arrive at its correct reading. In addition, to arrive at author's intention and what it meant for the early readers contextual understanding was essential.

Origins of historical criticism are usually linked with enlightenment but the spirit of reformation is equally responsible. Emphasis of German thought on Bible's authority and its free reading away from church's authority is the moving spirit behind it.

Reformation gave full right to critical studies to judge its meaning, as stated by Barton,

¹¹⁹ See David Jaspers, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, p. 85.

¹²⁰ Other terms used for Biblical Criticism is 'historical-critical method', 'biblical interpretation' and more recently 'biblical studies', see John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*, p. 1.

“Faced with an ecclesiastical interpretation of this or that text, the biblical critic does not automatically accept that the magisterium of the church guarantees that the meaning proposed is the true one, but reserves the right to apply rational principles of criticism. Chief among these will be to ask whether the proposed meaning was possible at the time the text was written: did a given term have the range of meanings being put forward?”¹²¹

Thus, historical critical method uncovers the original text for the critic from the later coverings. Need to restore the original text is unavoidable as the most ancient version of the Bible is only copy of copies.¹²² For that textual criticism, one of the forms of historical-critical method is helpful in reconstructing the text by comparing ancient manuscripts.¹²³ Other forms commonly applied in criticism for retrieving the original text are source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism and so forth.¹²⁴

Greatest contribution in interpreting Biblical accounts through historical critical method is by Tübingen School of Germany where F. C. Baur and D. F. Strauss (1808-1874) played major role. Strauss pointed out the legendary and irrational accounts present in gospels, and that its theology was the work of early church, whereas Baur looked behind irrational stories, at the intention and purpose of the author in their

¹²¹ John Barton, *Historical-critical approaches in Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (New York: Cambridge University Press 1998), p. 16.

¹²² For detail see Frederic Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Macmillan & Co. 1901); and *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (New York: Harper & Brothers 1951), fourth ed., reprinted; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press 1968), second ed.; Ernest C. Colwell, *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1969); Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament* tr. Peter R. Ackroyd (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1957)

¹²³ See J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to the New Testament Textual Criticism* (USA: Hendrickson Publishers 1999), second printing; Leon Vaganay *An Introduction to the New Testament Textual Criticism* tr. Jenny Heimerdinger (New York: Cambridge University Press 1991); David Alan Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism* (Michigan: Baker Books 1994); G. Thomas Tanselle *A Rationale of Textual Criticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1989); Jerome J. McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia 1999), third Printing.

¹²⁴ See ed. J. W. Rogerson & Judith M. Lieu, *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: University Press 2006); John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*; Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Gospels in Current Study* (Michigan: Baker Books 1980), second edition; Luis Alonso Schokel, *Understanding Biblical Research* tr. Peter J. McCord (London: Burns & Oates 1968).

writings. Moreover, this school faced the challenge of reconstructing and verifying the figure of historical Jesus.¹²⁵ Briefly the stance of Tübingenians regarding Jesus was that he was a historical figure, who lived and died in a particular age. However, the historical data of the gospels when analyzed scientifically is contradictory and fragmentary thus not helpful in constructing a historical picture of Jesus. Moreover, Biblical accounts of Jesus are unauthentic as these stories oppose natural laws like in virgin birth, resurrection and so forth. Thus, according to them, miraculous accounts of Jesus' life were in direct contradiction with the modern perception of natural laws of cause and effect; so numerous books written on 'life of Jesus' during this period focused on this inconsistency. To rationalize these inconsistencies these accounts were either eliminated or explained as 'deceptive stories' or 'myths', which we find in the writings of Schleiermacher, Reimarus, Paulus (1761-1851) and Strauss. Schleiermacher's stance was simply rational but it was with Reimarus who gave rational explanation to Jesus' story. For him miraculous elements were tricks or deceptive stories created by disciples of Jesus. For Paulus they were illusions and misunderstandings and for Strauss, who was more critical and doubted even the historical reality of Jesus, for him it was Christ-myth created on the pattern of God-manhood and was taken as ultimate goal of humanity.¹²⁶ Thus, this rational critical wave resulted in questioning historical truth of Jesus and authenticity of scripture.

Biblical criticism remained in full swing until the end of nineteenth century, by the end of the century it started to lose its strength as serious objections were raised regarding its methodology and results. Liberal theologians were the supporters of historical-critical method but after the world war with the disapproval of liberal stance, biblical criticism too came under attack. Mainly the objections were that biblical

¹²⁵ For details on the 'Quest' of historical Jesus see Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, tr. W. Montgomery (London: Adam and Charles Black 1910); *The Historical Jesus Quest*, ed. Gregory W. Dawes (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press 2000).

¹²⁶ See Jean-Robert Armogathe, *Biblical Studies in the Eighteenth Century. From the Letter to the Figure*, *Concilium* 1 (February 1991), pp. 69-76; W. Neil, *The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible 1700-1950* in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, pp. 275-277.

criticism concentrated on peripheral issues related to literary, philology or history while ignoring the central and important themes of bible. Consequently, there is a shift in biblical interpretation in twentieth century, from biblical criticism to the meaning of bible. The relevance of the word of God for the modern man became the essential issue in biblical interpretation, which was also the concern of Biblical Theological Movement. Commenting on the Biblical Theological Movement Childs elaborated that though historical critical method produced some sound results still it failed to bring theological fruits due to over concentration on trivial issues, the task of theology as stated by him,

“Of course, lying at the center of the new concern for a theologically oriented study of the Bible was the conviction that the scriptures were highly relevant for modern man.”¹²⁷

Bultmann as a theologian took the task of interpretation of the New Testament for the modern man. In what sense is it relevant for the modern man was the main concern of Bultmann. In accordance with the modern theology, he rejected the historical critical method and his demythologizing the New Testament is to eliminate the non-relevant elements from it for the modern man. Keeping in view the needs of modern man the interpretation shifted from the original meaning of the text or the author to the reader response side. It is a change from the nineteenth century interpretation to the twentieth, the details of reader response interpretation in Bultmann’s thought will be discussed in the following chapters.

CONCLUSION

Al-Ghazālī and Bultmann were renowned theologians and were concerned with the interpretation of Christian sacred literature. In the Muslim world prior to al-Ghazālī theological and historical criticism was dominant whereas al-Ghazālī instead of examining the same issues, was more concerned with the meaning of the text. Similar is

¹²⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press n. d.), p. 34.

the case of Bultmann who appeared on the scene when modern critical method started to lose its position and instead he was inclined towards the 'meaning' of the text. Al-Ghazālī's option was not the result of decline of other methods as it was for Bultmann. Muslim scholarship, from al-Nizāmiyyah and otherwise was exploring new dimensions in these methods but al-Ghazālī attention was diverted to its interpretation due to richness of meaning present in it. On the other side Bultmann was well aware of bankruptcy of historical method and was faced with the demand of 'interpretation' therefore he chose it. Moreover, being a representative of modern age he inherited the intellectual climate of the modern times where Bible lost its sanctity and revelatory status and modern rationalism, scientific and critical tools were most powerful weapons to dissect Bible. With critical devices modern scholarship tried to fix the text but was unable to do so, their methods were erected on philosophies i.e. deism, humanism, Kantian, Hegelian or Tübingenian thought thus were impositions from the side of man on the text. For al-Ghazālī the text still retained the original teachings of Jesus but it was lost under the blanket of later interpretations. Even for other Muslim scholars Injil was a revealed book but Christians were in a confused state. From above it is clear al-Ghazālī and Bultmann remained within different paradigms in interpretation of Christian text. In the forth coming chapter the principles followed by them in interpretation would be discussed. The place of principles cannot be ignored as they provide the foundations to erect the structure of interpretation.

CHAPTER TWO

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION:

MEANING AND PRINCIPLES OF AL-TA'WĪL

ETYMOLOGY OF AL-TA'WĪL AND RELATED TERMS

The word *al-ta'wīl* is derived from the verb *awwala*, *yua'wwilu*, meaning 'to return' or from *iyyālah* which is to manage properly or to put things rightly, so *al-ta'wīl* which is a verbal noun, means to explain, expound or to interpret.¹ Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī defined in his *Mu'jam* the former derivative as, 'to return to its original place in knowledge or in action', about knowledge as is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān: "and none knows its interpretation save only God. And those firmly rooted in knowledge" (3:7).

And about action as it comes: "Do they look for aught else but its interpretation? The day its interpretation comes" (7:53).

That is the end or aim of a thing, whereas the meaning of the second derivative is to govern, manage or to handle something rightly.² According to Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 H.) *al-ta'wīl* when it is derived from *al-awl* it means to 'return' and technically it is the diversion of the verse from its apparent meaning to a deeper or possible meaning, and when derived from *al-iyyālah* it is to govern and technically it is to put the meaning in its proper place.³

In the Holy Qur'ān the word *al-ta'wīl* occurs seventeen times in different meanings; it occurs as interpretation of dreams,⁴ in interpretation of an event,⁵ as end, result or fulfillment,⁶ and as hidden or veiled understanding.⁷ In the prophetic tradition it appeared in a prayer for Ibn 'Abbās that God may grant him wisdom and instruct him

¹ See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Qum: Nashr Adab al-Ḥawzah 1405 H.), vol. 11, pp. 32-34; al-Firūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah 1407/1987), p. 1244; Ibn Athīr, *al-Nihāyah fi Gharīb al-Ḥadīth wa al-Āthār*, ed. Ṭāhir Aḥmad al-Zāwī and Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī (Qum: Mu'assasah Ismā'īliyyān 1364), vol. 1, pp. 80-81

² See al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Mu'jam Mufradāt al-fāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. Nadīm Mar'shīlī (n. p.: Maṭba'ah al-Taqaḍḍum al-'Arabī 1392/1972), p. 27.

³ See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍal Ibrāhīm ('Azīzi: Maṭba'ah Amīr 1363), vol.4, p. 192.

⁴ See Yūsuf 6, 21, 36, 37, 45, 44, 100, 101.

⁵ See al-Kahaf 78, 82, and Yūnus 39.

⁶ See al-Nisā' 59, al-Isrā' 35, al-A'rāf 53 (twice).

⁷ See Āl-'Imrān 7 (twice).

in al-ta'wīl.⁸ In a narration by al-Zuhri it appeared as a query about saying full prayers during journey by al-Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah. The reply was that she ta'wwalat (interpreted) like 'Uthmān i.e. the way he interpreted during al-Ḥajj to perform full prayer.⁹ Meaning of al-ta'wīl is best illustrated in comparison with its pair *al-tafsīr*, which appears only once in the Holy Qur'ān in the meaning of 'explanation'.¹⁰ Al-tafsīr, commonly used for the Qur'ānic commentary, is from the root word *fasara*, which means unveiling, clarification, exposition or illustration of words.¹¹ Scholars varied in their opinion regarding the meaning and relationship of these terms; whether they are synonyms and are used interchangeably or not.¹² Al-Suyūṭī, and al-Zarkashī (d.974 H.) elaborated the opinion of those who maintained a polarity between them. According to some of these narrations al-tafsīr is general as compared to al-ta'wīl and is limited to illustrate meanings of the words whereas al-ta'wīl explains sentences, or that al-tafsīr bears only single interpretation of the passages and al-ta'wīl bears more than one interpretation, or that al-tafsīr is to identify exactly the meaning as intended by God and al-ta'wīl is to select one opinion among many, or that al-tafsīr is based on *al-riwāyiyah* (traditions of the prophet- peace be upon him-or the companions) and is general in nature with explanation of difficult words whereas al-ta'wīl is based on *al-dirāyiyah* (deduction or deeper comprehension within the limits set by al-sharī'ah) with *Ijtihād* (analysis of the text) by choosing a particular meaning from a set of statements

⁸ See Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak 'alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990), vol. 3, p. 618.

⁹ See Muḥammad b. Ismā'il b. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-'Arabīyah n. d.), al-Taqṣīr, hadīth 5. 196.

¹⁰ See al-Furqān 33.

¹¹ See Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 5, p. 55.

¹² See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol.4, pp. 192-195; Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍal Ibrāhīm (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifaḥ 1391/1972), vol.2, pp. 149-153; Muḥammad Ḥussayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn* (Beirut: Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī 1396/1976), vol.1, pp. 17-22; I. Poonnawala, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P.J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill 2000), art. *Ta'wīl*, vol. x, pp. 390-391.

while taking into consideration linguistic, contextual and conceptual understandings.¹³ From above it can be said that the dichotomy is epistemological, difference in them arises as they take different dimensions of meanings. Al-Tafsīr concentrates on the meaning of the words, terms or expressions while remaining within the boundaries of authoritative transmission whereas al-ta'wīl investigates in a broader perspective of linguistics and contextual meaning and so does not remain within the boundaries of tradition or al-riwāyyah only. Furthermore an important difference between the two is that al-tafsīr is *dhū wajh* (single interpretation) and al-ta'wīl on the other hand is *dhū wujūh* (has multiple interpretations or aspects) and one is preferred among them. Commenting on the categorization of verses in al-tafsīr and al-ta'wīl that is identifying verses which can accept only one interpretation, i.e. *dhū wajh* and verses which can accept multiple interpretations, i.e. *dhū wujūh*. John Wansbrough linked it with the concept of *al-muḥkam* and *al-mutashābih*. As for al-muḥkam it can accept only one interpretation and so it falls under al-tafsīr, whereas al-mutashābih accepts multiple interpretations therefore it can be categorized under al-ta'wīl. Moreover, the relation between al-muḥkam and al-mutashābih is that the latter is interpreted in the light of former.¹⁴ Thus, al-ta'wīl relies on al-tafsīr in interpretation. Without entering in this discussion as it is out of our scope, our concern is the interdependence of al-muḥkam and al-mutashābih in interpretation. Undoubtedly al-muḥkam is foundational and provides guiding principles for the interpretation of al-mutashābih particularly in case of verses related to God. Methodologically ambiguous and unclear verses are to be understood in the light of unambiguous and clear verses. Al-Ghazālī too followed the same principle in his interpretation where the ambiguous terms and verses of John about the divinity of Jesus were explained in the light of clear verses of his humanity.

¹³ See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, pp. 193-194; al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, pp. 149-150; al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, vol. 1, pp. 21-22; Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its interpreters* (Albany: University Press New York n. d.), vol.1, pp. 20-21.

¹⁴ See John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies sources and methods of scriptural interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977), pp. 155-157.

Coming to the historical development of the al-tafsīr and al-ta'wīl and whether they were synonyms or distinctive terms from the early period, it seems that the two terms appeared as synonyms in the early period as al-Ṭabarī (d. 310) or Mujāhid bin Jabr (d. 104) while commenting on the verses used the term al-ta'wīl in place of al-tafsīr; moreover some of the titles of the Qur'ānic commentaries too have these terms interchangeably for example the commentary of al-Nasafī (d. 701/1301) bears the title of *Madārik al-tanzīl wa Ḥaqā'iq al-ta'wīl*, al-Baiḍāwī (d. 716/1316) of *Anwār al-tanzīl wa Asrār al-ta'wīl*, and al-Khāzin (d. 741/1340) of *Lubāb al-ta'wīl fī Ma'ānī al-tanzīl*. Still, we find the difference in the two terms was clearly demarcated in the early period as it is evident from the wordings of Ibn Ḥabīb al-Nīsāpūrī that confusion prevails among al-mufassirūn regarding the distinction between al-tafsīr and al-ta'wīl.¹⁵ In the opinion of I. Poonawala and al-Dhahabī the distinction between the terms al-tafsīr and al-ta'wīl was not very sharp in the early period and they were separately defined later on.¹⁶ Reason behind this dichotomy in the later age was of political nature according to I. Poonawala. As long as al-ta'wīl did not contradict the literal meaning of the Qur'ān or ḥadīth it was not opposed by the Sunnī orthodoxy but when it deviated from the traditional sources and was used by different sects, since then it became a technical term for the allegorical and esoteric interpretations, common among Shī'īs, Ismā'īlīs and Sufīs.¹⁷ Whereas according to al-Dhahabī with the development of various disciplines like al-'Usūl, al-Taṣawwūf and al-Kalām, al-ta'wīl was distinguished from al-tafsīr. It was distinctively defined as diversion from the literal to a possible meaning due to *dalīl* (indicator) and without an indicator al-ta'wīl would be incorrect.¹⁸ The development of al-ta'wīl within these disciplines reflects the *al-riwāyyah-al-dirāyyah* distinction in them. As al-ta'wīl is the diversion from the literal to a possible meaning

¹⁵ See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, p. 192; al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, p. 152; al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*, vol. 1, p. 19.

¹⁶ See I. Poonawala, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, art. Ta'wīl, vol. x, p. 391; al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*, vol. 1, p. 17.

¹⁷ See Poonawala, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, art. Ta'wīl, p. 391.

¹⁸ See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*, vol.1, pp. 17-18.

thus it requires reasoning and analysis to arrive at a possible meaning, thus it is a step forward from the apparent meaning. On the other hand Poonawala's opinion that sectarian differences turned al-ta'wīl opposite to al-tafsīr would mean that al-tafsīr represented Sunnī orthodoxy and al-ta'wīl, in contradiction to it, is the opinion of deviated sects from the traditional thought. Thus al-tafsīr-al-ta'wīl would not be complementary, in his opinion, but would be contradictory to each other.

Furthermore, equating Sufis, Shī'ites and Ismā'īlites in their esoteric explanations cannot be justified as al-ta'wīl among Sunnī Sufi remained within the boundaries of traditional thought which would be clear from the exposition of al-Ghazālī's interpretation. From the above it is clear that for Poonawala intellectual trends were the outcome of political differences whereas for al-Dhahabī that was not the case.

Although it cannot be denied that institutions interact and influence in any society, still only political conflicts cannot produce civilizations rich of innovative ideas as was the case with the Islamic civilization in its early phase. Perhaps as pointed by al-Dhahabī, that distinctive form of al-ta'wīl appeared late with the development of various disciplines as a natural outcome of intellectual growth of the age. Nevertheless, it had its origins in the traditional sources and was in conformity with al-tafsīr in the earlier thought. Later technically it only points to the deeper and wider meanings as compared to simple explanation of words. Complementary as well as distinctive nature of al-tafsīr-al-ta'wīl is further confirmed in the words of the prophet (peace be upon him) for Ibn 'Abbās that may God grant him wisdom and instruct him in al-ta'wīl. Concluding from above it can be stated that al-ta'wīl in the Sunnī traditional thought meant extracting and unveiling deeper meaning while not contradicting the literal sense. And al-Ghazālī being a scholar of Sunnī tradition, remained within its bounds. Closely connected to al-ta'wīl is another pair al-zāhir and al-bāṭin which we shall now discuss.

AL-ZĀHIR AND AL-BĀṬIN

Al-Zāhir is from the verb *zāhara yazharu* with the root *ḡa-ha-ra* which means visible, apparent or external and is opposite to *al-bāṭin* that is hidden or concealed. *Al-Zāhir* is also used for the surface of the earth and *al-bāṭin* for its inside; when any thing happens on *zāhir al-ard* it means it is commonly known whereas *bāṭin al-ard* is a secret or hidden happening.¹⁹ In *Muʿjam al-Mufradāt* the meaning is further expanded that *al-zāhir* is for all known or knowable by senses or wisdom as compared to *al-bāṭin* which is concealed or the hidden aspect of the things.²⁰ *ʿilm al-zāhir* and *ʿilm al-bāṭin* are at times used for *jalī* (unequivocal, explicit) and *khafī* (veiled or obscure) *ʿulūm*, and at times for the knowledge of this world and of the hereafter respectively.²¹ In the Holy Qurʾān *al-zāhir* is used in the meaning of 'clear, apparent or known' and *al-bāṭin* for 'covered or hidden' thing,²² it also appears as Divine names.²³ So He is the manifest or is concealed, or that *al-zāhir* is the intuitive and *al-bāṭin* real or true knowledge of Him, or that He is manifest through His signs whereas concealed in His essence, or He perceives all but is not perceived.²⁴

From above it becomes clear that *al-zāhir* is the outward, apparent and explicit aspect of a thing as against *al-bāṭin* which is the inward, hidden and implicit side, this distinction corresponds to the *al-tafsīr-al-taʿwīl* dichotomy or the literal and non literal interpretation. Thus *al-bāṭin* or *al-taʿwīl* is the inward, hidden or the non literal interpretation whereas *al-tafsīr* or *al-zāhir* is the outward, apparent or the literal interpretation. Highlighting the difference in *al-zāhir* and *al-bāṭin* *al-Suyūṭī* narrated that *al-zāhir* refers to the word of the Qurʾān and *al-bāṭin* to *al-taʿwīl*, or *al-zāhir* is the apparent, literal explanations as opposed to the hidden meanings which are revealed to the *arbāb al-ḥaqāʾiq*, or *al-zāhir* are the stories of the past nations whereas the hidden

¹⁹ See Rohi Baalbaki, *al-Mawrid* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm lil malāyyin 1990), art. *zāhir* and *bāṭin*.

²⁰ See *al-Aṣṣfahānī*, *Muʿjam Mufradāt*, p.328.

²¹ Ibid.

²² See Ghāfir 26, al-Anʿām 151, al-Aʿrāf 33, al-Kahf 22, al-Rūm 7, 41, al-Ḥadid 13.

²³ Al-Ḥadid 3.

²⁴ See *al-Aṣṣfahānī*, *Muʿjam Mufradāt*, p.50.

lessons in these stories is their al-bāṭin.²⁵ It is narrated by Ibn ‘Abbās that the Holy Qur’ān is a treasure with endless exoteric and esoteric meanings, there are stories of the past nations, metaphors and similes, *ahkām* pertaining to lawful and unlawful, abrogated and non abrogated verses, al-muḥkam and al-mutashābihah, al-zāhir and al-bāṭin, and al-zāhir is the recitation and al-bāṭin is the understanding or al-ta’wīl of it, so knowledge must be attained from the scholars while avoiding the company of the unlearned.²⁶ It is also narrated that the proper appreciation of the Holy Qur’ān is possible only when looked through various perspectives.²⁷ Al-Suyūṭī emphasized exoteric exegesis as an essential step and only after a firm grasp of it esoteric understanding follows; thus, anyone claiming esoteric knowledge without sound grasp of the exoteric aspect is a liar.²⁸ In a ḥadīth it comes that for every verse there is al-zāhir, al-bāṭin, al-ḥadd and al-maṭla’,²⁹ according to Ibn al-Athīr (544-606 H.) al-ḥadd is the limit and al-maṭla’ the point of ascendancy or gaining knowledge from above.³⁰ Thus, al-ḥadd and al-maṭla’ is another pair for the expression of al-zāhir and al-bāṭin, they are metaphorical expressions in which al-ḥadd is the limit, boundary or the maximum that the mind can grasp and al-maṭla’ is the point of ascendancy where knowledge is given from above.

Consequently it may be stated that al-ta’wīl parallels al-bāṭin and al-tafsīr corresponds to al-zāhir, in al-ta’wīl the inner, concealed or the esoteric meaning is to be extracted and in al-tafsīr the outward, apparent, or the exoteric side is highlighted. Leaving aside al-tafsīr or al-zāhir as it is out of scope, we will concentrate only on al-ta’wīl or al-bāṭin aspect in what follows. Here two issues would be discussed briefly, firstly acceptance or

²⁵ See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, pp. 225-227.

²⁶ Ibid., p.226.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Qāsim bin Sallām, *Fadā’il al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1420), p. 98.

³⁰ See Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāyah fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, vol.1, p. 353, and vol. 3, p. 132; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, pp. 225-226.

perception of al-ta'wīl among the major schools of thought in al-Ghazālī's age, secondly what criteria for discerning the inward meaning was employed by them. In al-ta'wīl to uncover the hidden meaning the interpreter needs to cross behind the apparent sense. To reach the correct implication certain principles or criteria must be followed. Valid principles are important as they influence and determine the dimension of the interpretation. Within Muslim schools overlapping interpretations appeared due to diverging principles. Same is the case of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann; their differences mainly go back to opposing presuppositions and principles of interpretation. In the age of al-Ghazālī chiefly there were two extremes, those who denied the distinction between al-zāhir and al-bāṭin and rejected al-ta'wīl altogether, and those who accepted this difference and considered al-ta'wīl a foundational pillar in understanding the text. Apart from these extremes the rest of the trends oscillated between these poles. Within those who considered al-ta'wīl a valid tool differed on the principles of interpretation, whether to rely on reason, mystical approach, theological aspect, or the ritualistic and practical side only whereas Shī'ites particularly Ismā'īlites relied on the authority of Imām in their interpretation. On the extreme of taking the literal meaning as the only correct sense is the school of Dawūd b. 'Alī al-Zāhirī.³¹ Due to their strict following the letter of the word and rejecting qiyās their opinions does not match with the general view.³² Famous exponent

³¹ He was Abu Sulaymān Dāwūd b. 'Alī b. Khalāf born in 200 or 202 in Kufā and died in Baghdad in 270 and was founder of Dāwūdī or Zāhirī school. He rejected *qiyās*, *ta'līl* and *taqlīd* of any *imām* in *fiqh*. This school is basically a *fiqhī madhhab* and not a theological faction but later the theological side was developed particularly by Ibn Ḥazm. See Ignaz Goldziher, *The Zāhirīs: Their Doctrine and Their History*, ed. and tr. Wolfgang Behn (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1971).

³² In *fiqh* there are many issues where opinion of zāhirites differed widely from the general view, for example in usury limitation to six items only which are mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān, rejection of geographical limits for shortening of prescribed prayers, for every prayer ablution must be performed i.e. to repeat it for every prayer. See for detail Ignaz Goldziher, *The Zāhirīs: Their Doctrine and Their History*, pp. 40-80.

of this school was Ibn Ḥazm who rejected al-ta'wīl altogether and condemned whoever interpreted the word of the Qur'ān.³³

Ḥanbalites were near to Zāhrites in holding fast to the literal interpretation of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth and in denying al-ta'wīl. Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal followed the path of Imām Mālik (d. 179/795) who rejected al-ta'wīl for the attributes of Allah and his statement *al-Istiwā' ma'lūm wa al-kaifīyah majhūl wa al-imān bihi wājib wa al-su'āl 'anhu bid'ah* is oft quoted by scholars. Still there are few aḥādīth where Imām Ḥanbal had to interpret and could not take the apparent meaning.³⁴ Generally speaking, Ḥanbalites are near to Zāhirite thought³⁵ and have been described by Watt as 'conservatives' in relation to mutakallimūn³⁶ who opposed rational argumentation in theology and emphasized on following the letter of the Qur'ān, Sunnah and the early generation only.³⁷ Among them was Muwaffaq al-Dīn 'Abd Allah b. Qudāmah (d. 620/1233) who wrote *Dhamm al-Ta'wīl* and later Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah (d.728/1328) vehemently rejected al-ta'wīl. In his treatise on 'Ilm al-bāṭin and al-zāhir³⁸ he strongly condemned al-Ghazālī and his concept of al-ta'wīl.

On the other extreme were Ismā'ilites, for them Imām was the sole authority in religious understanding and relied heavily on al-ta'wīl. Al-zāhir and al-bāṭin in Ismā'ilite thought is of paramount importance, everything revealed by God or said by the prophet has two aspects i.e. outward and inward; and salvation lies in following the esoteric meaning only.³⁹ The view of Ismā'ilites is well depicted in the commentary of

³³ See Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr 1317 H.), vol. 2, p. 140; Ignaz Goldziher, *The Zāhirīs: Their Doctrines and Their History*, p. 124.

³⁴ See al-Ghazālī, Fayṣal al-Tafriqah, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il* ed. Muḥammad 'Alī Biḍūn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutūb al-'Ilmiyyah n. d.), pp. 83-84.

³⁵ See Ignaz Goldziher, *The Zāhirīs: Their Doctrines and Their History*, p. 81.

³⁶ See W. Momtgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: University Press Edinburgh 1985), p. 57.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³⁸ See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Risālah fi 'Ilm al-bāṭin wa al-zāhir*
<http://www.almeshkat.net/books/open.php?book=1557&cat=25> (accessed on 15/6/10).

³⁹ See Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan al-Nūbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī'ah* (Istanbul: Maṭba'at al-ḍawlah 1931), pp. 63-64.

Abū al-Haytham al-Jurjānī for the ḥadīth of the prophet (peace be upon him), 'Between my tomb and the pulpit where I preach, there is a garden from among the gardens of Paradise', where he says, "needless to say, this saying is not to be understood in a literal, exoteric sense (al-zāhir). The pulpit for preaching is precisely this literal appearance, that is to say, positive religion with all its imperatives and dogmas. The tomb is philosophy for in this tomb the exoteric aspect of positive religion and its dogmas must undergo the decomposition and dissolution of death".⁴⁰ Ismā'īlites were influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy⁴¹ which is evident in their concept of revelation and prophecy.⁴² For them al-tanzīl or the revelation is shapeless or is in raw form and takes its proper shape through al-ta'wīl only. Like gold or silver in raw form are useless unless crafted and put in their proper form; here it is the job of waṣī who is divinely commissioned to give meaning to revelation.⁴³

Shī'ites or Imāmītes on the other hand believe that only imām has the right to interpret the text, he is the ultimate authority and is divinely guided. The belief of Imamate which is their fundamental doctrine means that only imām is the authoritative source of knowledge for the esoteric and exoteric side.⁴⁴ It is through him that the revelation continues, that is he receives the true meaning of the prophetic revelation with correct knowledge of legal precepts, ghayb, prophecies and the past

⁴⁰ Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, tr. Liadain Sherrard, (London: Kegan Paul International & The Institute of Ismaili Studies London, n. d.), p. 78.

⁴¹ Neo-Platonism was founded on the ideas of Plotinus, born in 205; it appeared and flourished in Alexandria and not in Greece. Alexandria was a meeting place for people from East and West and here the thought of the two worlds combined together, which resulted in Neo-Platonism. Prominent feature of it is that there is amalgamation of Greek philosophical tendencies with mystical trends of the East. See W. T. Stace, *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy* (London: Macmillan 1962).

⁴² See Ismail K. Poonawala, Ismā'īlī ta'wīl of the Qur'ān, in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin, pp. 206-207; Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (Chicago: The University Press of Chicago 1979), p. 103.

⁴³ See Ismail K. Poonawala, Ismā'īlī ta'wīl of the Qur'ān, in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, p. 206.

⁴⁴ See Syed Husain M. Jafri, Twelve Imam Shi'ism, in *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Spirituality*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Lahore: Suhail Academy Lahore 2005), vol.1, p. 165.

history of the Holy Qur'ān and guides people. On his death he passes on this knowledge and the functions of imām to his successor within the sacred family.⁴⁵ Rest of the schools oscillated between the extremes of Zāhirites and Ismā'īlites, which belong to legal, theological factions, or philosophical and mystical dimensions. Their common element is sharing the distinction of al-zāhir and al-bātin with variation in approaching and interpreting al-bātin according to madhab or the requirements of a particular discipline. Among them jurists and theologians tried to maintain equilibrium between literal and non-literal sense. Former emphasized more the practical aspect whereas the later, the theological side as compared to the esoteric explanations but both relied on reason and linguistics in their interpretation. On the other side philosophers and Sufis gave importance to the esoteric aspect with a difference that Sufis, within the Sunnī tradition, tried to balance the esoteric and the exoteric aspects in a way that the later can only be perceived through former. Thus, the literal meaning is a 'must' or door to enter the realm of inside truths whereas for philosophers esoteric implications were central.

Regarding the methodology of interpretation again linguistics and reason was shared by both. In addition to that Sufis relied on intuition as well, a faculty which is above reason for them. Consequently, they incorporated diverging components giving their interpretation a unique colour not present among others. For this reason they were heavily criticized i.e. ranking intuition above reason as it was never accepted by their rivals either rationalists or literalists.

As for Sufis they believe that after fully grasping the outer aspect the truth or the inner aspect is unveiled by God through *kashf* (intuition). It is also termed as *Isharāt Khafiyah* (inner or mystical dimensions) revealed to *al-sālik* from God, for complete

⁴⁵ See Mahmoud Ayoub, "The speaking Qur'ān and the silent Qur'ān: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imāmī Shi'ī tafīr' in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 186-187; Husain M. Jafri, *Twelve Imam Shi'ism*, pp. 165-166.

cognition of the text the two dimensions, outer and inner, are needed.⁴⁶ According to Quasem, intuition in Sufi thought is two dimensional i.e. practical and cognitive both though different but closely related to each other. The practical or *al-a'māl al-bāṭinah* is related to man's inward self and aims at its purification without ignoring the outward acts. On the other hand the cognitive aspect looks for the inner or hidden meanings or *al-ma'ānī al-bāṭinah*,⁴⁷ which literalists of Zāhirī school, muḥaddithūn and Ḥanbalīs strongly condemn.⁴⁸ At the same time Sufi thought cannot be equated with Bāṭinism who considered al-zāhir as symbols for inward sense.⁴⁹ As mentioned, point of contention is the cognitive dimension, i.e. knowledge gained through supra rational faculty. Thus, the dispute is on the possibility of attaining knowledge through such a faculty. As this faculty is beyond reason so it cannot be verified through reasoning. Unfortunately those unqualified for such an experience simply deny its possibility and in the end the gap remains unbridged.

Forerunners of al-Ghazālī in this regard were al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243 H.),⁵⁰ al-Sahl al-Tustarī, (d. 283/896),⁵¹ al-Junaīd al-Baghdādī, (d. 298/910),⁵² Ibn 'Atā' (d. 309/921),⁵³

⁴⁶ See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, p. 224; William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Lahore: Suhail Academy 2000), p. xvi.

⁴⁷ Al-Ghazālī in *Ihyā'* elaborates *al-bāṭin* aspect of *al-a'māl*.

⁴⁸ See Ibn Taimiyyah, *Dar' al-Tā'arūḍ* ed. Muḥammad Rishād Sālim (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Kunūz al-Arābiyyah 1391 H.) http://www.islamport.com/isp_eBooks/tym/ (accessed on 12/6/10); Ibn Jwuzī, *Talbis Iblis* (Karachi: Mīr Muḥammad Kutub khāna Markaz 'Ilm o Adab, n.d.), tr. In Urdu by Abū Muḥammad 'Abdul al-Ḥaqq, pp. 231-232.

⁴⁹ See Muḥammad 'Abdul Quasem, 'al-Ghazālī in Defence of Sufistic Interpretation of the Qur'ān' in *Islamic Culture*, vol. LIII no. 2 (April, 1979), p.63.

⁵⁰ See al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āyah li Ḥuqūq Allah*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥamūd (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif 1984).

⁵¹ See Sahl al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*; Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of existence in Classical Islam :The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl Al-Tustarī* (Berlin : Walter De Gruyter 1980), pp. 137-139.

⁵² See Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, *Uṣul al-Tarīq*; Abū al-Qāsim, *Risā'il al-Junaīd*.

⁵³ See Ibn 'Atā', *Latā'if al-Minṣan*, ed. 'Abdul al-Ḥalīm Maḥamūd (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī n. d.).

Sirāj al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 378 H.),⁵⁴ Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386 H.)⁵⁵ and Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072).⁵⁶

AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON AL-ZĀHIR AND AL-BĀṬIN

The concept of al-zāhir and al-bāṭin is vital in al-Ghazālī's thought, which he elaborated in his various Sufi writings particularly *Ihyā'*.⁵⁷ As said above, the notion of al-zāhir and al-bāṭin was hotly debated so al-Ghazālī felt obliged to authenticate its status, need and nature. Without going in the detail of these arguments, as a few are already stated above, here we need to mention al-Ghazālī's opinion on the conflicting trends and on the nature of al-zāhir and al-bāṭin. Among the trends he referred to those who altogether denied al-zāhir, a view strongly rejected by him. Just opposite to them was the literalist approach of Imām Ibn Ḥanbal who discouraged it and accepted al-ta'wīl only for three prophetic sayings.⁵⁸ Between them were groups who accepted the distinction of al-zāhir and al-bāṭin, and putting these groups in ascending order there were al-Ashā'irah, al-Mu'tazilah and lastly the philosophers. In al-Ghazālī's view Ashā'irah were moderate among them as they maintained equilibrium between reason and revelation thus, they interpreted the verses related to divine attributes while not interpreting the events of hereafter. Al-Mu'tazilah were more rational and so were more inclined towards al-ta'wīl; they interpreted a few events of the Last Day while taking the rest literally and lastly were philosophers who excessively relied on reason in al-

⁵⁴ See Abū Naṣr al-Sirāj al-Ṭūsī, *al-Luma'* ed. 'Abdul Ḥalīm Maḥmūd & Ṭaha 'Abdul Bāqī (Egypt: Dār al-Kitāb al-Ḥadīthah 1960/1380).

⁵⁵ See Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, www.al-mostafa.com (accessed on 5/12/08).

⁵⁶ See Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* and *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah* ed. 'Abdul Ḥalīm Maḥmūd & Maḥmūd b. al-Sharīf (Cairo: Maṭba'ah Ḥassān 1972).

⁵⁷ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr 1411/1991), vol.1, book of Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id, pp.119-122, and in book of Ādāb Tilāwah al-Qur'ān, p. 347, vol. 3, book of 'Ajā'ib al-Qalb, p. 26: al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, ed. Lajnah Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī (Beirut: Dār al-Afāq al-Jadīdah 1401/1981), pp. 18-21; al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 3.

⁵⁸ The first one is, '*al-Hajr al-aswad yamīn Allah fi ardih* (Abd al-Razzāq, *Musannaf Abd al-Razzāq* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1403), vol. 5, p. 39), second one is, '*Qalb al-mū'minīn bayna uṣbu'in min āṣābi' al-rahmān*' (Ahmad, *Musnad Ahmad*, 4/182), Muslim, and third is, '*Innī la ajid nafas al-rahmān min janīb al-yaman*', (al-Ṭabarānī, *Musnad al-Shāmiyyīn* (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risalah, 1984), vol. 2, p. 149).

ta'wīl and interpreted the bodily resurrection and other events of the hereafter.⁵⁹ It seems that al-Ghazālī felt the need to refer to these attitudes due to their controversial nature but at the same time he highlighted the incorrect ideas attached to it. In his judgment not only the division of al-zāhir and al-bāṭin is important but proper tools to uncover al-bāṭin are equally essential. In his scheme 'proper tools' meant maintaining equilibrium between revelation and reason. No doubt this reflects his factional affiliation but at the same time 'reason' unless put in chains of revelation can be harmful and the doors of revelation can be unlocked through reason only. So, the two are connected in a way that ignoring anyone of them can produce unfavourable results. In fact al-Ghazālī wants to show that the conflict in these trends is methodological, by not following proper tools they ended up in incorrect perception. Thus, ignoring outer or inner aspect or using incorrect tools in both cases the interpreter is bound to proceed half way only. With this now we turn to the nature or distinction of al-zāhir and al-bāṭin in his thought.

Al-Ghazālī emphasized on their distinct but complementary natures; according to him, there are levels of understanding where al-zāhir is the outer aspect, related to the practical life and is for the common people; on the other hand al-bāṭin is the hidden meaning unveiled to the elect only. Discussing the distinct nature of al-zāhir and al-bāṭin in *al-Ihyā'* al-Ghazālī mentioned five levels of understanding.⁶⁰ First category of hidden knowledge is the one gained by the prophets or the elect only, for example reality of the divine attributes or al-rūḥ. Such ideas are *daqīq* (subtle) and are above the comprehension of common man and if informed would harm him.⁶¹ Second category is the knowledge of things which are not subtle but when informed would have negative effect on common people therefore prophets and the elect keep it secret like the reality

⁵⁹ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol.1, pp. 123-124.

⁶⁰ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol.1, p. 120; Nabih Amin Faris's translation of Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id, *The Foundations of the Articles of Faith* (Lahore: Ashraf Printing Press Lahore 1999), p.39.

⁶¹ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol.1, p. 120.

of predestination.⁶² Third is related to linguistics that the metaphors and similes are effective in conveying delicate meanings and have aesthetic beauty as compared to simple constructions and an intelligent can easily recognize what is behind the literal meanings.⁶³ For example to say 'pearls being hanged in the neck of a pig' or saying of the prophet that the mosque shrinks when some one spits in its courtyard, these both are metaphorical statements where the former stands for spreading knowledge among the unworthy and the latter to pinpoint an act of disrespect towards the house of Allah. As the apparent meanings are not rational therefore the wise will look behind them.⁶⁴ Another example is the interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān as water and the valleys as hearts (13:17). Fourth level is the difference in theoretical knowledge and the practical experience which comes with *al-dhawq wa al-tahqīq*. A man might know something but it is the experience that brings the real understanding e.g. the state of hunger, sickness or love and their proper perception comes through experience only.⁶⁵ Lastly is the figurative language and a simple minded considers the literal meaning as correct and only interpretation.⁶⁶ For example to consider that the earth and heaven will speak with tongue and words as mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān (41:11) whereas the wise knows that it is a figurative expression.⁶⁷

It is clear from above that there are levels of knowledge where al-zāhir is different from al-bātin but complement each other. The hidden aspect completes the apparent meaning; thus its knowledge is as important as the literal sense, or true knowledge is possible with both only. Commenting on it Martin Whittingham criticized al-Ghazālī that in the above categories third and the last do not fit in complementary Sufi model

⁶² Ibid., p. 121.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol.1, p. 122.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol.1, p. 123.

as claimed by him,⁶⁸ here al-zāhir is put aside for the linguistic, rational or the legal aspect and contradicts inner meaning.⁶⁹ In fact putting aside the literal meaning in the third and fifth category by al-Ghazālī to extract the inner meaning does not point to its contradictory nature unless the words 'complementary' and 'contradictory' are taken in very literal sense. Search for hidden meaning does not contradict the spirit of al-zāhir nor is it negating any legal principle of al-sharī'ah. In other words al-zāhir and al-bāṭin in his thought parallels al-Sharī'ah and al-ḥaqīqah. They complete each other but are not same nor are contradictory, and whoever claims any difference in them is nearer to *kufr* than to *īmān*.⁷⁰ In this spirit al-Ghazālī equated and made them levels of learning. Further, no doubt that al-Ghazālī's thought is diverse and he easily moves between different dimensions, which at times seems contradictory but in reality is not so, a fact accepted by Whittingham⁷¹ and others as well.⁷²

Summarizing al-zāhir and al-bāṭin in al-Ghazālī's thought it can be said that the two are distinct but complement each other. Within al-bāṭin there are levels or grades of understanding which must be uncovered with correct tools. With this background of al-zāhir and al-bāṭin let us now move to the definition of al-ta'wīl.

DEFINITION OF AL-TA'WĪL

Technically al-ta'wīl is defined as 'diversion of a word from its apparent meaning to a possible meaning'.⁷³ Al-Ghazālī's own definition we find in *al-Mustasfā* and in *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah* which is as follows.

In al-Mustasfā definition of al-ta'wīl appears in its third Quṭb (part) which deals with semantics elucidating Islamic sources i.e. the Holy Qur'ān, Sunnah and Ijmā'. Here al-

⁶⁸ See Martin Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qur'ān: One Book, Many meanings* (London: Routledge 2007), p. 57.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.59.

⁷⁰ See al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, vol.1, p. 120.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 63.

⁷² See above chapter: Life of Imam al-Ghazālī page no. 9 and 14.

⁷³ Syed Muḥammad 'Amīn al-Iḥsān, *Majmū'ah Qawā'id al-Fiqh* (Karachi: Maktabah Mir Muḥammad n. d.), p. 218.

Ghazālī follows uṣūlī pattern in categorization of text into that which accepts al-ta'wīl and that which does not. Thus, *al-naṣṣ* is the one which does not accept al-ta'wīl and al-zāhir accepts it. After defining these terms he switches over to the concept of al-ta'wīl, and it is defined as *al-iḥtimāl* (possibility) supported by a proof. Further, it is explained as a diversion from *ḥaqīqah* to *majāz* due to presence of certain indicator, pointer or *dalīl*.⁷⁴ Thus, according to al-Ghazālī al-ta'wīl is possibility or it is diversion of a word from al-ḥaqīqah to al-majāz but the diversion is valid only in the presence of *al-burhān* or proof otherwise it would be an invalid interpretation. Al-Ghazālī had been criticized on this definition by al-Āmidī (d. 631 H.),⁷⁵ according to whom al-ta'wīl is not the possibility or iḥtimāl rather it is the process of *ḥaml al-lafẓ* i.e. carrying a word to certain meaning.⁷⁶ This difference leads to difference in meaning as in former it is the 'possibility' only whereas in the latter case it is the process of interpretation. Although for al-Ghazālī it is *ṣarf* (diversion) of a word from *ḥaqīqah* to *majāz* still it is ambiguous. Martin Whittingham rightfully comments on al-ta'wīl in *al-Mustasfā* that it is difficult to decide whether it is a process or the end result of interpretation.⁷⁷

While in *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah* the concept of al-ta'wīl is explained in relation to the five levels of 'existence' and the knowledge perceived through them to which we will return shortly, the discussion here is philosophical where al-ta'wīl is used as one of the tools for proper understanding of revelation.⁷⁸ Consequently al-ta'wīl is here the process of interpretation whereas according to Whittingham there are implicit reference to al-ta'wīl as an end result too, is present.⁷⁹ Apart from *al-Mustasfā* and *Fayṣal* the concept of

⁷⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl* (Qum: Maṭba'ah Amīr 1364 H.), vol. 1, p. 387.

⁷⁵ He was Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Abū Muḥammad b. Sālim al-Tha'labī or al-Taghlabī famous as Saif al-Dīn al-Āmidī born in 551 H. in Āmad a city near to al-Rūm and died in 631 H.. He was a doctor of *fiqh* and *Uṣūl* and followed al-Shāfi'ite school and left many books; some are *al-Iḥkām fi Uṣūl al-Aḥkām*, *Abkār al-Aṣkār*, *Daqā'iq al-Ḥaqā'iq*.

⁷⁶ See 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām fi uṣūl al-Aḥkām* ed. Syed al-Jamīlī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī 1406/1986), vol. 3, p.59.

⁷⁷ See Martin Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qur'ān* pp. 35-36.

⁷⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah* in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, pp.75-84.

⁷⁹ See Martin Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qur'ān*, pp. 26-27.

al-ta'wīl has been illustrated in his various other writings as well. But it is clear from above that al-Ghazālī is not restricted to one definition of al-ta'wīl; two understandings are present simultaneously in his thought and he moves freely between them. The reason might be that his main objective was its implementation rather than theoretical discussion.

Another important factor in al-ta'wīl is whether it is the process or the result of interpretation, in absence of burhān (proof) same interpretation stands invalid.⁸⁰ Al-Ghazālī explicitly states that al-ta'wīl depends on burhān or proof, in other words it is 'reason' which determines the reading of the text. Only in presence of suitable indicator non literal sense is preferred otherwise literal meaning stands valid.

Elaborating the 'proofs' in *al-Mustasfā* he points that they are at times clear and at times not, and are either *qarīnah*, or *qiyās* or another indicator pointing that the literal sense is impossible.⁸¹ So for al-Ghazālī interpretation depends on linguistics and on reason. Now let us take a few examples of al-ta'wīl from his writings.

IMPLEMENTATION OF AL-TA'WĪL

Al-ta'wīl is expounded by al-Ghazālī in his various writings; we find it in *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, *Ihyā'*, *al-Qistās al-Mustaqīm*, *Iljām al-'Awām*, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah*, *Qānūn al-Ta'wīl*, *al-Iqtisād fī al-'Itiqād*, *Tabāfut al-Falāsafah*, *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* and *al-Radd*.

As already stated above, al-Ghazālī while remaining within the Sunnī Sufi tradition tried to balance the esoteric and exoteric meanings of the text in al-ta'wīl. In which extracting the hidden meaning after putting aside al-zāhir⁸² does not mean to discard it, it is as important as the esoteric sense. Exoteric is 'must' to reach the esoteric as mentioned in *Mishkāt*, 'do not assume from this specimen of symbolism and its method that you have any license from me to ignore the outward and visible form, or to believe

⁸⁰ See al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p.85.

⁸¹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, vol.2, p. 387.

⁸² See al-Ghazālī, *Iljām al-'Awaām 'An 'Ilm al-Kalām*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 49.

that it has been annulled'⁸³ Exoteric is a land mark or a door to enter the realm of esoteric, 'here you just have this cross-relation between the two, from outward word to inward idea'.⁸⁴

There are ample examples of this cross relation of outward word with its inward idea in his writings but suffice here to take only a few. His most famous work *Ihyā'*, which gave al-Ghazālī an everlasting fame, is an example of crossing from the outward meaning to an inward idea, in other words it is the 'rereading' of religious text and concepts. When looked at the contents it is simply a book of fiqh with all the related issues of practical life which are being 'reread' in a different paradigm. It is in the light of spirituality that al-Ghazālī explored fiqh. We are not concerned here with the debate that whether fiqh can be spiritualized or not, our concern is his method of 'rereading' or al-ta'wīl. In his thought the importance of this method lies in the fact that it opens new vistas of intellectual activity and gives freedom to human thought with a condition that this activity should remain within the permissible boundaries of al-shar'iah. While dealing with Christian religious texts al-Ghazālī used the same method of 'rereading' their text, which will be dealt with in the following chapter.

One of the examples of rereading the text in *Ihyā'* is the prophetic tradition, 'the angels of Allah enter not a house wherein is a dog'.⁸⁵ Here dog and the house are the two key words that must be explored. Dog is not condemned due to its physical form but due to its qualities of anger, hatred and ferocity. Similarly house is a man's abode, it resembles heart in the human body in the sense that true nature and his thoughts resides there. And Allah reveals the knowledge through angels to man, who do not enter the heart filled with evil or doggish qualities. The heart must be purified to receive angels.⁸⁶ In this cross relation from outward meaning to inward sense al-Ghazālī does not negate the literal interpretation of 'dog' or 'house'; in his opinion *al-zawāhir* point towards *al-*

⁸³ Al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, tr. W. H. T. Gairdner (Lahore: Ashraf Press Lahore 1952), pp. 136-137.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁸⁵ Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Cairo: Dar al-Sha'b, 1987), vol. 4, p. 138.

⁸⁶ See Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol. 1, p. 62; Al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, tr. W. H. T. Gairdner, p. 138.

bawā'im. This does not imply that the literal meaning is an unwanted expression, as claimed by al-Bāṭaniyyah.⁸⁷ In crossing from the outward wordings to the inward sense al-Ghazālī concentrates on the spirit of the argument, as elaborated in *al-Qistās al-Mustaqīm* '...taking its spirit let us discard this particular form so that we may use the argument where we wish'.⁸⁸ It is the balance between the spirit of the word and its outward sense which is important for al-Ghazālī.

Another example of interpretation is of *al-Qalam* which is a tool of writing. The word is borrowed to convey the message of imprinting the knowledge on human heart which is the function of pen otherwise God has not taken pen made of wood to write down the things.⁸⁹ In case of *al-Aṣābi'*, which are attributed to God they refer to its symbolic meaning. Function of the fingers is to turn the things, and God uses the powers of good and evil which are forceful and attractive to turn the hearts of people. It is the swiftness and quickness of turning the things which is being symbolized through the word 'finger'.⁹⁰

In summary it can be said that al-Ghazālī through al-ta'wīl tried to explore wide range of possible meanings which a word might bear. So the text may not be limited to only one fixed reading but would be open to a number of meanings. This requires many factors; among them are linguistics, reason and above wisdom which is attained through purification of heart. Moreover, al-Ghazālī was faced by two extremes on this issue; on the one hand were al-Ḥanābilah who rejected al-ta'wīl out rightly and on the other were al-Bāṭiniyyah who went on the other extreme of ignoring legal or rational limitations. Al-Ghazālī took the middle path between these extremes and therefore was condemned from both sides. For al-Ghazālī there are certain principles which must be taken care for in interpretation which are as follows.

⁸⁷ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol.1, p. 62.

⁸⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Qistās al-Mustaqīm*, tr. D.P. Brewster (Lahore: Ashraf Press Lahore, 1978), p.17.

⁸⁹ See al-Ghazālī *Jawāhir al-Qur'an*, p. 30; *Ihyā'*, vol., 4, p. 537.

⁹⁰ See al-Ghazālī *Jawāhir al-Qur'an*, p. 29.

PRINCIPLES OF AL-TA'WĪL

To know the principles of al-ta'wīl it would be appropriate to look at the rules of interpretation for the Holy Qur'ān which are outlined in *al-Risālah al-Ladunniyyah*; 'the commentator ought to consider the Qur'ān from the point of view of the language and from the point of view of metaphor and from the point of view of the composition of the vocables: also from the point of view of the particulars of the grammar and of the usage of the Arabs and of the subject-matter of the philosophers and the doctrine of the Sufis, so that his interpretation comes near to the truth of things'.⁹¹

These principles are further elaborated by him in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* where he ranked them in a manner that an interpreter could move from the outer shell to the pearl. Combining these with those mentioned in *Ihyā'*, *Mishkāt* and *Ijām* they can broadly be identified as related to Sufism, semantics and reason. Bringing divergent elements near i.e. reason and mysticism, al-tawīl is a significant feature of al-Ghazālī.⁹² Moreover, reading text from opposing perspectives unravels various levels of meanings.

MYSTICAL DIMENSION

In Sufistic interpretation there are two important features; first is cosmology and the other epistemology, which in turn is founded on the former.

In Sufism cosmos means visible and the invisible world taken together and in it the invisible has preference over the visible without undergrading the physical world. Al-Ghazālī followed this bipartite division and mentioned it in many places specifically in *Mishkāt al-anwār*, *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, *al-Qistās al-Mustaqīm* and *Ihyā'* in its portions of kitāb Ādāb tilāwat al-Qur'ān and Kitāb Qawā'id al-'aqā'id. The two sides of the cosmos are designated as, 'ālam al-mulk wa al-shahādah (the world of power and witness), 'ālam al-hiss (the world of senses), or al-'ālam al-sufli (the lower world) for this

⁹¹ Margaret Smith, 'Al-Risālat Al-Luduniyya by Abū Ḥāmid Muhammad al-Ghazālī' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3(July, 1938), p. 355.

⁹² *Tafsir Yāqūt al-Ta'wīl fī Tafsir al-Tanzīl* which was written by al-Ghazālī is lost now, but his method of incorporating different aspects is well depicted in his writings particularly *Ihyā'* and *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*.

world and *'alam al-ghayb wa al-malakūt* (the invisible and the world of dominion), *al-'alam al-'aqlī* (the world of intellect), or *al-'alam al-'ulawī* (the upper world) for the other world.⁹³ Difference in names is not significant as they represent different aspects or views for the same thing. When considered in relation to perception of human eye they are named as *'alam al-hissī* and *'aqlī*, and in relation to each other as *'alam al-sufli* and *al-'ulawī* or *'alam al-mulk wa al-shahādah* and *'alam al-ghaib wa al-malakūt*.⁹⁴ In *al-Arba'in fi Uṣūl al-Dīn* al-Ghazālī mentions three realms instead of two, there is an intermediate level between the other two and is termed as *'alam al-jabarūt*⁹⁵ but as it is less discussed in other writings therefore here the concentration will be on the two realm division and its relation with knowledge.

Prior to al-Ghazālī cosmological division in levels was discussed by Sufis and philosophers as well. According to Wensinck, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386 H.) was the first to distinguish between two worlds i.e. the spiritual and this world of senses among Sufis.⁹⁶ Makkī differentiated between *'ulamā' al-ākīrah* and *'ulamā' al-dunyā*; it is the former who are the masters of heart and belong from the realm of *al-malakūt* they can attain knowledge from above whereas the latter are the possessors of *'ilm al-zāhir* and belong to the *'alam al-mulk*.⁹⁷ It may be noted that although Makkī was the first in stating explicitly the division but it was the general notion present in Sufi thought.⁹⁸ In Muslim philosophy too, the idea of cosmological gradation was present, as we find it in the writings of al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā' (d. 428/1037) the famous Muslim

⁹³ Gairdner translated them as spiritual and material or sensual and intelligential or supernal and inferior. See al-Ghazālī *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, tr. W.H.T. Gairdner, p. 122.

⁹⁴ See Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār in Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 17.

⁹⁵ See al-Ghazālī *al-Arba'in fi Uṣūl al-Dīn* ed. 'Abdullah 'Abdul Ḥamid 'Arawānī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam 2003), p. 64; 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Jurjānī *al-Ta'rifāt* p.39; A. J. Wensinck, *Ghazālī's Cosmology and Mysticism* (Amsterdam: Uitgevers Maatschappij Amsterdam 1933), pp. 10-16.

⁹⁶ See A. J. Wensinck, *On the Relation Between al-Ghazālī's Cosmology and His Mysticism*, p.191; Martin Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qur'ān*, p.39.

⁹⁷ See Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, pp. 207-209.

⁹⁸ See Abū Naṣr al-Sirāj al-Ṭūsī, *al-Luma'*, pp. 148-149; al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āyah liḥuqūq Allah*, p. 80; Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, *Uṣūl al-Tariq*, pp. 19-21.

philosophers.⁹⁹ In their cosmological hierarchy, which is near to the Neo-Platonic system, they tried to solve the relation of 'One' and many in the universe and the interaction of human soul with the higher world. According to them the highest realm is the realm of *al-'aql al-awwal* (The One, The First Mind or Intellect) then is the *al-'aql al-fa'āl* (Active Mind), lower to it is *al-nafs al-kuliyyah* (Universal Soul), these all belong to *'ālam al-malakūt* whereas man or the human soul is from *'ālam al-mulk*. In these levels active intellect occupies intermediate position between the 'One' and the universal soul, which corresponds to al-jabarūt in al-Ghazālī's thought. According to Ibn Sīnā human soul interacts with the higher realm that it can be united with the *'ālam al-malakūt* and can gain knowledge from there with a condition that it could purify itself from the worldly defilements. From it Wensinck inferred that al-Ghazālī in addition to al-Makkī's mysticism was to a great extent influenced by Greek philosophy, in a manner that his mysticism was deeply immersed in ancient philosophy as he paralleled Active Intellect and Universal Soul with human reason and soul.¹⁰⁰ No doubt that al-Ghazālī was well versed in Greek philosophy but what must be taken in account here is whether he was receptive of all their ideas or was selective in his choice. Although Greek ideas and its terminology are evidently present in his writings but at the same time he was not a simple narrator. His methodology was first to have a clear estimation of opponent's views and after that to accept what was beneficial and in accordance with religious norms.¹⁰¹ In *Maqāsid al-Falāsifah* while demarcating the areas dealt by philosophers he accepted and appreciated mathematics and logic, pointing some problems in the later, as they are tools of thinking therefore

⁹⁹ See Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Ārā' Ahl al-Madinah al-Faḍilah wa Mudādatuhā*, ed. 'Alī Būmalḥam (Beirut: Dār wa Maktabah al-Hilāl 1995), pp. 45-56; Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Najāh* ed. Majid Fakrī (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadidah 1982), pp. 281-290; *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt* ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif n. d.), vol. 3, pp 216-233

¹⁰⁰ See Wensinck, *On the Relation Between al-Ghazālī's Cosmology and His Mysticism*, p. 10, although he admits that al-Ghazālī's terminology is different, see p.6.

¹⁰¹ See al-Ghazālī, *Maqāsid al-Falāsifah*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Egypt: Dār al-Ma'ārif 1961), p. 31; *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (Egypt: Maktabah al-Anjilū al-Miṣriyyah 1962), pp. 125-126.

can be relied on. It is in metaphysics where philosophy is in a state of confusion and needs a careful scrutiny before accepting their opinions.¹⁰² Furthermore, al-Ghazālī's acknowledgement of truth present among the previous civilizations and its incorporation in his own thought gave him a wider vision as compared to those who denied it.¹⁰³ Similarly he acknowledged his indebtedness to Sufi masters like al-Makkī, al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243 H), al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 297 H), al-Shiblī al-Baghdādī (d. 334 H) and Abū Yazīd al-Bustāmī (d. 261 H) in *al-Munqidh*.¹⁰⁴

Coming back to two world theory and the relation of the two realms in al-Ghazālī's thought, we find that the two worlds are closely connected to each other in a way that the real existence is for the other world which is 'ālam al-ghayb wa al-malakut.¹⁰⁵ This world or 'ālam al-shahadah is only a reflection, a copy,¹⁰⁶ a symbol¹⁰⁷ or a shadow¹⁰⁸ of the other. But it does not mean that this world is not important or has no value of its own. It is as important as the other, in reality the other cannot be approached except through this world, it can be said that it is a door or stairs to enter the other. The other world is termed 'ālam al-ghayb because it is invisible to sensual perception; senses keep human beings blind of the reality of the other world, which would be unveiled to all on death¹⁰⁹ or unveiled to few in this world who could cleanse their hearts and free themselves from the love of this world.¹¹⁰

As man has the central place, in Islamic and Christian traditional thought alike, so cosmology has direct relevance to him. Fundamental importance in human life is for heart with its role and functions. Following the Sufi lines heart has dual meaning, for

¹⁰² See al-Ghazālī, *Maqāsid al-Falāsifah*, pp. 31-32.

¹⁰³ See al-Ghazālī, al-Qiṣṭās al-Mustaqīm, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p.21.

¹⁰⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, pp. 172-173.

¹⁰⁵ See al-Ghazālī *Jawābir al-Qur'ān*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁶ See al-Ghazālī *Iḥyā'*, vol. 3, p. 23.

¹⁰⁷ See al-Ghazālī *Jawābir al-Qur'ān*, p. 28; al-Qiṣṭās al-Mustaqīm, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p.22; *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p.18.

¹⁰⁸ See al-Ghazālī *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p.9.

¹⁰⁹ See al-Ghazālī *Iḥyā'*, vol. 4, pp. 536-538.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 537; al-Ghazālī *Jawābir al-Qur'ān*, pp. 32-33.

al-Ghazālī one is the body organ and other the spiritual aspect which is related to the former.¹¹¹ The spiritual side is as called *al-qalb*, *al-rūh*, *al-'aql* or *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah* and so forth, all these terms are used interchangeably.¹¹² This spiritual element is the essence of man that is addressed by God and it perceives and would be held answerable in the end. It is defined as a simple substance of very fine tenuous spiritual nature which is termed as *latīfah rabbāniyyah rūhāniyyah*.¹¹³ In spite of difference between the spiritual and the bodily heart there is a strange relation present between the two in a sense that both affect each other. This relationship can be symbolized as the spiritual heart being the king and the bodily organ its kingdom.¹¹⁴ The important thing to note is that the spiritual heart is from 'ālam al-malakūt whereas the bodily organ from 'ālam al-mulk wa al-shahādah.¹¹⁵ Through physical heart the connection between the two worlds or between man and God is made possible, without it no link between the two spheres could be established, nor could man ascend upwards therefore it is the mercy of God that He has provided such a link.¹¹⁶

Further, relationship present between the two worlds or between man and God is linked epistemologically. Like Sufi thought heart is the seat of knowledge for al-Ghazālī. It is the heart which receives knowledge from God; the more cleansed the heart is from worldly defilements the more it is able to receive knowledge.¹¹⁷ Although generally knowledge is gained through senses and reason but for Sufis heart is another faculty which is supra rational and not anti rational and on it Sufis rely most.¹¹⁸ This faculty is the eye of the heart, as there is bodily eye or the rational faculty to perceive

¹¹¹ See al-Ghazālī *Ihyā'*, vol. 3, p. 4.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 4-5, it is termed as *al-nafs al-nāṭiqah* by philosophers, as *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah* and *al-rūh* in the Holy Qur'ān, and as *al-qalb* by Sufis; these different terms according to al-Ghazālī point to the same meaning, see al-Risālah al-Ladunniyyah, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 60.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol. 3, p. 6, vol. 4, p. 27.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, p.143.

¹¹⁶ See al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, pp. 17-18.

¹¹⁷ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol. 1, p.62, vol. 3, pp.10, 14, 15, 20-26., vol. 4, p. 537.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. vol.3, pp 9-10.

things so is the heart which partakes in this process. But it works only when it is purified; consequently it is directed towards 'ālam al-malakūt to perceive directly from that world. To this effect it is narrated that there is eye for every heart, when Allah bestows His blessing on someone the eye is opened to what is obscure for common vision.¹¹⁹ Thus, *al-lawḥ*, *al-kitāb al-mubīn* is revealed and as a result of it knowledge is gained¹²⁰ through reflection on the purified heart, which is *al-kashf* (unveiling). Though this process is difficult to understand but as explained at numerous places by al-Ghazālī the obscurities of mystics are turned graspable. According to him there are two aspects or levels which must be maintained; only then the unveiling can take place. One is the relation between the two worlds and other is the understanding which takes place at the level of man. For the proper mechanism of *al-kashf* both must operate but should be interconnected. Regarding the former, as stated above, this world is a reflection of the other and maintains a relation with other, and the other world is the source of knowledge. Whereas on the human level there are categories of attaining knowledge through revelation, for prophets it is in clear form and for others it is symbolic.¹²¹ And symbolic ideas by their nature require proper clothing; they cannot be stated in literal statements. To summarize the functioning of the two levels it may be said that the knowledge gained through unveiling is from invisible world, which is reflected on the purified heart in a symbolic form. Here the role of *al-ta'wīl* comes as the symbolic form needs interpretation. To interpret symbols relation between it and the thing symbolized must be well clear for the interpreter. This, according to al-Ghazālī, is hidden due to indulgence of the heart in worldly affairs and only with purification can man transcend the world of senses and can know symbolic nature of things and to what are they pointing.¹²² Terms used by al-Ghazālī to refer to the relation between symbols and the things symbolized are *al-munāsibah* and *al-muwāzinah* which can be

¹¹⁹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Risālah al-Ladunnīyyah*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p.62.

¹²⁰ See, al-Ghazālī *Iḥyā'*, vol. 4, p.537.

¹²¹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Risālah al-Ladunnīyyah*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p.70.

¹²² See al-Ghazālī *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, p. 28; *Miskāt al-Anwār*, tr. W.H.T. Gairdner, pp. 125-126.

rendered as similitude present in 'ālam al-shāhadah and 'ālam al-ghayb,¹²³ Gairdner translates it as a 'correspondence', a relation or an interconnection in the two worlds.¹²⁴ To grasp the correspondence or the similitude present in the two realms it is the spirit of the words i.e. meaning or intention to which the word is pointing to be considered and not the physical shapes of the things. To make this clear al-Ghazālī refers to dreams and its interpretation. *Ta'bir* or dream interpretation is from the root 'bara which is to cross a bridge or anything. Here it means to cross from the literal words to its intended meanings while taking into consideration the interconnection or the correspondence between the two. Similar is the case of interpretation for 'ālam al-shahdah and 'ālam al-ghayb where the similitude or the correspondence in the two is to be looked at with a difference that in dreams the literal sense is symbolic and is put aside whereas in al-ta'wil literal meanings are not discarded and through it symbolic meanings are uncovered.

REASON AND REVELATION

Another important feature in al-Ghazālī's thought is reason and its relation with revelation. Unlike the modern age, for al-Ghazālī faith and reason were connected and supportive. Reason was a tool to understand and defend faith; as a result of that, it always remained under the umbrella of faith. Al-Ghazālī was a trained theologian and a jurist therefore reason was placed high in his intellectual edifice, although this tool was later on sharpened by Aristotelian logic and was the dominant feature of his thought. In interpretation the important thing is the classification of the text in literal and metaphorical statements. This identification according to al-Ghazālī should be based on reason, it is the rational faculty which can determine that the literal meaning of the text would be valid or al-ta'wil is to be opted. In absence of rational criterion we cannot differentiate between valid and invalid interpretation, which would lead to confusion

¹²³ Ibid.; al-Ghazālī al-Qistās al-Mustaqīm, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 22.

¹²⁴ See al-Ghazālī *Miskāt al-Anwār*, tr. W.H.T. Gairdner, p. 125.

and chaos, as in case of al-Bāṭiniyyah where literal meanings lost their authenticity.¹²⁵ They invalidate the literal meaning of the text without rational proofs. As for al-Ghazālī reason is one of the most important criterion in identifying where the literal meaning would stand valid or the non literal one, this discussion appears in *Ihyā'* and *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah*, in the last mentioned it is termed as al-burhān which Frank Griffel rendered 'demonstrative proof'.¹²⁶ Demonstrative argument is crucial as it provides sound criterion for interpretation thus helps in reducing differences among people.¹²⁷ In the above two writings the nature of al-burhān is not discussed by al-Ghazālī, rather its implementation by distinguishing between a literal and a non literal text is provided. For the explanation of al-burhān we need to turn to his other writings like *Mi'yār al-'Ilm*, *Muḥik al-Nazar*, *al-Qiṣās al-Mustaqīm*, and *al-Mustasfā*. It is defined as an argument which leads to assured knowledge,¹²⁸ and is based on experience or on *al-khabar al-mutawātir*.¹²⁹ With these qualities the argument turns to be an evidence or rational proof. In absence of it only literal interpretation is valid and only in its presence we shift to the non literal meaning.¹³⁰ Therefore we find al-Ghazālī considered al-ta'wīl of Pharaoh¹³¹ as heart or saḥr (daybreak meal)¹³² as seek blessings of God at dawn invalid due to absence of rational proof.¹³³ Moreover, Moses or Pharaoh were historical figures proved by unbroken chain of narrations. Similarly aḥādīth of daybreak meal are narrated through uninterrupted chain of transmitters therefore

¹²⁵ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol. 1, p. 49.

¹²⁶ See Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, (New York: Oxford University Press 2009), p. 107.

¹²⁷ See al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 86.

¹²⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *Mi'yār al-'Ilm*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Egypt: Dār al-Ma'ārif 1961), p. 70.

¹²⁹ See al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 86.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Tāhā 24, "Go to Fir'aun (Pharaoh)! Verily, he has transgressed (all bounds in disbelief and disobedience, and has behaved as an arrogant and as a tyrant).

¹³² Prophetic tradition which says, "Go, eat the daybreak meal (saḥr) for therein lies blessing" al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jamī al-Sahīh* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabi n.d.), vol. 3, p. 88.

¹³³ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol. 1, p. 49.

cannot be denied.¹³⁴ Rational proofs here are in favour of literal meanings of the text therefore its literal meanings would stay valid and it cannot be interpreted otherwise. In these examples *al-burhān* is not directly connected to the text but to historical verification of the entities or the events mentioned in it and accordingly the nature of the text is determined.

In *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah* al-Ghazālī takes another way in identifying the nature of text, it is directly dependant on the content of the text particularly from the side of language and context. He proposes that the text should be read rationally while taking in account the linguistic and conceptual understandings present in it, to determine the nature of text in literal or non literal category. To clarify it, he elaborated the concept of *al-wujūd* (existence) as it appeared in various texts. Rational reading of these texts in the light of linguistic and context shows that the meaning of 'existence' varies in different texts and thus cannot be put in the same category. Thus, status of the text is identified through reason and the key concepts present in it.

According to al-Ghazālī existence is of five levels; first is *al-wujūd al-dhātī* (real existence). Like animals, trees, sky and earth they have real existence apart from senses or reason and are perceived through them. They are known entities and therefore must be taken literally and cannot be interpreted otherwise. Secondly is *al-wujūd al-ḥissī* (existence in sense) i.e. a thing which has existence in eye and not outside it so it exists in senses only like dreams or what prophets and friends of God see through revelation or *al-ilhām*. As said by the prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) that paradise appeared to him on the width of the wall.¹³⁵ Rationally, in al-Ghazālī's view, it is impossible that entities merge in each other or a bigger existence fits into a smaller one, hence leading to the conclusion that the real paradise was not placed on the wall rather it was the sense perception as if the prophet saw it. As the context refers not to the real existence of paradise but the sense perception of the prophet therefore the text is not

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ al-Bukhhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, mawāqit al-ṣalāh 11, I'tisām bi al-Kitāb wa al-sunnah 3

giving the real or literal meaning but falls in the category of non literal statement. Similar is the case of dreams where the narration of a dream does not have a real existence but is present in the senses of one who dreams thus they are not literal statements and accept al-ta'wil. Thirdly is *al-wujūd al-khayālī* (existence in imagination) i.e. images which remain in the mind and can be visualized, its example is the prophetic narration of seeing Yūnus bin Mattā, according to al-Ghazālī due to the time difference between the two it is impossible that the prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) saw Yūnus bin Mattā in reality and his words 'as if' points that it was not real existence but imaginative one. Consequently the statement is not the literal one and needs to be interpreted. Fourthly is *al-wujūd al-'aqlī* (conceptual existence), in it any being or thing like hand is characterized apart from its physical shape. It is like universal concept of a thing so when hands are attributed to God, this in fact refers to the quality of power or to perform an act. Again such statements are not to be taken on their face but they accept al-ta'wil. Lastly is *al-wujūd al-shubḥī* (similar existence), it is a being not present in reality nor in sense or in mind but it resembles in quality to another existence. For example when anger, happiness or *al-ṣabr* is attributed to God, rationally it is impossible to ascribe them to Him. So these statements are not literal ones, they show a similarity of quality like in anger revenge is similar to punishment so non literal statements are used here.¹³⁶

According to al-Ghazālī all types of existences fall within these five categories and their classification is determined rationally. Starting from the highest level if the thing is proved to be from the level of *al-wujūd al-dhātī* it will interpreted literally otherwise moving in descending order its place will be determined by al-burhān or evidence and

¹³⁶ See al-Ghazālī, Fayṣal al-Tafriqah, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, pp. 79-80; Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, pp. 107-108; Peter Heath, Reading al-Ghazālī: The Case of Psychology, in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam* ed. Todd Lawson (London: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies London 2005), p. 191; Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination* (Karachi: Oxford University Press Karachi 2006), pp. 198-200.

will be interpreted accordingly.¹³⁷ In this way the last four accept al-ta'wīl and the reason behind is that al-burhān prohibits their literal meanings; instead it points to non literal sense. It may be noted that al-Ghazālī established a hierarchy of existence where the highest accepts only the literal meanings. This shows that for al-Ghazālī the literal meaning is the first preference and it is to be left only if al-burhān proves its impossibility.¹³⁸ And thereafter he moves to lower levels.

This structure of al-Ghazālī is comparable to Ibn Rushd's (d. 595/1198) categorization of text in five groups. Although the terminology used by Ibn Rushd is philosophical in differentiating symbolic and non symbolic elements of the text. He agrees with al-Ghazālī that a 'being' can have different levels of existence but criticizes him for not providing a criterion for the identification of symbolic ideas and why they are so.¹³⁹ Coming back to al-Ghazālī there is another categorization in *Iljām al-'Awām* with four levels of being, *wujūd fi al-a'yān* that is external existence, *wujūd fi al-adhbān* that is existence in mind, *wujūd fi al-lisān* that is existence in expression, *wujūd fi al-kitābah* that is existence in written form.¹⁴⁰ Is al-Ghazālī inconsistent in his ideas; by dividing existence in five levels in *Fayṣal* and four in *Iljām*, or it is only difference of expression for the same concept? Comparing the two divisions it can be seen that mostly they are overlapping with few differences which in turn are sub divisions of a particular kind of al-wujūd. If the two sets are put side by side while taking into consideration meaning ascribed to them by al-Ghazālī it can be said that they are near in their meanings, like *wujūd fi al-a'yān* corresponds to *wujūd al-dhātī* in *Fayṣal*, and *wujūd fi idhān* equates *wujūd al-khayālī* and *wujūd al-'aqlī* together, and *wujūd fi al-lisān* and *wujūd fi al-kitābah* together are near to *al-wujūd al-ḥissī*. Therefore it cannot be said that al-Ghazālī was inconsistent in his thought. Moreover, as stated by Peter Heath that al-Ghazālī

¹³⁷ See al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 85.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ See Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf 'an Manāḥij al-Adilāh fi 'Aqā'id al-Milāh* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Wiḥdah al-'Arabīyah 1998), pp.205-207.

¹⁴⁰ See al-Ghazālī, *Iljām al-'Awām*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p.76.

changes his terminology and expression according to his audience which at times seems to be inconsistency in his ideas but in reality it is not so. In *Fayṣal* his addressees were scholars so he used philosophical terminology whereas *Iljām* was meant for commoners therefore it was simplified to their level.¹⁴¹ Thus, it is not inconsistency but only change of expressions according to the level of listeners.

As far the relation between reason and revelation is concerned al-Ghazālī discussed it in his booklet *Qānūn al-Ta'wīl*. In it he elaborates interpretation of religious texts where it apparently contradicts reason. In such a situation is it reason that will be the criterion of judgment or the revelation? According to him there are five approaches to it; two are on extremes and the rest in the middle. On one extreme are those who consider the letter of the revelation as the only criterion even where it apparently contradicts reason. On the other pole are those who hold fast to reason so whatever in revelation matches with reason is accepted and whatsoever contradicts it is interpreted figuratively. In the middle are those who are moderate towards both reason and revelation but differ as to standard of judgment in case of contradiction. Whether the standard should be revelation or reason due to this difference within them they are placed in the previous fashion of three divisions. On the one hand are those who take reason as the standard to judge contradictory narrations and deny accepting what is not easily interpreted figuratively. On the other are those who take revelation as standard and their grasp on reason is meager therefore rational impossibilities are not considered a problem by them so no need for al-ta'wīl is felt. In the middle are those who take both i.e. reason and revelation as parallel standards due to their place and authenticity. In reality they do not contradict each other and it is through reason that revelation is proved and accepted.¹⁴² In his opinion it is the middle group who are on the right path, as it is through reason that revelation is known and through it a distinction between a

¹⁴¹ See Peter Heath, "Reading al-Ghazālī: The Case of Psychology" in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam*, p.191.

¹⁴² See al-Ghazālī, *Qānūn al-Ta'wīl* in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, pp. 123-126.

true and a false prophet is made.¹⁴³ The primacy of reason or of revelation was a debated issue in 'ilm al-kalām¹⁴⁴ and among al-Ashā'irah the principle of equating reason and revelation was laid down by al-Juwaynī in his *Irshād* where he explicitly stated that revelation does not negate reason¹⁴⁵ and was later on followed by many among whom were Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 543 H.)¹⁴⁶ and al-Ghazālī.

To keep the balance in reason and revelation al-Ghazālī proposes three advices to be considered; first is not to exceed in al-ta'wīl as there are areas which reason can not grasp, second not to deny rational argument as *al-shar'* is known through reason, third not to interpret statements based on conjectures as it might lead to wrong conclusions.¹⁴⁷

To conclude it may be noted that reason played an important role in al-Ghazālī's thought. Revelation being a sacred text requires a careful and thoughtful reading to reach its in-depth meaning and al-Ghazālī was well aware of this fact. Accordingly he grounded al-ta'wīl on firm principles, not only proper interpretation is important but before that identifying and placing text in its correct category is an essential step in understanding the text. Therefore we find that al-Ghazālī laid rational principles in this regard. After identifying and categorizing text he prefers first the plain and outward meaning of the text, only when the reason invalidates the plain or outward meaning that he abandons it for the inward meaning. As in his view reason and revelation do not contradict therefore apparent contradiction means that the outward meaning is not intended. Furthermore, to maintain the harmony between reason and revelation, the

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁴⁴ See Muṣ'ab al-Khaīr Idrīs, *Muqaddimāt al-Nazar wa Daḡiq al-Kalām* (Lahore: al-Maktabah al-Quddūsiyyah 2007), pp.102-105.

¹⁴⁵ See Imām al-Haramīn al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād* ed. Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā and 'Alī 'Abdul Mun'im 'Abdul Ḥamid (Egypt: Maṭb'ah al-Sa'ādah 1950), p. 360.

¹⁴⁶ See Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī, *Qānūn al-Ta'wīl* ed. Muḥammad al-Sulaymānī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī 1990), pp. 351-352.

¹⁴⁷ See al-Ghazālī, *Qānūn al-Ta'wīl* in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, pp. 126-128.

two had equal status and both must be given due place in arriving at the correct meaning.

SEMANTICS

Language and al-ta'wil are interconnected in the sense that rules of language govern the process of interpretation therefore proper knowledge of language is essential. Words convey meanings but to determine what is precisely intended depends on various factors within language. For al-Ghazālī correct understanding of text is impossible without having proper knowledge of language, which he discussed in *al-Mustasfā*, *Muḥik al-Nazar* and *Mi'yār al-'Ilm*. Its importance can be visualized from the fact that in *al-Mustasfā*, which is a work on *uṣūl*, a full chapter i.e. the third portion deals with linguistics and semantics. Thus, correct comprehension of language only leads to the correct understanding of the text. For this reason al-Ghazālī repeatedly reminds that Arabic language with its derivatives is indispensable for interpretation.¹⁴⁸ He compares language with stairs as climbing to roof is impossible without stairs similarly grasping the meaning of the text is impossible without knowing language with its rules of grammar, linguistics, poetry of *jābili* period and so forth.¹⁴⁹ Although language is indispensable but still it is a tool or 'stairs' to reach the roof as mentioned in *Jawābir*. Similarly Arabic language with its branches, for the interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān, are termed as garment or shell beneath which the pearl or the message is hidden and one needs to break the shell to reach the pearl.¹⁵⁰ From these branches are science of Arabic language, science of syntax of Arabic grammar, science of readings, and science of outlets of letters.¹⁵¹ Though they are very important still they are not more than helping tools.

¹⁴⁸ See al-Ghazālī, al-Risālah al-Ladunniyyah in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 64; Fayṣal al-Tafriqah in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 91.

¹⁴⁹ See al-Ghazālī, al-Risālah al-Ladunniyyah in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 65.

¹⁵⁰ See al-Ghazālī, *Jawābir al-Qur'an*, p. 18.

¹⁵¹ See Muḥammad Abul Quasem, *The Jewels of the Qur'an al-Ghazālī's theory* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1977), p. 34.

Language is a vast field and due to limited space here we will deal with the most prominent aspect relevant to al-ta'wil. First step in language study is the word and its meaning, and does it have only one meaning or more. Al-Ghazālī discussed the relation of word and meaning in detail in *Mi'yār al-'ilm*,¹⁵² *Mubīk al-naẓar* and *al-Mustasfā*¹⁵³ and in few words as mentioned in *Mi'rāj al-Sālikīn* it can be stated that the words have dual function or faces as to their *dalālah* (signification). On the one side they point towards the physical form of things and on the other towards their meaning or essence. For example 'stairs' or the upward movement would belong to the former whereas its essence or inner meaning is expressed through *majāz* and *Isti'ārah*.¹⁵⁴ There are numerous examples in his writings where the dual aspect of the words is elaborated; both aspects physical and non physical are required for proper comprehension. Physical side or meaning can be termed as the literal meaning of the word whereas non physical as the non literal meaning. In al-ta'wil the word with its dual signification must be taken in account. As a matter of fact linguistically al-ta'wil is the relationship of two significations of a word while highlighting the non literal aspect of it. For example, the word 'hand' has a physical form and its inner essence is 'power'. When 'hand' is ascribed to God it cannot be taken literally, whereas its inner essence 'power' gives the correct sense to it. Al-ta'wil is to highlight this inner meaning, similarly for *al-fawq*, *al-nur*, *al-wajh*, *al-qalm* or *al-istiwā'* inner sense and not the literal interpretation is important.¹⁵⁵ In language the non literal or figurative expressions are termed as *majāz*, though there are other terms as well but *majāz* being an encompassing term so the discussion will be limited to it only.

According to Jurjānī, *majāz* is from the verb *ja wa za* which means to exceed to or to extend beyond its original meaning to another one due to a similarity present in the

¹⁵² See al-Ghazālī, *Mi'yār al-'ilm*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Egypt: Dār al-Ma'ārif 1961).

¹⁵³ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, vol. 1, pp. 341-342.

¹⁵⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *Mi'rāj al-Sālikīn* in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁵ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fi al-'Itiqād* (Ankara: Nur Matbaasi 1962), p.86; *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, p. 30; *Mi'rāj al-Sālikīn* in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, pp. 59-60; Fayṣal al-Tafriqah in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, pp.80-82; *Mishkāt al-Anwār* in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, pp. 4-16; *Iljām al-'Awām* in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, pp. 42-46, 70-72.

two like a brave man is called lion.¹⁵⁶ The common element in the two is braveness so the word lion is ascribed to a man. In other words majāz is a borrowed expression; a word is borrowed to convey some other meaning due to certain similarity present in the two words. Further he explains that the similarity might be in form of these words, in their essential characteristics or due to nearness present in them.¹⁵⁷

As already mentioned majāz is not limited to one particular expression rather it covers a variety; from its sub divisions are isti'ārah (metaphor), *maqlūb* (inversion), *ḥadhf* (ellipsis), *tikrār* (repetition), *ishārāh* (allusion) and idiom.¹⁵⁸

In English majāz is commonly translated as figurative expression, although its exact translation is not easy, as the term and its meaning developed over a period of time.¹⁵⁹ Majāz is best understood when considered in relation to its opposite *ḥaqīqah* which is the apparent meaning of the text. Majāz and *ḥaqīqah* dichotomy has been a debated issue among scholars.¹⁶⁰ Among those who rejected majāz as a figurative expression opposed to *ḥaqīqah* were Zahrīs, and a few scholars from Ḥanbalī, and Malikī schools. For them it is a lie in the Qur'ān because any diversion from *ḥaqīqah* to majāz means inability of the author to express and God is above that.¹⁶¹ Ibn Tāmiyyah, too, rejected the notion of majāz and *ḥaqīqah* as diverse terms.¹⁶² According to him, they appeared late in time, and majāz in figurative sense was not used by the Companions or by the

¹⁵⁶ See 'Alī bin Muḥammad bin 'Alī al-Jurjānī, *al-Ta'wīfāt* www.al-mostafa.com (accessed on 5/1/09), p. 109.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, vol. 1, pp. 341-342; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 3, pp. 120-139; for a detailed discussion see John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, pp.227-246.

¹⁵⁹ See Wolfhart Heinrichs, "On the Genesis of the *ḥaqīqa*-majāz Dichotomy" in *Studia Islamica*, No. 59(1984), p.111.

¹⁶⁰ See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 3, p. 120; al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 255.

¹⁶¹ See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 3, p. 120; al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol.2, p. 255; John Wansborough, *Quranic Studies*, p.228.

¹⁶² See Wolfhart Heinrichs, "On the Genesis of the *ḥaqīqa*-majāz Dichotomy", pp. 115-117; Ibn Tāmiyyah, *Kitāb al-Imān* http://www.islamport.com/isp_eBooks/tym/ (accessed on 15/5/10).

scholars of early age.¹⁶³ On the other side majority of the scholars accepted the presence of figurative expressions in the Holy Qur'ān which for them is the beauty of the Qur'ān and for linguists figurative expression is more profound and far reaching in effect as compared to ḥaḳīqah (literal) expression.¹⁶⁴ Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) emphatically refuted the objections raised against majāz. In his opinion, if majāz is invalid then it would be wrong to ascribe an act to inanimate objects whereas such examples are in abundance in common usage and in the Holy Qur'ān itself. Thus, denial of the worth of majāz reflects ignorance of those who do so.¹⁶⁵

Point of contention in this debate in Wolfhart Heinrich's view is that variety of idioms and majāz present in the Qur'ān requires correct interpretation by 'decoding' them. In the process of 'decoding' many factors play their role like jāhili literature, poetry and so forth, apart from it ra'y (personal opinion) and judgment cannot be avoided in selecting certain opinion from a set of opinions.¹⁶⁶ And as personal opinion and judgment was not accepted by the above mentioned schools in interpretation of revelation therefore presence of majāz as figurative expression was rejected by them. Al-Ghazālī favoured presence of majāz and outlined rules for its interpretation according to al-shar'iah; still he was strongly criticized.

Apart from above another important feature of majāz in al-Ghazālī's thought is its relation with ontology. Within those who accepted majāz two trends originated due to difference in their worldviews and not due to linguistics as mentioned by Nasr Abu Zayd (d. 2010). One view considers this world real and tries to understand the other world in the light of this one, as stated by theologians '*qiyās al-shāhid 'alā al-ghā'ib*'.

They are rationalists; majāz for them is a symbol for the other world. Other opinion is

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 115-116; In Wolfhart Heinrich's opinion Ibn Taymiyyah provided a good historical survey for the idea but his claim that it was absent in the early period is a generalized statement, see "On the Genesis of the ḥaḳīqa-majāz Dichotomy", p. 118.

¹⁶⁴ See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 3, p. 120; al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol.2, p. 255; al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, vol. 1, pp. 105-107.

¹⁶⁵ See Ibn Qutaybah, *Tā'wil Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, (Cairo: 1954), p. 99.

¹⁶⁶ See Wolfhart Heinrichs, "On the Genesis of the ḥaḳīqa-majāz Dichotomy", p. 129.

of Ibn 'Arabī's school, they consider the other world real and this world is to be understood in terms of the other. For them, this world is to be crossed or to go beyond it, considering *majāz* from *jāz*, *yajūz* meaning to cross.¹⁶⁷ Although al-Ghazālī was from the forerunners of Ibn 'Arabī and considered the other world as the real and this one to be approached in the light of the other but at the same time he also merged the *kalāmī* or rationalist aspect in his thought. In fact his thought was a blend of diverging ideas which gave him a unique place.

In summary it may be stated that language and its rules are indispensable for *al-ta'wīl*. Interpretation is impossible unless the correct connotation of the text is uncovered. Limiting oneself to only one aspect, literal or non literal, and ignoring the other is bound to produce undesirable results. For this reason we find al-Ghazālī criticizing literalists for being narrow and *al-bāṭiniyyah* for overlooking the apparent meaning. In *al-ta'wīl* both aspects must be taken into consideration and must play their due role. With this let us turn to the status and purpose of *al-ta'wīl* in al-Ghazālī's thought.

STATUS OF AL-TA'WĪL

Faced with strong criticism al-Ghazālī justified the status of *al-ta'wīl* in the fourth chapter of *Ādāb Tilāwah al-Qur'ān* and in the second chapter of *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id of Ihyā'*. In both places he answers a query raised by an unknown inquirer regarding authenticity of *al-ta'wīl* and cited proofs from the traditional sources and from reason for that. These evidences show the richness of meanings present in the Qur'ānic text for that reason its interpretation cannot be restricted to literal meaning only. Some of the evidences, as mentioned by him are like the Qur'ān has *al-zāhir*, *al-bāṭin*, *al-ḥadd* and *al-maṭla'*,¹⁶⁸ or that the prophets are ordered to communicate with people according to their ability to grasp.¹⁶⁹ According to a narration of Abū al-Dardā' religion is not

¹⁶⁷ See Nasr Abu Zayd, "Muraqabah 'al-Majāz': Man Yaquduha? Wa Ilā Ayna?" in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 12 (1992), p.51.

¹⁶⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, vol.1, pp.119, 341.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

comprehended fully until and unless the Qur'ān is explored from different perspectives. It is also said that for each Qur'ānic verse there are sixty thousand or above meanings in it, or that if explanation of al-fātiḥah is carried it would require seventy animals.¹⁷⁰ Thus, for al-Ghazālī the Holy Qur'ān is an unfathomable sea, whosoever confines its meanings to the letter of the word is revealing his ignorance. The Holy Qur'ān is a book of God and it narrates about His essence, attributes and acts. For al-Ghazālī all forms of knowledge emerge from His essence, attributes and acts and the book of God is an explanation of it. There are ishārāt (symbols) in the Holy Qur'ān for everything and those who penetrate in its meanings will gain knowledge otherwise only apparent meanings or tafsīr al-zāhir is not enough. To substantiate his view al-Ghazālī quoted Ibn 'Abbās that the verse "He gives the wisdom to whomsoever He will, and whoso is given the wisdom, has been given much good" (2:269) refers to knowledge of the Holy Qur'ān, or it is the 'understanding' given to Sulaymān (peace be upon him) and is mentioned before 'ḥukm and knowledge' in the verse "We made Solomon to understand it, and unto each gave We judgment and knowledge" (21:79). Holy Qur'ān is the endless ocean of knowledge an idea elaborated in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* as well, while talking about different sciences,

The principles of those sciences which we have enumerated and of those which we have not specified, are not out side of the Qur'ān, and all of these sciences are drawn out of one of the seas of knowledge of God (may He be exalted), i.e. the sea of (knowledge of His) works....The Qur'ān is (like) a sea which has no shore...¹⁷¹

It comes in the Holy Qur'ān "Say: If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the Words of my Lord are spent, though We brought replenishment the like of it." (18:109).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Muḥammad Abul Quasem, *The Jewels of the Qur'ān*, (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1977), p.46.

Commenting on the narration of Ibn Mas'ūd that one who intends to acquire the knowledge of the ancients and the moderns should ponder over the Qur'ān, for al-Ghazālī 'knowledge of the ancients and the moderns' is what was known in the past but is now lost or what will be known in the future all is present as symbols in this book, whether physical sciences or philosophies all are present in potential form which requires penetration in order to extract new meanings from it.¹⁷² To this fact prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) pointed, 'read the Qur'ān and seek to know its (deep) strange meanings (by eliciting and understanding)'.¹⁷³

Furthermore, rationally it is out of question to deny personal opinion in interpretation, as explanation of the Holy Qur'ān from the prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) is less in volume as compared to what is narrated by Ibn 'Abbas, Ibn Mas'ud or others; obviously it is based on their personal opinion. Secondly companions differed in their explanations to the Holy Qur'ān which reflects their effort in understanding. Thirdly if al-ta'wīl was revelation like the word of Qur'ān then there was no need for the prophet to pray for Ibn 'Abbas. Fourthly deducing meanings from the Holy Qur'ān has been affirmed in the verse "those of them whose task is to investigate would have known the matter." (4:83) which is beyond simple hearing from the authority and narrating it, it requires comprehension and use of reasoning.

From above it is clear that al-Ghazālī refuted that there is only one outward exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān which has come down to us through tradition rather he stressed on a wide range of understandings present in it.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, he criticized who refused personal opinion in understanding the Qur'ān and stick to what is being narrated by the tradition only considering it ignorance or lack of proper training and education.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² See al-Ghazālī, *Jawābir al-Qur'ān*, pp. 26-28; al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* tr. Quasem, p. 88.

¹⁷³ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, tr. Quasem, p.88.

¹⁷⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* vol.1, pp. 341-342.

¹⁷⁵ See Muḥammad Abul Quasem, *The Recitation and Interpretation of the Qur'an al-Ghazālī's theory* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaysia Press 1979), p. 87; Nabih Amin Faris, *The Foundations of the Articles of the Faith* (Lahore: Ashraf Printing Press 1999), p.35.

At the same time it is not a free land that everybody is allowed to enter; only those who fulfill its requirements should be allowed to interpret.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN INTERPRETER

No doubt that al-Ghazālī considers interpretation very crucial and important but at the same time he is crystal clear that great care must be taken while interpreting the text. He discusses in detail characteristics of an interpreter and whether it is a free land or a restricted area. The characteristics of an interpreter in al-Ghazālī's thought are directly linked with epistemology, which in turn is grounded in Sufism. He emphatically maintains that only who are well versed in these areas qualify for interpretation while others are prohibited to use this tool. There is no specific term used for them; they are called 'the selected few', 'the elite' or *al-'ulamā'*, *al-'arifun*, *dhawī al-baṣā'ir*, and so forth. To know who are these 'selected few' we need to look at al-Ghazālī's gradation of people in their ability to understand. According to him there are different levels of understanding present among people. There are 'common people', 'the selected' and 'the selected few'.¹⁷⁶

'The selected few' are those who could clean their hearts from the worldly impurities, polish and enlighten them by *al-dhikr*. Their thoughts are rightful and are true followers of al-sharī'ah. After training and self discipline they receive nūr from the lamp of prophecy and their hearts becomes mirror where knowledge is reflected from above.¹⁷⁷ In other words their third or internal eye for 'ālam al-malakūt is opened through the Qur'ān and other revealed books.¹⁷⁸ To attain this ability self discipline is essential as mentioned in the verse "By the soul, and That which shaped it and inspired it to lewdness and godfearing." (91:7-8).

¹⁷⁶ See al-Ghazālī, *Ijām al-'Awām*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p.49-50.

¹⁷⁷ See al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 76.

¹⁷⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p.8; *al-Risālah al-Ladūniyyah*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 62.

And tasfiyah (completion) of the nafs in Margaret Smith's translation is 'making sound of the soul and its return to its original disposition'.¹⁷⁹ This is accomplished through three steps, firstly to gain greatest share from all branches of knowledge, secondly true meditation and lastly al-tafakkur or reflection which opens the door to the 'Invisible World'.¹⁸⁰ Through this door to the invisible world knowledge is gained. And in the light of this knowledge the visible and sensual world is compared and interpreted. In this way al-Ghazālī makes relation of 'visible' and 'invisible' worlds as foundational element in al-ta'wīl.

Coming back to 'the selected few' who can dive in the sea of knowledge, they are on the verge of great danger and few will be saved, according to him, 'among ten only one might be saved'.¹⁸¹ Whereas the common populace is not allowed to indulge in such an activity as they are unfit for it in his opinion.¹⁸² In commoners fall men of letters, grammarians, al-muḥadithūn, al-mufasirūn, al-fuqahā', al-mutakalimūn or all those scholars who are not well trained to dive in the sea of al-ma'rifah,¹⁸³ and are labeled to be 'ulamā' al-sū' or al-dunyā,¹⁸⁴ whose hearts are involved in this world.

In *Iljām al-'awām* the position of common populace in regard to al-mutashābihāt and its interpretation is made clear. As already said al-ta'wīl is not allowed for them, they must have firm faith in them and should not inquire as it is above their grasping. They

¹⁷⁹ Margaret Smith, *Al-Risālat Al-Luduniyya* by Abū Ḥāmid Muhammad al-Ghazālī, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3(July, 1938), pp. 372-373.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 373.

¹⁸¹ See al-Ghazālī, *Iljām al-'Awām*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p.50.

¹⁸² See ibid., p. 49; al-Ghazālī, Fayṣal al-Tafriqah, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 85.

¹⁸³ See al-Ghazālī, *Iljām al-'Awām*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p.49. *Al-Ma'rifah* and *Ilm* are the two terms used by al-Ghazālī for knowledge. *Ilm* is used more frequently with a detailed discussion on it in *Iḥyā'*, it is used in a wider sense as compared to *al-ma'rifah*. Apart from *Iḥyā'* and other works *baḥār al-ma'rifah* is expounded in *Jawābir al-Qur'ān* which is the Holy Qur'ān itself as it talks about Allah, His Being and His acts. To attain this knowledge a Sufi travels towards God with self purification and discipline till 'alam al-malakut is unveiled to him. *Al-Ma'rifah* comes through unveiling or *al-kashaf* and is more authentic than all forms of *ilm* which is gained by common ways of learning. See *Iḥyā'*, vol. 1, pp.15-98, vol.3, pp.14-29, *Jawābir al-Qur'ān* pp.8-20, *al-Risālah al-Ladūniyyah*.

¹⁸⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* vol.1, pp. 73-79.

must believe that it is known to Allah, His prophets, *al-siddiqūn* and *al-awliā'*.¹⁸⁵ Faith in unknown might be disturbing for them and in answer to it al-Ghazālī maintains that this knowledge is meant for intellectuals or scholars and not for common people, and the understanding of common people as compared to scholars is similar to the understanding of children in regard to adults. They must be treated in similar way as adults treat children while making them understand some profound ideas, generally they must be discouraged to ask such questions.¹⁸⁶ Intellectual gradation of people was discussed by Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'¹⁸⁷ and Sufis before al-Ghazālī.¹⁸⁸ It was *al-khawāss*, *al-ḥukamā'*, and *al-ʿarifūn* who could grasp the realities and deduce the meanings present in symbols. Al-Ghazālī followed Sufis more closely which is very clear in his writings as compared to Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. Al-Ghazālī being their contemporary must have been aware of these tendencies, in fact his ideas were watered from different fountains but he carefully picked the elements which matched with the true Islamic spirit.¹⁸⁹ It becomes clear from above that al-ta'wīl for al-Ghazālī was a restricted area and only 'the selected few' were allowed enter it.

¹⁸⁵ See al-Ghazālī, *Ijām al-'Awām*, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 42.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁸⁷ See *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' wa Khullān al-Wafā'* (Tehrān: Maktab al-'Alām al-Islāmī Qum 1405 H.), vol. 2, al-Risālah al-Thāminah, pp. 342-344.

¹⁸⁸ See al-Sirāj al-Ṭūsī, *al-Lum'a*, pp. 111-113, 147-152; Imām al-Qushairī, *al-Risālah al-Qushairiyyah*, vol. 1, p. 266; Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, pp. 232-234.

¹⁸⁹ Fuwād Ma'sūm traces the idea of *al-zāhir* and *al-bāṭin* and levels of people in their understanding of *al-bāṭin* in the thought of al-Ghazālī and Ibn 'Arabī to *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*. But in fact the similarities discussed by him are apparent and cannot be taken seriously as al-Ghazālī or Ibn 'Arabī and *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* follow different lines of thought. See Fuwād Ma'sūm, *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā': Falsafatuhum wa ghāyatuhum* (Damascus: Dār al-Madā publishing company Damascus 1998), pp. 156-169.

MEANING AND PRINCIPLES OF DEMYTHOLOGIZATION

THE TERM DEMYTHOLOGIZATION

Bultmann proposed and coined the term 'demythologization' for interpretation. The word is a combination of 'de' and 'mythologization'. The prefix 'de' means uncovering, or removal; explaining it Macquarrie mentioned that 'de' in the term simply means 'removal' or 'elimination' of mythology, a similar phrase might be decarbonization for removal of carbon from anything.¹ The background of this term as pointed by Roger Johnson is that demythologization was initially used by Hans Jonas, a student of Bultmann, in German as *Entmythologisierung* which was translated as demythologizing in 1930.² Bultmann borrowed the term and gave it a philosophical connotation and with it coined the term.

This project was first proposed in a lecture in 1941 by Bultmann which was published as *New Testament and Mythology*. It was provocative and stirred the theological circles either in form of debates or in form of disciplinary actions taken by the church against those who drew on Bultmann's theology in their preaching; in both cases this no doubt shows the strength of his proposal.³ It is not out of place to mention here that Bultmann was not the first one to raise the problem of mythology in Christian doctrines as there were others before him particularly liberal theologians who proposed elimination of mythology from Christianity. But the provocative issue in his thought was reliance on existentialism in the interpretation of myth.

Coming back to the term demythologization and its meaning in Bultmann's thought, we find that for him, "de-mythologizing is an hermeneutic method, that is, a method of interpretation, of exegesis. 'Hermeneutics' means the art of exegesis."⁴ It is clear from the definition that for Bultmann demythologization is hermeneutics or

¹ See John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing Bultmann and his Critics* (New York: Harper & Row 1960), pp. 11-12.

² See Roger Johnson, *Rudolf Bultmann Interpreting faith for the modern era* (London: Collins 1987), p. 334.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1958), p. 45.

interpretation of mythology and not its elimination. He has not followed the literal meaning of *de* that is elimination rather has given it his own meaning i.e. 'interpretation'. Whether Bultmann was faithful to his word or not, this can only be answered at the end of this study but at the outset it may be noted that his project in the end does lead to discard some of the basic dogmas of Christianity as will be clear from the following discussion. For this reason Heinrich Fries while commenting on the term demythologizing in Bultmann's thought considers it a 'false' term as it does not match with Bultmann's project. According to Fries in demythologizing 'elimination is definitely contained in it', moreover 'elimination and interpretation of the myth certainly exclude each other'.⁵ No doubt the criticism of elimination cannot be ignored though Bultmann tried hard to focus on interpretation and not on elimination. For Fries the reason which led Bultmann to retain the term is that his interpretation in the end does 'lead to the elimination of the previous understanding'.⁶ Bultmann denies all such allegations but the fact remains that elimination is definitely contained in it as stated by Fries. Now let us take the second component of the term that is 'myth' and its relation with interpretation.

MYTH AND DEMYTHOLOGIZATION

When someone takes a copy of the New Testament, in the modern age, and reads it some strangeness is certainly felt. On the one side it talks about universal realities such as meaning of life, death, human suffering, love, hope and so forth but at the same time its concepts, ideas and terminology are strange. It seems that the world of the author is different from our world. This strangeness or gap between us and the authors, according to Bultmann, is because the authors belong to another world, different from ours. The stories of the New Testament are odd because they present a different worldview as compared to that of the modern age. The worldview of the New

⁵ Heinrich Fries, *Bultmann-Barth and Catholic Theology* ed. Henry J. Koren, tr. Leonard Swidler (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, Duquesne Studies Theological Series # 8, 1967), p. 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Testament reflects a primitive and mythological understanding of the world which stands in a sharp contrast to the cosmology of the present age. To make it acceptable to the modern man one of the options, as taken by Bultmann in demythologization, is to interpret it according to modern notions. Thus the main concern of Bultmann in demythologization is 'interpretation' or 'hermeneutics' and not the concept of mythology as he himself stated so, 'I do not reckon the question about the concept of 'myth' among the most important',⁷ neither he considered 'myth' a satisfactory term.⁸ Although myth is not the important issue for Bultmann still he provides a general understanding as it is the underlying concept in his interpretation. 'Myth, for him, is the report of an occurrence or an event in which supernatural, superhuman forces or persons are at work',⁹ elsewhere he defined as, 'myth is here used in the sense popularized by the 'History of Religions School'.¹⁰ Mythology is the use of imagery to express the other worldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side. For instance, divine transcendence is expressed as spatial distance'.¹¹ Consequently, myth for him is a specific manner of thinking where some phenomenon is referred to supernatural in opposition to nature, or to divine powers and not human powers. Another important element of mythical thinking is that it is, 'objectifying as scientific thinking, for instance, when the former represents

⁷ R. Bultmann, "On the Problem of Demythologizing" in *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. & tr. Schubert M. Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1984), p. 95.

⁸ See R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p.18.

⁹ R. Bultmann, "On the Problem of Demythologizing" in *New Testament and Mythology*, p. 95.

¹⁰ 'Myth' in English language is derived from Greek *mythos* which means fable or made up story. This understanding of 'unreal or made up' story was common in English language till 19th century. Since 19th century though the earlier meaning of the term 'myth' as fabulous and untrustworthy persisted but with it new intellectual approaches appeared. Thus, defining myth as 'disease of language' by Max Muller where confusion of names led to personification, or as 'to an animistic stage of human culture' by Lang, or 'to specific rituals which the myth gave access to' by Frazer and Harrison. With the development of anthropology a more positive understanding appeared where myth is considered to be a truer (deeper) version of reality than secular history, or realistic description or scientific explanation. See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press 1983), revised edition, pp. 210-212.

¹¹ R. Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology in Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, tr. R. H. Fuller (New York & Evanston: Harper Torchbooks 1961), vol.1, p. 10.

the transcendence of God in terms of remoteness in space, or when it personifies the power of evil as Satan'.¹² Thus, myth functions in a way that it talks about the 'other worldly' or 'divine' in terms of 'this worldly', man talks about transcendence in terms of his self experience or brings in what is non-temporal to temporal category, as Bultmann puts it, 'the idea of transcendence of God is imagined by means of the category of time',¹³ here Bultmann has followed the tradition of Kant that understanding takes place within the subject-object relation.

While discussing the mythical picture of the New Testament, Bultmann refers to its various stories where the divine intervenes directly in the world and miraculous happenings take place or it provides information which contradicts the scientific information. For example the three storey structure of the world where earth is the middle, heaven above and hell below, or sickness and disease is caused by demons and Satan, or the picture of Jesus as a Son of God who appeared on earth as man, and his death on the cross as a sinner atones the sins of men and his resurrection brings in a cosmic change and annihilates the death which was brought by Adam, after that he arises to skies and sits at the right hand of his Father.¹⁴ These and many such stories are mythical and legendary in nature and are presenting a primitive mind set which is different from the modern one. Pictures of mythical worldview are stumbling blocks; confronted with this issue Bultmann raises the question that is it possible for the modern man to accept the primitive worldview? For him it is simply impossible, but at the same time he does not take the option of their elimination as was done in the nineteenth century by liberal theologians. Instead he proposed to discard the mythical clothing and to retrieve the deeper meaning concealed under mythology. The procedure through which the mythical elements are put aside and the original meaning

¹² R. Bultmann, "The Case for Demythologizing" in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, tr. R. H. Fuller (London: S. P. C. K 1962), vol. 2, p. 185.

¹³ R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p.22.

¹⁴ See R. Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology: The Problem of Demythologizing the New Testament" in *New Testament and Mythology*, pp. 1-2; R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, pp. 12-15.

is retained is the interpretation of the New Testament which he termed as demythologizing.¹⁵

Apart from above, Bultmann's objection on mythical thinking is that it contradicts the modern understanding of the world and human self. In mythical or primitive perception of the world people believed in supernatural powers and their interference in the world. These supernatural powers could change the normal phenomenon of cause and effect, they were considered to be more powerful and man depended on them; similarly natural occurrences like eclipse of sun and moon too were from gods. Thus, for primitive man the world was not regulated by natural cause and effect phenomenon but was open for interference of gods as well. On the other hand for the modern man the world is a 'closed' system which works in accordance with the natural cause and effect phenomena without any intervention from outside.¹⁶ To accept mythical picture of the New Testament demands, 'that we shall make a sacrifice of understanding'.¹⁷ Man has advanced greatly in the scientific knowledge and to bring him back to believe in mythical narratives of the New Testament would mean to accept a particular view in religion and denying it in everyday life, which Bultmann calls as 'a curious form of schizophrenia and insincerity'.¹⁸ For him it is impossible to believe in electric light and wireless and at the same time to have faith in spirits and miracles of the New Testament. Besides, there is difference in self understanding of man in primitive and modern age; for Bultmann today man considers himself to be solely responsible for his own self, his thinking, or feeling is not dependent on superhuman powers.¹⁹ To deny his self-understanding for a primitive worldview is impossible, therefore Bultmann opted to demythologize it.

¹⁵ See R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁶ See R. Bultmann, *On the Problem of Demythologizing in New Testament and Mythology*, pp. 96-97.

¹⁷ R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 17.

¹⁸ R. Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology" in *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, p.4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Related to the above difference in understanding of people is that although both worldviews are representing certain kind of knowledge but both stand poles apart in their perception of the world. Bultmann acknowledges that mythology is a 'primitive science insofar as it is an inquiring kind of thinking that reckons with cause and effect'.²⁰ What is meant here is that Bultmann equates mythology and science because both have a similar quality i.e. understanding human existence, although both take different routes for that and express differently. Moreover, mythological expression is primitive, in it man is subordinate to supernatural powers and his life is 'full of enigmas and mysteries'.²¹ For Bultmann such expressions are inadequate as it talks about transcendent in worldly terms and bounds it within the limitations of time and space, in his words myth give, 'to the transcendent reality an immanent, this-worldly objectivity. Myths give worldly objectivity to that which is unworldly'.²² Now demythologizing is the way to uncover the correct sense hidden under mythology. It is evident from above that Bultmann rejected the stories of the New Testament as they present a cosmology which contradicts the modern one. Moreover, for him, cosmology is interconnected with the beliefs given therein. As man of today cannot accept the primitive cosmology so he automatically rejects the beliefs as well. It seems that for Bultmann mythical stories of the New Testament exist because primitive man thought in those categories and not because they in reality took place therefore he labels it as primitive man's thinking which can be interpreted in the light of modern thinking. This in fact is a serious blow to Christian faith, whether Bultmann intended it or not but he negated the truth of the beliefs. If the beliefs were just the product of a particular age and were written down because the authors in that age thought in those categories means that the beliefs have no reality of their own. Further, Bultmann here is taking the modern notions and through them is reading the text, which itself is

²⁰ See R. Bultmann, *On the Problem of Demythologizing in New Testament and Mythology*, p. 98.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 19.

questionable. Due to such serious flaws in his thought many objections were raised by his critics, considering here only the concept of myth he has been charged of ambiguity in it.²³ Schubert M. Ogden summarized some of these objections that his understanding of myth is not homogeneous; it is a combination of various thoughts, secondly there is confusion and narrowness and it does not match well with his explanation of mythical picture of the New Testament. Three storeyed world picture is primitive science or primitive worldview, it is a description of this world as it was imagined in primitive times therefore it is not according to Bultmann's understanding of myth description of the divine in terms of this world.²⁴ Commenting on these allegations Schubert Ogden considers them invalid, for they have charged him on issues which he himself has denied. Firstly, narrowness of his definition is not justified as Bultmann himself opted for it and clarified that he will follow the 'specific' meaning. As for the distinction made between primitive science and primitive worldview Schubert considers it an imposition on Bultmann's thought, for he does not make this distinction.²⁵ For him, as quoted by Schubert, 'there have occasionally been protestations against my designation of the three-storey world picture does not in itself have to be mythical. Nevertheless, it actually is so insofar as it is encountered in the realm of mythical thinking. For both the upper and the lower stories are thought of as 'numinous' spheres, that is, as realms of a transcendence reality of either a divine or a demonic character. Thus it is not permissible to distinguish between myth and world-picture...'.²⁶ This makes it evident that Bultmann himself is not making the distinction

²³ See for example, Friedrich K. Schumann, "Can the Event of Jesus Christ be Demythologized?" in *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, pp. 175-190; Karl Jaspers, *Myth and Religion in Kerygma and Myth*, vol.2, pp. 144-147; and Schubert M. Ogden mentioned in *Christ Without Myth*, (Dallas: Second Southern Methodist Press 1961), p.31, footnote 24, few essays like L. Malevez, *The Christian Message and Myth*, tr. Olive Wyon (London: SCM Press 1958), pp. 68; Giovanni Miegge, *Gospel and Myth in the Theology Of Rudolf Bultmann*, tr. Stephen Neil, Richmond (John Knox Press 1960), p. 91; Ian Henderson, *Myth in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press 1952), p. 46.

²⁴ See Schubert M. Ogden, *Christ Without Myth*, pp. 28-29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

and it is the general understanding of mythical thought to which he is referring in primitive cosmology, this justifies Schubert to consider these accusations invalid. Though Schubert is right in his claim that Bultmann adopted a general understanding of myth, but it must be noted, as said above, that Bultmann developed his thesis on the basis of dialectical conflict between 'mythical' and 'scientific', where he considers the former untrue and the later true and makes it the foundation on which to judge the 'mythical'. To take the modern notions and to judge the pre-modern thought in its categories raises objections to Bultmann's understanding, before that it would be appropriate to know his view on the dialect of myth and science.

MYTH AND SCIENCE

The above discussion is based on the conflict present in primitive and modern worldviews, for Bultmann the primitive worldview is mythological and unscientific and so it stands in opposition to modern scientific one. Difference in the two views is that in the primitive one this world is open to the other world where man and god easily interact; on the other hand the scientific view rejects it and considers the world as a closed continuum where all the occurrences are the result of cause and effect only. Accepting cause and effect process in nature automatically denies Christ events and the place of Bible as a special revelation, thus, they become stumbling blocks for the modern man. Here Bultmann adopts the scientific view as the modern man is situated in it. But does making it valid means that the Biblical view is worthless, Bultmann in fact does not deny the truth present in the New Testament. It must be rediscovered but at the same time it is not a good reason to adopt Biblical view in the modern age.²⁷ Relevance of scientific view for him arises due to the situation of modern man, 'the only relevant question for the theologian is the basic assumption on which the adoption of a biological as of every other *Weltanschauung* (world view) rests, and that assumption is the view of the world which has been moulded by modern science and

²⁷ See Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology" in *Kerygma and Myth*, vol.1, p. 3.

the modern conception of human nature as a self-subsistent unity immune from the interference of supernatural powers'.²⁸

Thus the world picture formed by modern natural science and self understanding of modern man as part of closed unity are two binding factors for the modern man to have the scientific view.

Considering the functioning of science and myth, it can be observed that there is some similarity in the two. Both are giving an explanation for the cause behind an effect, science remains within the natural world and looks for the natural cause where as myth refers to supernatural elements as its cause, furthermore in their search for cause science, according to Bultmann, looks for the origin of the things like Greeks,²⁹ on the other hand mythical thinking refers it to supernatural cause.³⁰ Due to these differences modern man cannot return to mythical thinking, to accept the mythical view as true would be 'both senseless and impossible'.³¹ Besides, scientific method is accurate as compared to mythical so modern man cannot return to mythology.³²

It may be noted from above that for Bultmann scientific world and its understanding is the parameter to judge the things, with that he is imposing one culture and its values on the other, to explore Bultmann's ideas on it we will return to it later.

Another difference in the two is linked with 'self-understanding of modern man'. In Bultmann's opinion modern man considers himself to be 'essentially a unity', who is responsible of his own feeling, thinking and will and does not ascribes them to strange powers and strives for self-mastery by organizing himself on rational basis.³³ Thus for

²⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, Faith in God the Creator in *Existence and Faith*, ed. & tr. Schubert M. Ogden (London & Glasgow: Collins 1960), pp. 211-212, here Bultmann refers to St Paul and his explanation of the idea of Son of God. For St. Paul the problem was the origin of the world, to explain that he borrowed from Greeks the concept of mediator between God and the world and applied it on the Son of God.

³⁰ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 15.

³¹ Rudolf Bultmann, New Testament and Mythology in *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, p. 3.

³² See Rudolf Bultmann, Theology as Science in *New Testament and Mythology*, p.47.

³³ Rudolf Bultmann, New Testament and Mythology in *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, p. 6.

him the 'sacraments' of the New Testament are 'utterly strange and incomprehensible'. Idea of death as 'the punishment of sin' is unintelligible, for modern man 'death is a necessary process of nature', likewise death of Christ for atonement is an irrational faith.³⁴ In summary it may be said that the modern man's self-understanding with his rational and scientific approach gave him a distinct identification which turned the mythical worldview impossible for him. Whereas the New Testament narratives are unscientific and irrational, and the 'mythical view of the world is obsolete' thus it is a dilemma for the modern man, in what way is it related to him, or 'how it could effect his own life'.³⁵ Faced with this situation theology must respond which for Bultmann arises out of necessity, so theologian must come with a solution for the modern man, as he puts it,

'we are therefore bound to ask whether, when we preach the Gospel to-day, we expect our converts to accept not only the Gospel message, but also the mythical view of the world in which it is set. If not, does the New Testament embody a truth which is quite independent of its mythical setting? If it does, theology must undertake the task of stripping the Kerygma from its mythical framework, of 'demythologizing' it.'³⁶

And the task for a theologian is to differentiate between the message and myth of the New Testament. It is the message or the Kerygma which must be restored and not the mythical picture of the New Testament by demythologizing. In differentiating between the message and the myth Bultmann is of the opinion that a sharp line must be drawn between them, whatever is mythical is to be put aside, it is not the matter of selection or subtraction of few items as he says, 'we cannot save the Kerygma by selecting some of its features and subtracting others, and thus reduce the amount of mythology in it' because for him, 'if we accept one idea, we must accept everything' and, 'it is just this

³⁴ Ibid., p. 6-7.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁶ Ibid., p.3.

one idea which we cannot accept'.³⁷ By eliminating myth from the New Testament Bultmann's demythologizing in fact led to rejection of traditional Christianity or its concept of salvation history, due to this rejection he faced strong criticism. On the other side Bultmann's stance is crystal clear for him theologian with all seriousness has to differentiate between the message and the myth because 'it is the duty they owe to themselves, to the Church they serve, and to those whom they seek to win for the church'.³⁸ The aim behind this task is the modern man for Bultmann, what the modern man accepts is correct and accordingly the New Testament must be approached and interpreted, as he says, 'they', theologians 'must make it quite clear what their hearers are expected to accept and what they are not'.³⁹ Thus, it is clear from what has been stated that the cause behind demythologizing is the conflict between the scientific and the mythical worldview. To resolve it Bultmann picked modern values as the standard of truth and the requirements of the modern man as the task of modern theology. Here as science is the criterion of truth it needs to be considered whether it was arbitrary choice for Bultmann or he accepted science out of necessity, to know that we need to look in the notion of 'science' in his thought.

For Bultmann as mentioned above scientific methodology is most accurate as it is disinterested in results and seeks the reality of the thing objectively.⁴⁰ Thus, scientific perception is the true understanding. It is perfect and rational as it excluded the supernatural causes in its explanation of the world and related every effect with clear proofs to its cause, so giving in clear terms explanation of the unknown phenomena in terms of the known.⁴¹ Therefore for him science is the 'truth'. Although Bultmann was

³⁷ Ibid., p.9.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See Rudolf Butlmann, *Theology as science in New Testament and Mythology*, p. 47.

⁴¹ Modern science differs from the pre-modern age in its understanding related to unknown, invisible or unobservable causes of the natural phenomena. In the pre-modern age invisible and unobservable causes were as much a fact as visible and known causes therefore the realm of God or gods was a reality and an accepted fact, and so their intervention in the world was not questioned but it is with the modern science that a shift appeared, as modern science accepts true only what is visible and known. Starting

well aware of the objections which considered science a 'myth' of modern man, for him all such allegations were pointless, 'one may call it an 'ideology' a 'fiction' or something else if one prefers to do so. But the important thing is the difference present in mythical and scientific thinking, with clarity and accuracy of its method.⁴² From this it becomes evident that for Bultmann science and myth are two poles, and acceptance of one means simply to reject the other. Today mythical thinking is outdated and modern man is living in different circumstances from the primitive age so according to the requirements of modern age science is the only option. It may be deduced from above that modern man was attracted towards science due to its feature of rationality, and Bultmann being a child of modernity preferred science on this common vision. Rationality and accuracy of science in reality is the outcome of enlightenment where the values of 'truth' and 'reality' were reversed and were confined to observable facts only. Moreover, modern science and its methodology run into primitive worldview. Therefore, opting common vision of science and to evaluate Christian faith in its light reflects serious flaws in Bultmann's demythologizing. There are many objections raised on the 'scientific view' in Bultmann's thought, according to Karl Jaspers there are structural problems in it, for Bultmann 'science' either is a way of thinking or it is 'science proper' which appeared in late middle ages, in both cases there are problems in his perception. When science is taken as common mode of thought than it is not a characteristic of modern age only rather it is common to every age or it is a identical element which characterize 'man' as such, that the absurd thinking is always absurd and so resurrection was as impossible to the contemporaries of Jesus as it is to modern man.⁴³ And if it is taken in its second meaning, which appeared in late middle ages here too Bultmann misunderstood it. In

from the Rene Descartes and Roger Bacon and coming down to nineteenth century and after wards that only visible and known became 'real' and unknown was considered 'unreal', and due to it the realm of God and the intervention of supernatural powers became unreal even in the religious thought.

⁴² See Rudolf Bultmann, On the Problem of Demythologizing in *New Testament and Mythology*, p. 124.

⁴³ See Karl Jaspers and Rudolf Bultmann, *Myth and Christianity: An Inquiry into the Possibility of Religion Without Myth* tr. Norbert Guterman (New York: Noonday Press 1969), Seventh Printing, p. 5.

common usage science provides a comprehensive worldview to man about himself and the universe around him. But this is a false conception according to Jaspers, science of enlightenment age is misunderstood by many, and 'Bultmann, a serious historian, is apparently one of them who are unfamiliar with its principles', as 'a crucial feature of modern science is that it does not provide a total worldview, because it recognizes that this is impossible'.⁴⁴ Science for the first time in human history showed its limitations to humanity and made it clear that it cannot explore 'being' as a whole but could investigate only objects in the world. Whereas Bultmann like a layman takes 'scientific world view' as a comprehensive view.⁴⁵

In the above criticism the first thesis that science is a mode of thinking inherent in man on the whole and based on it he considered that resurrection was absurd in early period as it is today, here Jaspers has in fact adopted the modern understanding that resurrection was absurd before as it is now. No doubt that 'absurd' is always absurd but what exactly is absurd, its definition may vary with time. As for his second thesis it is true that Bultmann followed a common meaning as he mentioned in his reply to Jaspers, 'my attempt to demythologize begins, true enough, by clearing away the false stumbling-blocks created for modern man by the fact that his world view is determined by science'.⁴⁶ So it is common understanding but his purpose was to make faith understandable for the modern man. Furthermore adoption of a worldview is not by choice rather it is determined for all by birth in Bultmann's opinion.⁴⁷ Even if Bultmann adopted the common view out of necessity still the problem persists, as scientific view believes in a closed world where miracle or intervention of supernatural is impossible, and the mythical view accepts it. Faced with this problem Bultmann opts to interpret it. Furthermore, scientific facts are not fixed facts. Scientific discoveries are ongoing process where its results are liable to change, and to take its results as the

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology" in *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 2, p. 183.

⁴⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology" in *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, p. 3.

premises for demythologizing weakens the whole procedure, because if scientific results changes in future it will bring Bultmann's interpretation on the ground. Therefore Jaspers argument of weak theses cannot be ignored.

Bultmann's stance of accepting scientific view as correct and consequently rejecting all unnatural occurrences and considering them impossible shows his unawareness of scientific discoveries in the world of physics. Faith of closed functioning of world in terms of cause and effect were shaken after modern physics and interestingly these discoveries are near to the understanding of al-Ghazālī as for him effect is not the natural outcome of a cause.⁴⁸

Coming back to Bultmann's adoption of the scientific view out of necessity, is problematic because the worldview in which man lives does not necessarily implies its adoption, it can be altered as admitted by him.⁴⁹ Another setback in Bultmann's thought is that he adopted it as a correct worldview though out of necessity, whereas to qualify a view as 'true' because it is the prevailing thought does not justify its truth. People might have certain views and it is equally possible that they are wrong, so in that case the argument of 'necessity' cannot be justified.

One of the reasons of adopting modern worldview is perhaps the general notion of superiority of modern thought over the primitive. It has been taken for granted, under the influence of evolutionary thought but there are voices who gave it a serious thought and labeled it a intellectual or 'cultural fashion' of the modern west.⁵⁰

It may be observed from above that though science versus myth is one of the vital elements in demythologizing the New Testament but Bultmann to a great extent followed the common version of science which weakens his interpretation.

⁴⁸ See Ümit Yoksuloglu Devji, 'Al-Ghazālī and Quantum Physics: A Comparative Analysis of the Seventeenth Discussion of *Tahāfut al-Falāsifā* and Quantum Theory' (M. A. Thesis), Montreal: McGill University.

⁴⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology" in *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, p. 3.

⁵⁰ See Mircea Eliade, "Cultural Fashions and the History of Religions" in *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa, Mircea Eliade and Charles H. Long (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press 1974), p. 23.

To what extent Bultmann's demythologizing was able to fulfill the requirements of modern theology is a question to which we will return later, but it must be noted that the debate provoked by his ideas reflects the need for revival in modern theology and demythologizing is one of the efforts in this regard. As demythologizing is the method of interpretation so now we turn to interpretation or hermeneutics in his thought.

THE CONCEPT OF INTERPRETATION

In interpretation of the text the components of text, reading and meaning are important. The 'reading' is the role played by interpreter; he acts as the middle man between the text and the meaning, his function is important as he has to understand the text and to give it a proper meaning. The focus of the twentieth century theology was more on the meaning, and not on the text, more importantly the meaning for the modern man. One of the reasons might be that due to the rational and scientific onslaughts of the previous age, in twentieth century theology was primarily concerned with the meaning of Christianity, the task in front of theologians was to expound and clarify the meaning of Christianity and to make it relevant and intelligible for the present age, Bultmann too faced the challenge and felt the need to interpret Christianity to make it acceptable for the modern age. For that he proposed that a proper methodology must be followed in interpretation, so that the text may be approached with right questions and to interpret in the light of existential philosophy. In interpretation of a text particularly in case of ancient text like the New Testament which is separated from the modern reader by centuries, there are many difficulties involved in its understanding, from that is how to bridge the historical gap and is it possible in the first place to reach the intention of the author or not and so forth. In face of various difficulties involved in interpretation, no doubt that Bultmann's hermeneutics reflects his deep insight in the problem and his concern for the requirements of the modern man. In his hermeneutics he was influenced by Wilhelm Dilthey, Schleiermacher and Kantian philosophy.

In defining hermeneutics Bultmann followed Dilthey that it is 'art of understanding expressions of life fixed in writing,' which draws attention to itself 'during a great historical movement.'⁵¹ Or as quoted by S M Odgen hermeneutics is, 'the science of the understanding of history in general'.⁵² Thus hermeneutics is the art/science⁵³ of interpretation a historical document, but in the process of interpretation Bultmann's concern was whether such a knowledge possible, or in other words how to reach at valid objective understanding of history, and what are the conditions under which it can be attained, as expressed by Bultmann, 'how can one individual come to an objective, generally valid understanding of another individual's expression of life as given through senses? Thus, it is the question of the possibility of achieving objectivity in understanding unique historical existence of the past.'⁵⁴ So for Bultmann the task of interpretation is to achieve objectivity in understanding the historical documents.

Commenting on objective understanding in Bultmann's thought Macquarrie explained it that for Bultmann it is possible by reaching the intention of the author in his writing and by approaching the text with correct questions. Incorrect questions can lead to wrong interpretation, for example dealing the literary text as it is a book of scientific facts or the vice versa will lead to incorrect interpretation therefore correct questioning can only lead to objective understanding.⁵⁵

Bultmann was not the first one to search for objectivity in understanding, before him there is history about the search, which he also outlined in his book *New Testament and Mythology*, according to him there were rules formulated since Aristotle to arrive at objectivity in understanding. For Aristotle it was the structure and the style to which Alexandrians added the grammatical knowledge and peculiar usage of the individual author, and the latter aspect was expanded further in enlightenment age and it was the

⁵¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Problem of Hermeneutics in New Testament and Mythology*, p. 68.

⁵² Schubert M. Ogden, *Christ Without Myth*, p. 50.

⁵³ Hermeneutics is a science or art is an unsettled issue among scholars, but the preferred usage is that it is science and art both.

⁵⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Problem of Hermeneutics in New Testament and Mythology*, p. 68.

⁵⁵ See John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing Bultmann and his Critics*, p. 39.

philological and historical methods which were used. But these hermeneutic rules lost their worth with new understanding given by Schleiermacher which is a composition of grammatical and psychological aspects,⁵⁶ in its interpretation not the 'outer form' i.e. the grammatical rules but 'inner form' or the subjective and the intuitive aspect too is given equal importance.⁵⁷ For Schleiermacher in interpretation there must be a relationship between the interpreter and the author in the sense that they both 'do not stand over against one another as two incomparable facts' but come very close to each other, the interpreter must try to penetrate in the thoughts of the author to bring to light his intentions.⁵⁸ In Bultmann's view hermeneutical rules of Schleiermacher are not valid for all categories of texts due to their one sidedness; after rejecting Schleiermacher's principles he presented his own understanding which he termed as 'pre-supposition' or 'pre-understanding', for him it is the guiding principle and conception present in the mind of interpreter even though he might be unaware of it.⁵⁹ Any interpretation without pre-supposition is impossible for Bultmann, because every interpreter must be guided by his 'individuality' i.e. his habits or weakness or so forth,⁶⁰ or by his conceptual background.⁶¹ To make it clear Bultmann gave few examples to show how pre-suppositions influence the interpreter, one of it is the interpretation of the word 'spirit' in the New Testament which passed through a change in meaning due to different suppositions working in different historical phases. During nineteenth century due to humanistic philosophy it was interpreted as power of reason but later under psychological conceptions it was meant to be a divine power which causes marvelous psychological phenomena like prophecy.⁶²

⁵⁶ See above page no. 83.

⁵⁷ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Problem of Hermeneutics in New Testament and Mythology*, pp. 70-71.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 46.

⁶⁰ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?* in *Existence and Faith*, pp. 343-344.

⁶¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 48.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

In pre-suppositions Bultmann differentiates between valid and invalid ones, the pre-understanding related to method is the required and valid pre-supposition whereas the one related to result is invalid pre-supposition. The latter means that pre-understanding dominates the result so the exegete presupposes the result of interpretation; here prejudice on the part of interpreter is involved which 'the exegete ought to eliminate by educating himself'.⁶³ The former that is the one related to method is the required one, it is the way of putting correct kind of questioning to the text, these questions may vary according to the conceptual background of the interpreter, as in the example above the word 'spirit' is interpreted differently due to humanistic or psychological background of the interpreter.⁶⁴ No doubt that the pre-supposition which will dominate the result of interpretation cannot be an objective study which is the aim set by Bultmann but pre-supposition of method also raises serious questions. Here as explained by Bultmann the reading of the text would be guided by certain questions which in turn depend on the interpreter, if he is interested in psychological phenomena he will look in the text accordingly and if he is interested in poetry or anything else, so his questioning and interpretation will be according to that. Here too the interest of the interpreter will dominate his way of questioning the text which will in turn lead to certain fixed results and will falsify the claim of objectivity of Bultmann. Perhaps the pre-supposition of result or of method they both fall in the same category, by determining from the very beginning the direction or approach of study which undoubtedly lead to pre-conditioned interpretation. There is no doubt that the pre-suppositions of the interpreter do play a role in understanding and interpretation of the text but for the objective interpretation a balance is needed between the text and the interpreter, which in modern hermeneutics has not been given its due place. In interpretation, as stated above, text, interpreter and meaning are three important components. Most important principle of Bultmann's thought in interpretation is to have correct pre-suppositions.

⁶³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?* In *Existence and Faith*, p. 344.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*; Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 48.

Now pre-suppositions of both categories are related with interpreter only and not with text. Thus his concern is the interpreter and the way he approaches text, whereas for text he calls Bible a historical document which must be treated in the same way.

Besides, pre-suppositions which according to Bultmann determine the meaning of the text come from the age of the interpreter. In that case a modern interpreter would be guided by the pre-suppositions of the modern age which consequently would result in arriving at meaning according to modern times. Thus the aim of all this effort is meaning of the text for the modern man. As a result of that text would be pushed back and would hamper the objectivity in interpretation.

INTERPRETATION AND HISTORY

Demythologizing Christian faith, as proposed by Butlamnn, has direct relevance with history. At the outset it must be noted that Christianity unlike other religions is founded on certain historical events particularly those related to Jesus Christ as a result of it truth of Christianity depends on correct understanding of history. Any interpretation which marginalizes historical value of Jesus is bound to impinge on its integrity. Apart from it another problem involved in historical study is the approach with which history is dealt. History can be studied in a number of ways, it can be studied as scientifically or religiously i.e. interpreting it in terms of salvation or philosophically.⁶⁵ Bultmann followed the philosophy and interpreted Christianity in existential terms due to that his program of demythologizing Christian faith has been

⁶⁵ Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) was among those who applied scientific method to Christianity, he proposed three principles for the scientific study; criticism, analogy and correlation. The first one means that the historical documents must be examined carefully, the second is that the past can only be reconstructed on the analogy of the present and the third one is that all historical events are products of its own culture and are influenced and conditioned by them, nothing stands in isolation. Oscar Cullmann in his *Christ and Time* and Helmut Thielicke are among those who proposed the religious approach to study of history. Here certain religious event is taken as the 'midpoint' to develop the concept of history, for both scholars mentioned above, that the Christ event is the midpoint for the world history and all events before and after are understood accordingly, and can also be termed as history of salvation or Biblical history. See for details Rudolf Bultmann, *History of Salvation and History* in *Existence and Faith*; John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing* pp. 65-80.

criticized. It has been asserted that his interpretation on the one hand is a blow on the historical foundations of Christianity and on the other hand philosophical or existential interpretation gave new shape to Christian faith, in order to evaluate these claims it would be appropriate to have a look in his concept of history and its relation to interpretation.

For Bultmann proper understanding of history is indispensable for correct interpretation, Christianity being a historical religion and Bible a historical document therefore their understanding and interpretation requires historical investigation. As in the concept of hermeneutics Bultmann brought an innovative idea of demythologizing so is the case in 'history' that few unfamiliar features are detectable in his thought to the extent that at times it becomes inconsistent. Whether there is a real paradox in his thought or it is a result of 'his own unclear formulations' as pointed by Schubert Ogden.⁶⁶ To grasp that let us look in his understanding of history and methodology for its study and then to return to the question of inconsistency.

To begin with his concept of 'history' is not simple and is pretty ambiguous but for Bultmann though it is simple but its complexity lies in the fact that simple things if they are not approached directly, they are burdened with our own understandings or pre-suppositions thus creating a problem.⁶⁷ Further, it must be noted that for him it is not only the natural occurrences or the events of the past to which the term 'history' is commonly referred to, apart from this general understanding Bultmann added 'faith history' of Christianity and within faith history he distinguished and separated the faith and the historical components and used distinct methodologies for both. And in it the faith element he interpreted existentially. These innovations made him a controversial figure in the modern theology. Moreover, generally for Bultmann the study of history is different and there are certain problems involved in its study, for

⁶⁶ See Schubert M. Ogden, *Christ Without Myth*, p. 66.

⁶⁷ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* tr. Louise Smith & Erminie Lantero (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1958), p. 15.

him it is impossible to attain pure objectivity in historical study because nature of history is different from the study of other objects of nature. In study of nature and its objects the observer stands at a distance from them and can observe them whereas in history the historian is a part of it and is involved in its events therefore historical observation cannot be impersonal and whatever the historian says is 'some thing about himself'.⁶⁸ As stated by Bultmann, 'the demand that the interpreter has to silence his or her subjectivity and quench any individuality in order to achieve objective knowledge could not be more absurd. It makes sense and is justified only insofar as it means that the interpreter must silence his or her personal wishes with respect to the results of interpretation'.⁶⁹

Here for Bultmann there are two factors which hinder objectivity in historical study, one is involvement of the historian as part of it and second pre-suppositions whether idealistic or psychological or other influences and so complete objectivity is impossible, though the pre-supposition, as already stated above, are related to method and not to results.⁷⁰ From the above discussion it is clear that Bultmann is very critical towards attaining objectivity in historical study and at the same time it is impossible for him to gain objective historical knowledge, moreover denying the objective historical knowledge leads to denial of truth of historical events like Christ occurrence or eschatology. His criticism of major historical events related to Christ reflects that,⁷¹ as Schubert M Ogden puts it, 'Bultmann's interpretation is unable to express the claim that Christian faith is possible only as faith in Jesus Christ'.⁷²

With his rejection of possibility of objective historical knowledge when we come to his methodology in the study of history here a paradox or inconsistency is clear in his thought. In study of history he relied on the historical approach in his study of history

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Problem of Hermeneutics in New Testament and Mythology*, p. 85.

⁷⁰ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, pp. 47-49.

⁷¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology in Kerygma and Myth*.

⁷² Schubert M. Ogden, *Christ Without Myth*, p. 67.

on the one hand and showed extreme apprehensions towards it on the other, this paradox is much more evident in Biblical studies. Bible is an historical document and according to Bultmann and it must be treated like any other historical document,⁷³ and 'its interpretation requires the labors of historical investigation'.⁷⁴ Leaving aside the inconsistency in his thought for a while it would be better to look briefly in his understanding of historical method particularly in reference to Bible and then to return to the paradox.

Some of the pre-suppositions in Bultmann's historical method are that he followed the historical critical method and the history-of-religion school, where history is studied as science in order to achieve objectivity. And as stated above for him the merit of scientific method is that it is objective in its research and its statements can be verified rationally therefore its results are more authentic. So in scientific study of history, the historian stands at a distance from the historical phenomenon and has no influence on the results, but at the same time he must have certain presupposition of the subject matter in order to comprehend it fully.⁷⁵

Moreover, taking the nineteenth century assumptions of mechanical functioning of the universe according to the law of cause and effect, history for him, 'is a unity in the sense of a closed continuum of effects in which individual events are connected by the succession of cause and effect'.⁷⁶ Important thing in this closed continuum is that all events succeed one after the other so there is no possibility of supernatural interference, in other words miracles are impossible. This pre-understanding for Bultmann is the scientific study of history, in science the truth of miracles cannot be demonstrated it can only show that people believed in it in the past.⁷⁷ With these

⁷³ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?* In *Existence and Faith*, p. 345.

⁷⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, tr. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1955), vol. 2, p. 251.

⁷⁵ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology as Science in New Testament and Mythology*, pp. 46-48.

⁷⁶ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?* In *Existence and Faith*, p.345.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

scientific presuppositions he approached history and 'hermeneutics' for him 'is the science of understanding history in general'.⁷⁸

Coming to the Biblical studies and its interpretation Bultmann followed history of religion school, as already discussed in the last chapter, where mainly historicity and the issue of literary patterns are focused on. Bultmann too concentrated on these issues, for him Bible is an historical document and to interpret any historical document certain rules must be followed. From these rules are reading the text grammatically and linguistically, while taking into consideration the style of the author and of the text.⁷⁹ The difference in meaning and style of the text means that various texts are presenting different historical settings to which the interpreter must pay attention.⁸⁰ The difference in style was the key idea in differentiating between the sayings of Jesus in synoptics and in Johannine writings. Apart from these general criteria for Biblical studies Bultmann is famous for form-criticism where he further developed the method of historical criticism, and the results of which are expounded in his well known work *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*.

In form-criticism or as it is known as *formgeschichte*⁸¹ in German Bultmann developed the thought of Wilhelm Wrede and Julius Wellhausen, where Mark was given priority over Matthew and Luke, with another oral source designated as 'urtext' or the logia or Q. It was with study of logia that Bultmann wanted to reconstruct the history of primitive community and through it to reconstruct the picture of Jesus and his teachings. It was supposed that within logia there were layers of traditions present and with the use of form-criticism in which literary presentation, styles with conditions of transmission are studied and that any change or expansion in the tradition can be

⁷⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Problem of Hermeneutics in New Testament and Mythology*, p. 70.

⁷⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?* In *Existence and Faith*, p. 344.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ In Lightfoot's opinion it is commonly translated as Form Criticism or Form History but there is no satisfactory equivalent of it is present in English language; see Robert Henry Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels* (New York & London: Harpers and Brothers 1934), p. 29.

detected.⁸² So with this critical method the aim of the critic is to arrive at the 'true' text which was hidden beneath the layers of tradition, it can be said that it is a reconstruction of the past by unraveling layer after layer with scientific method. In the process of reconstruction of the past the critic reads the text 'backwardly' and 'analytically', by separating layers of traditions to reach the original form of the unit.⁸³ But on what bases the separation of traditions or layers, which form a unit, is identified. Here form criticism in fact lacks a precise method; it is on the skills of the critic which help him to identify the units.⁸⁴ Thus it is the literary perception of the critic with the knowledge of the circumstances of the Biblical times and the ability to identify various layers helps in reconstruction.

Reconstruction of the past in form criticism is established on the hypothesis of analogy between the past and the present as noted by Ernst Troeltsch.⁸⁵ Following these lines of analogy between past and the present Bultmann differentiated between the layers of logia and tried to reconstruct the primitive community and the thought patterns which were present in that community. Moreover, one of the outcomes of the form criticism, as concluded by Bultmann too is that it reduces the historical worth of the events. Proofing the historical events like miracles to be the product of a community cuts their relation with Christ and their historical worth. Bultmann too was directed in the same direction, for him miracles and the Biblical narratives originated either in Palestinian Judaism or Hellenistic Church therefore they were the product of the community with their own motives and such a conclusion automatically attacks on the 'supernatural' character of it.⁸⁶

⁸² See Rudolf Bultmann, *The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem in Existence and Faith*, pp. 42-45.

⁸³ See Robert Henry Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels*, p. 31.

⁸⁴ See John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox Press 2007), p. 64.

⁸⁵ See Ernst Troeltsch, *Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology in The Historical Jesus Quest*, ed. Gregory W. Dawes (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press 1999), pp. 32-33.

⁸⁶ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, tr. John Marsh (New York & Evanston: Harper & Row 1968), second edition; Rudolf Bultmann, *The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem in existence and Faith*.

From the above discussion it can be said that form criticism of Bultmann is fully grounded within the paradigm of historical critical method and its results too are formulated in the same spirit. Whereas by digging the matter deeper it becomes clear that for Bultmann historical method is transitional, he constructed on it interpretation or used one to establish the other. Coming to form criticism to see how it worked as preliminary step towards interpretation, it must be noted that the task in form criticism is the reconstruction of the text, by removing layers which were imposed by redactors. By crossing these layers the aim is to go behind them to the real message, layers are the clothing or the mythical elements are to be put aside, so reconstruction of the text is a process of interpretation. Apart from it in form criticism the historicity of events is questioned, this aspect of form criticism has direct relevance with Bultmann's criticism of Christ events or the miracles of the New Testament. These narratives were impositions of the early community using mythical terminology therefore their historicity has no value, it leads to denial of historical worth of events. Form criticism or historical method generally by its very nature can only lead to denial of historical events; it leads to a closed end. There is no way to prove the historicity of the events as there are no authentic records present. It is this nature of historical method that Bultmann was extremely skeptical to the extent of denying the possibility of any objective historical knowledge.

At the same time for Bultmann history is important as Bible is a historical document and its interpretation 'requires the labor of historical investigation',⁸⁷ and historical investigation needs historical method and Bultmann is appreciative of history of religions school for carrying on historical method,⁸⁸ therefore 'there can be no question of discarding historical criticism'.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 251.

⁸⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and Paul in Existence and Faith*, p. 218.

⁸⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 31.

Being extremely critical of historical method on the one side and taking the study of history and its results on the other is obvious inconsistency in his thought. Roots of this paradox in his thought goes to the difference of meaning for 'history' in his thought. For him there are two modes or aspects of historical understanding, one is the historical act or event and the other is the historical fact. In other words it is the difference between *historie* and *geschichte* in his thought, where by former Bultmann means not the eschatological future but the historical process itself⁹⁰ and by latter 'history as the field of human actions cannot, however, be cut off from nature and natural events'.⁹¹ Example of *historie* is Jesus Christ, despite the fact that there is no historical objective record to proof him but for Bultmann the fact remains that he was a definite human being who appeared in history.⁹² As for the example of *geschichte* Bultmann explains it with reference to the cross, 'as the salvation occurrence, then, the cross of Christ is not a mythical event but a historical (*geschichte*) occurrence that has its origin in the historical (*historie*) event of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth'.⁹³ It follows that chronological accounts of Jesus are important from the aspect of *historie* but not from the aspect of *geschichte*. Bultmann in his historical understanding deviates from the traditional historical approach followed by history of religions school where he focused on the subjectivity of the historian as compared to objectivity in study by them.⁹⁴ Moreover, for him *historie* and *geschichte* both aspects of history are important and are interconnected to each other, as *geschichte* perspective cannot be gained except through historical data or *historie* and alone *historie* aspect is fruitless as it limits itself to the idol of objectivity. In inter relatedness between *historie* and *geschichte* or rather between subjectivity and objectivity Bultmann indeed introduces a different and

⁹⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity*, Gifford Lecture Series online, <http://www.giffordlectures.org/Browse.asp?PubID=TPESCH&Cover=TRUE> (accessed on 25/5/10).

⁹¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 139; Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, p.xi.

⁹² See Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology in New Testament and Mythology*, p. 32.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁹⁴ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Problem of Hermeneutics in New Testament and Mythology*, p. 84; Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, p. 4.

innovative understanding from the traditional understanding of subject object relationship which maintains a separation between the two. For Bultmann, 'it needs to become clear that the genuine relation of historians to history cannot be understood according to the traditional scheme of the relation of subject to object'.⁹⁵ Instead of the traditional understanding Bultmann emphasizes on the relation between subjective interpretation and the objective data, as stated by him, 'it is precisely the 'most subjective' interpretation of history that is the 'most objective'. Those alone who are moved by the question of their own historical existence are able to attend to history's claim.⁹⁶ This assertion of Bultmann if understood in traditional terms of subject-object would lead to contradiction thus to avoid it, the better way is to evaluate his thought in his own suppositions. For him, 'the point, then, is not to eliminate the pre understanding but to risk it, to raise it to the level of consciousness, and to test it critically in understanding the text. In short, in questioning the text one must allow oneself to be questioned by the text and to give heed to its claim'.⁹⁷ Thus in Bultmann's opinion for objective historical research historical data is necessary but it is through subjectivity of the historian that the text is questioned and it is through these questions that the geschichte of the history is grasped.⁹⁸

From above it can be said that the critical attitude towards history and use of history at the same time in Bultmann's opinion leads to inconsistency which can only be resolved when looked in his own understanding and not in the generally held relation of subject and object. For him the subject and the object are mutually related and the reality is one which is attained through both.⁹⁹ Apart from it another reason for seemingly inconsistency in his thought goes to some extent to Bultmann himself, as pointed by Macquarrie, 'the cause of the confusion must be attributed in part at least to a certain

⁹⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, Science and Existence in *New Testament and Mythology*, p. 137.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 138-139; Rudolf Bultmann, Is Exegesis Without presuppositions Possible? In *Existence and Faith*, p.348.

⁹⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, The Problem of Hermeneutics in *New Testament and Mythology*, p. 84.

⁹⁸ Ibid., Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.119.

⁹⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, On the Problem of *Demythologizing* in *New Testament and Mythology*, p. 158.

ambiguity and lack of lucidity in Bultmann himself. He speaks with two voices, and he has not adequately shown how their seemingly diverse utterances are to be reconciled'.¹⁰⁰ Here as discussed above the word 'history' and the philosophy behind it, is used in two very different meanings which resulted in a paradox. But it seems that Bultmann followed this methodology intentionally, that is to give different meanings to certain terms. As seen above the term demythologizing has been given a different understanding so is the case here with 'history', he enriched the concept of history with his own philosophy and thereby giving it a new dimension. Undoubtedly it is the originality of his thought that he gave birth to new concepts but to some extent his unclear expressions caused confusions to understand him.

The new dimension to the concept of history, as said before, is the harmony between subject-object relations, this dimension in Bultmann's thought is the focal point on which he constructed the edifice of demythologizing. For this reason the apparent inconsistency in the study of history is reflected in his hermeneutics as well particularly in the interpretation of Bible.

Biblical history is mythological in character where world is conceived as three storied structure of heaven, earth and hell, with intervention of supernatural powers in human life, with the picture of Jesus as pre-existence divine being, who appeared as a man on earth and died on the cross as redeemer and resurrected on the third day.¹⁰¹ For Bultmann this mythological picture of the Bible presents a different worldview and is alien for the modern man and to make it understandable for modern times it must be translated and 'translation', for him 'is the task of historical science'.¹⁰² In making translation or interpretation facts of historical science are important but at the same time about the discoveries of the historical science he is indifferent or rather skeptical,

¹⁰⁰ John Macquarrie, *The Scope for Demythologizing*, p. 31.

¹⁰¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology in Kerygma and Myth*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰² Rudolf Bultmann, , *Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?*, in *Existence and Faith*, p. 346.

he is not even bothered if the discoveries are 'burned' to the ground.¹⁰³ No doubt there is ambiguity in his expressions but the inconsistency is not limited to vague expressions only rather it goes back to his dual understanding for history and Biblical narratives. History for him, as said above, has dual aspect, it is the event of the past, and secondly the fact and occurrence of present or the future, and Bultmann speaks of Biblical narratives in both ways. For example Jesus, his cross or resurrection, for Bultmann refers to an historical event occurred in early Christian era and secondly it would refer also to the message for the present age.¹⁰⁴ For the first understanding which is simple historical aspect historical critical method is applicable whereas for the second that is related to the reader historical research is not relevant. But still the problem in his thought persists because from the first understanding it seems that Bultmann separates the two as if there is no relation between historical and existential. On the other hand he connects the two in the sense that God revealed Himself through Christ alone which is an act of God, and the faith in God demands that 'everything will come from him and nothing from ourselves',¹⁰⁵ or for the cross he says, 'in its redemptive aspect the cross of Christ is no mere mythical event, but a historic (geschichtlich) fact originating in the historical (historisch) event which is the crucifixion of Jesus'.¹⁰⁶ This raises objection on Bultmann's stance as he negates the relation at times and affirms it at others. Pointing out inconsistency in Bultmann's thought Paul Althaus quoted him saying, 'I do not deny the close relationship of the Easter kerygma to the earthly and crucified Jesus',¹⁰⁷ but Paul Althaus argues that no such relationship is developed by him, as he comments on Bultmann's statement, 'but this remains for him an absolutely general and abstract statement, which receives no concrete expression whatsoever in kerygma theology. There is no concrete continuity in Bultmann's theology between

¹⁰³ Bultman, *Faith and Understanding*, p. 132.

¹⁰⁴ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, pp. 34-42.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.37.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Althaus, *Fact and Faith in the Kerygma of Today*, tr. David Cairns (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press 1959), p. 45.

the historical Jesus who was the subject of his historical work, and the apostolic preaching'.¹⁰⁸ Apart from Paul Althaus there are others too who has raised the same objection¹⁰⁹ and Macquarrie summarizes their views but in his own opinion as stated before it is the unclear formulations of Bultmann himself.¹¹⁰

When looked in the problem it seems most probable that no doubt there is an element of unclear formulations present in Bultmann's thought but unclear formulations are directly linked with his dual understanding of history, he uses both the understandings in a way that to draw a hard between them is difficult and so it results in confusion. Bultmann differentiated between history as events of the past and as the message for the present. In Interpretation of Biblical narratives he uses both understandings, in geschichtlich or the existential dimension he maintains a close relation between history as event and as faith, taking the two aspects together, whereas in historisch dimension faith aspect is irrelevant. What Bultmann means here is that historical research is not important for establishing faith but the faith narrative in history itself have the faith and history aspect together therefore they cannot be separated. For example the results of historical critical method of Jesus Christ are not important for the geschichtlich but from the perspective of geschichtlich Jesus is on the one hand a historical reality and on the other an aspect of faith, thus the two are combined and faith requires that the concrete historical person must be present in history. While taking the historisch side here again there is the event of the past which as a fact has relevance for faith and the two have close relation whereas the results of the historical critical method has no relevance for faith.

Commenting on Bultmann's criticism on the historical critical method Stuhlmacher considered existentialism a suitable option in face of reductionist and rationalistic

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ See for example John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*, pp. 46-48.

¹¹⁰ See John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing*, pp. 29-32, among the critics whose opinions are reproduced by Macquarrie are Helmut Thielicke, Karl Adam, Fritz Buri, Karl Jaspers, Emil Brunner and H. P. Owen.

approach of historical criticism where removal of historical value does not influence faith because faith does not depend on the verification of historical events, as quoted by John Barton, 'the great thing about Bultmann's system of existential interpretation is that in this system he retains these tried and tested rules of historical criticism, yet at the same time is able in this way to take up the question of the unconditional claim of the word of God on humanity'.¹¹¹ Therefore the interpretation for Bultmann is related with history as historical event of the past but at the same time his interpretation is not dependent on the historical critical method. With this we come to another dimension in Bultmann's interpretation and that is the aspect of language.

INTERPRETATION AND LANGUAGE

In interpretation the first thing an interpreter is concerned with is the language of the text particularly in case of ancient texts. More the distance is between the interpreter and the text more complex the phenomenon of interpretation becomes. With the gap of centuries it is not only the difference in linguistic styles which needs concentration but even the conceptual world of that age and the social, cultural influences are to be taken into consideration for the proper grasping and interpretation of the text. Language is not an arbitrary outcome of the society rather all the above factors work in its formation and development.

Coming to Bultmann's opinion, for him as Bible is an ancient document therefore language understanding is indispensable for its interpretation. In the issue of language Bultmann concentrates on the mythical aspect of it and its other forms like metaphor, simile or figurative expressions do not have much space in his discussion. The role of language in his hermeneutics briefly is that the Bible for him talks in mythical language like the three storied world or the eschatology are all myths which conveys the worldview of pre-scientific age. But the character of this language is that it, 'contain a

¹¹¹ See John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*, pp. 46-47.

still deeper meaning which is concealed under the cover of mythology'.¹¹² It conveys some type of knowledge, as Bultmann expresses, 'myths express the knowledge that man is not the master of the world and his life'.¹¹³ That means literal sense of the mythical language is not the real intention of the author rather it points to something else. Moreover it expresses, 'inadequately and insufficiently'¹¹⁴ therefore it must be interpreted objectively and in terms of human existence.

To have a clear picture of mythical language and existential philosophy as proposed by Bultmann it would be better to say few words about language formation and its relation with human thought. As elaborated by Luis Alonso Schokel language is an expression of certain idea or reality that is when certain idea is formed or a reality is experienced than it is expressed through the medium of language.¹¹⁵ Thus, through language reality and experience are conformed to each other and the function of language is that it, 'teaches us to understand and to order the world as well as to shape our own experiences'.¹¹⁶ It is through language that we understand the world around us and at the same time it helps in developing and refining our experience of the world, so it the two way process. In this mutual relationship the experience is half formed continuum which is given form through human language or expression using vocabulary, syntax and so forth, this can be termed as second stage of transformation or interpretation where language takes its form through human effort. Further this transformation is developed with social and cultural influences which has an impact on human thought and are reflected in his communication with others. Thus, man's thought influences his language and on the other way round his surroundings influence his thoughts which make the process intertwined.

¹¹² Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p.18.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ See Luis Alonso Schokel *Understanding Biblical Research*, tr. Peter J. McCord (London: Burns & Oates Limited 1968), pp. 94-96.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Taking this model we can find that it corresponds to the underlying assumptions in Bultmann's thought about language and demythologizing. For him language is the expression of the understanding of the world in the sense that what is present in the mind as 'internalization' of the outer world is expressed through 'externalization' of that interiority.¹¹⁷ This expression of the language includes natural world and the records of the past, in a way that it describes, and narrates for others.¹¹⁸ No doubt Bultmann takes this dimension of language where it is externalization of the interiority but concept of language goes beyond that, as his main theme is demythologizing in the light of existential philosophy which he elaborated in several of his works, in summary it can be stated that 'human self' is not an inactive instrument where external and internal forces are working automatically rather it is human self which is the center of understanding. It is self who is conscious of its own being or existence in a sense that it understands the world in relation to its own being or to put it other way it aspires and wills to live as self conscious being,¹¹⁹ particularly in the moment of decision for the present. Thus a relation between past and present or future is made, as Bultmann puts it, 'a man is always what his past has made him. He always brings his past along with him into his present. He can never make a fresh start with a clean sheet. He has no real future in the sense of something entirely new'.¹²⁰ This new consciousness of self elevates man to a higher level, to a self-assertive man. Bultmann compares this self understanding of man with New Testament themes which are narrated in mythical terms,¹²¹ taking the example of fall of man which Bultmann compares with the concept of sin in the New Testament. The New Testament talks about fall of man in mythical language but within this language it gives an existential solution for the self. In the state

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity In Its Contemporary Setting*, tr. R. H. Fuller (New York: World Publishing 1972), sixteenth printing, p. 180.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 182.

¹²¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, pp. 19-43; Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity In Its Contemporary Setting*, pp. 180-208.

of fall man knows that 'he is not what he really ought to be and what he would like to be, that he can be aware of his plight. That awareness of his authentic nature is essential to human life, and without it man would not be man'.¹²² In the New Testament it is 'sin' which conveys this, as Bultmann expresses that man knows 'from the bitter experience that the life he actually lives is not his authentic life, and that he is totally incapable of achieving that life by his efforts. In short, he is a totally fallen being'.¹²³ His authentic life is the one where he is delivered from himself through the act of God 'God steps in and acts on man's behalf' and man becomes free and 'has been made new'.¹²⁴ Through these parallels Bultmann relates past of man with his present. In this process language is not simply an expression of state of mind but through past events decision for the present moment is taken so in this way Bultmann develops the relation between language and the existential understanding.

Coming back to the above model the other two aspects i.e. the explanation and the influence of culture, here too Bultmann relates them with existential philosophy which makes his concept of language and its relation to hermeneutics totally immersed in philosophy.

In the above language model experience of reality is formless or half formed which takes expression through vocabulary, here the external universe is given a human dimension through language. On quite similar lines we find Bultmann talks of Biblical vocabulary but he related the human dimension in existential terms.

For Bultmann primitive man faced frightening experiences about human existence which he expressed in mythological language so it is a kind of 'understanding'.¹²⁵ Man experienced that he is limited in his power and is under the control of forces which are unseen and beyond his imagination, he has no control over them, he expressed this

¹²² Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 29.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

¹²⁵ See Rudolf Bultmann, *On the Problem of Demythologizing in New Testament and Mythology*, p. 98.

reality in mythical terms which is inadequate expressions.¹²⁶ Here two aspects may be noted in Bultmann's thought, first is about the mythical language that these unseen powers were gods who belong to invisible and incomprehensible world but he related them to this world as if they were the man and woman with superhuman powers and can intervene in the functioning of this world. In this way mythological language gave 'worldly objectivity to which is unworldly'.¹²⁷ And second is the 'inadequacy' of these expressions, it means that their language is not proper and are conveying meaning 'contrary to its real intention'.¹²⁸ It is pointing to some reality, and that is, as said above, 'myth is giving expression to a certain understanding of human existence', it talks in symbols or signs. To bring out the real intention of myth Bultman demythologized or translated it by uncovering 'deeper meaning which is concealed under the cover of mythology'.¹²⁹ In this case the literal meaning is to be put aside as it is pointing to some other meaning. By taking myth as pointing to something else the under lying assumption in Bultmann's thought is the relation present between language and reality. For him words are signs pointing to some reality. The relation between sign and its reality is like similarity of experience of two or more people under similar circumstances for the same thing. On the basis of this similarity in experience a word or sign, in terms of language, would be a reference shared by people. This choice of a sign or word might be random but communication and language development rest on agreed words or signs and their meanings.¹³⁰ To clarify it Bultmann took the example of foreign language, and showed that its translation in an understandable language is possible only when there is some familiarity present in translator's context otherwise a new word or sign must be designated with a specific meaning to describe a thing.¹³¹ It is obvious that the language developed in this manner must be connected with the

¹²⁶ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 19.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹²⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, On the Problem of Demythologizing in *New Testament and Mythology*, p. 93.

¹²⁹ Rudolf Bultman, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 18.

¹³⁰ See Rudolf Bultmann, The Problem of Hermeneutics in *New Testament and Mythology*, pp. 74-75.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

context and experience of people involved in it. Therefore understanding of the text would demand to take into consideration the context and the experience of the events and the people of that age. So is the case of Bible which is an historical document its understanding would entail not only meaning of words or signs but the events and context in which they emerged, it would be like reading backward in the context. Moreover, for Bultmann interpretation of the Bible does not stop here, because the text of the Bible by its very nature is different from the common historical text. There are two facets of Biblical text, on the one side it is structured in the experience and the events of the past therefore must be read accordingly, on the other hand it interpreted and explained the events by giving them supernatural causes in mythical language. The mythical interpretation eventually was incorporated in such a way that experience and event both were colored with the mythical expressions, as Bultmann says, 'the intention of which is to explain phenomena and incidents which are strange, curious, surprising, or frightening, by attributing them to supernatural causes, to gods or to demons'.¹³² Further, the mythical explanation took the form of preaching as the events and the experience was narrated in form of message for people about their existence, taking the example of eschatology Bultmann illustrates the covering of mythological language on event and message for human life. Eschatology in theological terminology is the doctrine of the last things, end of the world but the 'last' is further linked with transcendence of God, who is always the coming God and is veiled by the unknown future, so eschatological preaching presents time in the light of the future that this world is temporal in face of eternity.¹³³ The mythical covering here for Bultmann is in fact a 'general human understanding of insecurity of the present in the face of future has found expression in eschatological thought',¹³⁴ and was shared by Greeks as well. Moreover, it is the 'knowledge of the finiteness of the world, and the end which is

¹³² Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, pp. 18-19.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

imminent to us all because we are the beings of this finite world'.¹³⁵ As majority of the people are blind towards this reality so the preaching of Jesus was focused on it and highlighted this fact, 'Jesus proclaims the will of God and the responsibility of man, pointing towards the eschatological events, but it is not because he is an eschatologist that he proclaims the will of God. On the contrary, he is an eschatologist because he proclaims the will of God'.¹³⁶ The preaching or the will of God as proclaimed by Jesus is the demand of right and righteousness, love of neighbor and emptiness of the world is due to sin of man who has turned it so. Thus the end of the world in eschatological preaching is to bring to 'consciousness the emptiness of the human situation' and call man towards 'humility and resignation' and to 'responsibility toward God and to repentance'.¹³⁷ So for Bultmann Biblical language is mythical and it covers the historical content and the preaching of Jesus as well. The real message is beneath the covering of myth to be recovered by putting aside mythical language, and this message directly touches the human existence and thus language is related to existential interpretation. Coming to the influence of social and cultural factors we find that according to Bultmann they were the major factors in the formation and accumulation of myth in Bible. It was not a once for all but was a slow ongoing process where with the passage of time layers and layers of mythology were added to the original text. The cultural influence was dealt in detail by Bultmann in the study of synoptics,¹³⁸ in his opinion the original message was in form of small oral units which were clothed under layers of additions by redactors thereby expanding the size of original message. This addition was either to explain the historical event or the preaching but in both cases the language is mythical and caused expansion in the text. Interpretation of such text requires going behind the layers, or uncovering the mythical elements. For that

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

¹³⁷ Ibid. For other examples see Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, pp. 17-43.

¹³⁸ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, and *New Approach to the Synoptic Problem in Existence and Faith*.

identification of layers would be the first step and in that language and literary styles would help. Moreover, as the historical documents present an alien worldview therefore they must be translated in the present understanding. And for that knowledge of the cultural aspects like economic, political and social and so forth, is necessary. So in Bultmann's opinion historical interpretation requires understanding of the subject matter of history and for that a relation between the interpreter and the subject matter as expressed in the text must be developed.¹³⁹ The pre-understanding about the subject matter is attained by putting right questions thus a relationship between the text and the interpreter is established. For Bultmann it is the life relation to the subject matter with which the text is concerned or questioned.¹⁴⁰ For example understanding of the text related to music or mathematics is possible only when the interpreter has relation or pre-understanding with the subject matter of music or mathematics.¹⁴¹ Commenting on the concept of life relation S M Ogden quoted from Bultmann that, 'the presupposition of every understanding interpretation is a previous life-relation to the subject matter (Sache) that is directly or indirectly expressed in the text and constitutes the object (Woraufhin) of the inquiry. Without such a relation in which text and interpreter are bound together, inquiry and understanding are impossible',¹⁴² In other words the interpreter shares at least in principle the experiences or the subject which the document represents, in other words he would be able to experience the life settings of the document or the worldview of its authors. With this scientific method when the Biblical documents are approached it is evident that the problem lies in the life setting or as termed by Bultmann in the worldview of its authors. It was a life setting where mythical thinking prevailed and the authors of these documents as a natural outcome of it borrowed the ideas from the existing patterns of their times. As a result of it the message of Jesus was immersed in mythical coverings.

¹³⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?*, in *Existence and Faith*, p. 347.

¹⁴⁰ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Problem of Hermeneutics in New Testament and Mythology*, p. 74.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁴² Schubert M. Ogden, *Christ Without Myth*, p. 51.

Concluding the above discussion it may be noted that myth was the prime concern of Bultmann in interpretation. For him the problem is in the language of these documents as they were written by authors who used mythical language which is alien for the modern man so it turned to be a stumbling block for the modern man. In consequence to it Bultmann proposed elimination of mythical language from these documents. The program of Bultmann apparently seems to be quite suitable for the modern requirements but at the same time there are severe problems in it. Whole structure of demythologizing is based on the language problem in a sense that what it means for the modern man, or to make it meaningful it must be translated. It can be said that all intellectual activity of Bultmann revolves around technical hermeneutical questions about understanding, language, meaning, translation or interpretation and preaching. To answer these queries has he proposed any theory of language for interpretation? In the light of what has been stated above answer to this question would be in negative. Generally, language is the study of styles, idioms, metaphors and so forth all these elements are absent in his interpretation, his main concern is myth in language now myth is a concept and not a part of language study. This is a serious flaw in demythologizing. Bultmann's major task in theology is hermeneutical or understanding and interpreting the text and language is the basic component to understand the text but any such study is absent in his project. As already said myth is a concept and Bultmann is interpreting it with a new concept of existentialism this is not to give a meaning to something but is replacement of one concept with another. In explaining or giving meaning to anything we explain it with another word with a condition that there is some similarity present between them. Here instead of similarity in mythical thinking and scientific thinking they are two opposites for him so to accept one is to reject the other. Further, existential or scientific interpretation is opted because it is most appropriate for the modern man so here the parameter of validity in interpretation is the modern man or reader, in other words the text has to

say what the reader wants. With this we now move to another core notion in his thought and that is duality present in his certain concepts.

OUTER AND INNER

One of the underlying assumptions in demythologizing is the duality of content present in Bible which for the sake of convenience can be termed as inner and outer contents. Though these terms are not implied by Bultmann but the idea can be discerned throughout his discussion. As Biblical narratives, its worldview, language or history all these concepts for Bultmann have dual aspect. In this duality he differentiates between the outer and their inner contents. His concern mostly is not the outer sense but the inner aspect which he interprets in existential terms. In what follows example of Biblical narratives and history is elaborated to make the point clear. The Biblical message is presented in mythical terms as it talks about the world as three story structure, about miracles, about eschatological preaching of Jesus and so forth, for the modern man the mythical language is 'over and done with'.¹⁴³ To believe on myths means that he must sacrifice his knowledge which is impossible, and thus the Biblical message or it's preaching are the stumbling-blocks today which demands to look again in the matter. There are various teachings of Jesus in Bible for example, eschatological, ethical or the commandments of God, all of them are covered under mythical language. To recover the real message which teaching is to be given preference cannot be easily detected. Commenting on this state of affairs Bultmann says, 'the preaching of Jesus is not confined to eschatological sayings. He proclaimed also the will of God, which is God's demand, the demand for the good. Jesus demands truthfulness and purity, readiness to sacrifice and to love'.¹⁴⁴ Jesus preached ethical teachings as well, but taking only that would mean to confine his teachings in 'obeying certain external commandments', which due to selfish will of modern man are the stumbling-blocks for

¹⁴³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

him.¹⁴⁵ In this confusing situation Bultmann raises the question that whether his ethical teaching is to be retained or his eschatological preaching or there is a third possibility. It is the third possibility which Bultmann opts, and that is to look behind ethical and eschatological teachings of Jesus and to dig out the real content of his message, as he says, 'we must ask whether the eschatological preaching and the mythological sayings as a whole contain a still deeper meaning which is concealed under the cover of mythology. If that is so, let us abandon the mythological conceptions precisely because we want to retain their deeper meaning'.¹⁴⁶ To recover the deeper meaning from behind the mythological conceptions Bultmann calls it demythologizing. Leaving aside interpretation for a while, it can be seen from above that there are two aspects present in Biblical message, the outer covering which he calls 'mythical' and the inner or deeper content which is the real message covered beneath the mythical language. Bultmann is mainly concerned with the inner or deeper meaning which must be translated or demythologized to bring to light the real message of Jesus, and that is the task of theology to strip the message or kerygma from its mythical framework.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, Bible for Bultmann is an historical document therefore its interpretation requires appropriate historical method. History for him has two sides, *historisch* and *geschichtlich* and he deals with each of them with a different method. Biblical narratives like the Christ event, Cross, resurrection and so forth have dual aspect, and they are *historisch* or the historical events and are at the same time *geschichtlich* historical facts related to the existence today.¹⁴⁸ This duality of historical events is the idea of inner and outer content in the New Testament. The *historisch* aspect of the historical event though important is the outer covering whereas *geschichtlich* is the real message which gives significance to the historical event. The outer covering as said

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ See Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology in Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 17-43, here Bultmann in detail differentiates between the dual aspects of history in all Christian dogmas.

above is the mythical covering therefore the historical events of the Bible are conveyed in mythical language, on the other hand within these historical events is the real message which needs to be extracted. As he says about the Cross, 'in the last resort, mythological language is only a medium for conveying the significance of the historical (historisch) event. The historical (historisch) event of the cross has, in the significance peculiar to it, created a new historic (geschichtlich) situation'.¹⁴⁹ Due to the difference in content they convey different meaning for the narrative, in the former it is the past event presented in mythical terms whereas in the later it is related to existence and so carries a deeper or real meaning in it. Thus the historical interpretation has two dimensions; it is to tell about the past event 'to reconstruct the past', or to learn from 'historical documents what you need for your present practical life'.¹⁵⁰ Bible has both these aspects, and while interpreting it which one will given preference or both will be taken together, in repose to it Bultmann considers both as equally important but it is undoubtedly the second one which must take lead, as he puts it, 'I think our interest is really to hear what the Bible has to say for our actual present, to hear what is the truth about our life and about our soul'.¹⁵¹

For reconstructing the past picture and uncovering the mythical elements historical method with the study of language is required. As stated above, these mythical coverings were accumulated with the passage of time in form of layers and expanded the original teachings of Jesus. To reach the original message one has to eliminate the imposed layers through backward reading of the text.¹⁵² But this reconstruction or the historical critical method has its limitations; it can lead backward to the inner meaning but stops after that, the inner meaning needs interpretation, a task which according to Bultmann historical method is unable to perform.¹⁵³ To reach the inner content or to

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁵⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 51.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.52.

¹⁵² See above 'Interpretation and History'.

¹⁵³ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 54.

bring to light the significance of the historical event (geschichtlich) which addresses man personally, and informs him about his real existence, historical method is unable to do that. For this purpose Bultmann proposes a scientific method of existential philosophy. Here in Bultmann's opinion theology must take the help of philosophy and historically interpretation had always relied on some or the other philosophy. Existentialism is the best option for the modern man although he was aware of the objections raised due to his reliance on philosophy.¹⁵⁴ The option of existential philosophy was because it is truer and appropriate in its explanation of the world, and its language is best suited for the modern man, with this we turn now to the proposal of scientific interpretation of Bultmann.

EXISTENTIAL INTERPRETATION

Existential interpretation of the New Testament was the main task of Bultmann's theology. In his philosophical interpretation two aspects are important one is the existence or specifically place of man and second is history.

For Bultmann 'existence' or place of man is linked with theology, as in the words of Fries, 'to speak of God means, for Bultmann, to speak of man',¹⁵⁵ and the word of God can be understood only through man's existence, God's revelation through Christ is an act of God for me.¹⁵⁶ This link between theology and existence according to Bultmann provides basis for interpretation in existential terms as it will be clear from the following.

While dealing with 'existence' the reason for opting existential philosophy is not that it is most satisfactory in solving all human problems but because it deals with human existence in most adequate way and directly addresses man.¹⁵⁷ In defining existence Bultmann is greatly indebted to Heidegger where man is regarded as a 'person' or an

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 54-55.

¹⁵⁵ Heinrich Fries, *Bultmann-Barth and Catholic Theology*, p. 33.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ See Rudolf Bultmann *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 55.

individual being. While summarizing Heidegger's concept Bultmann comments, 'to be a man is something that uniquely belongs to the individual; and the being of man is a 'possibility of being' i.e. the man who is involved in the care for himself chooses his own unique possibility'.¹⁵⁸ Thus man must be taken as individual or as a subject and to consider him as an object would be misleading. In existential terms 'I' in man is the basic characteristic of human existence that 'stands out' from other objects of the world and decides for himself and gives him an authentic existence.¹⁵⁹ For Bultmann existential philosopher offers an understanding of human existence, it tells him 'what it means to exist', as a unique being, 'distinguishing between man's being as 'existence' and the being of all worldly beings which are not 'existing' but only 'extant'.¹⁶⁰ So this philosophy gives man a right understanding of 'what existence means', man as a 'being' different from other beings. Features of uniqueness of man's existence according to Bultmann are that man as a historical being can relate his present or the future with past. 'Each 'now' is the moment of free decision', each individual has to decide for his own, no one can take the responsibility of other, everyone has to die his own death and it is in this loneliness that man realizes his own existence.¹⁶¹ Moreover, it shows man his authentic existence, with responsibility to take decision that is 'you must exist'.¹⁶² Consequently, for Bultmann understanding of man and his existence is best expressed in existential philosophy, here man has his full freedom and responsibility to decide and act. This existential understanding of existence is most adequate for the modern man; it helps him to understand his being and the world around him in accurate way. Furthermore, the term 'existence' has some characteristics in Bultmann's thought; it refers to a particular being that has relationship to itself, distinct from other kinds of beings. For example it is different from animals or inanimate objects as they are not

¹⁵⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Historicity of Man and Faith in Existence and Faith*, p. 119.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121; John Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, (London: Hutchinson & Co. 1972), pp. 51-52.

¹⁶⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 56.

¹⁶¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 2, p. 192; *The Meaning of the Christian Faith in Creation in Existence and Faith*, p. 255.

¹⁶² Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 57.

concerned with their existence in the sense of making free decision as man has. And the existence of man is his individual existence, related to his own being and therefore responsible for himself, so he talks in terms of 'I' and 'mine'.¹⁶³ Moreover, Bultmann differentiates between 'existential' and 'existentialist', the former (in German existentiell) refers to existence as such, or to individual human being as responsible for his own future, and is expressed in individual's self-understanding as 'I' or 'mine', whereas the latter (in German existential) refers to systematic body of philosophical concepts commonly known as existentialism.¹⁶⁴ In making the distinction between the two Bultmann takes the example of love, hate or friendship. In these entire cases one can be well versed theoretically in these concepts but that is different from having experience of them as existential events.¹⁶⁵ The theoretical knowledge is restricted to ideas in the mind whereas it is the experience of existential event that man is faced with choice or decision to act in certain way, so the existential event is directly related to self-understanding of man towards himself and towards others. It may also be pointed out that in Bultmann's thought the difference between existential and existentialist is reflected in faith and theology. Faith for him is a particular experience like that of friendship or love, and in it man faces the question of existential decision. On the other hand theology has the task of explaining faith and for that it needs a theoretical construction to explain it, and for Bultmann it is the existentialist philosophy which has the framework to explain faith. Thus, a theologian qualifies to understand and interpret the word of God in terms of existential philosophy.¹⁶⁶ As here theology and existential interpretation are linked together, so it is in the second aspect of interpretation where historical document is related to existential philosophy in its interpretation.

¹⁶³ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Historicity of Man and Faith in Existence and Faith*, pp. 120-121.

¹⁶⁴ See Roger Johnson, *Rudolf Bultmann Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, p. 22; Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, p. xi.

¹⁶⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 57.

¹⁶⁶ See Roger Johnson, *Rudolf Bultmann Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, p. 23; Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, pp. 57-59.

In interpretation of historical documents Bultmann proposed certain rules and concepts in his essay 'The Problem of Hermeneutics',¹⁶⁷ for example grammar, composition of the text, linguistic styles of author's age and so forth with the idea that history is succession of events with no intervention from outside. Added to it is the concept of 'pre-supposition' that to understand any text 'life-relation' between interpreter and the text is important. With this background let us see the relation between historical interpretation and existential philosophy.

The above mentioned hermeneutical principles helps in explaining the document 'what it is' whereas the Bultmann's concept of 'pre-supposition' or rather 'life-relation' relates the document to the interpreter, and with that provided basis of existential interpretation for historical documents. Historical documents whether they are of religious, philosophical or literary nature, while describing the past narrations they also relate the events to the present by giving the reader self-understanding of the text.¹⁶⁸

The task of the historian, as Bultmann says is, 'to interpret the movements of history as possible ways of understanding human existence, thus demonstrating their relevance today. By bringing the past to life again'.¹⁶⁹ In fact Bultmann's wordings, 'by bringing the past to life again' are significant as they summarize the relation of historical documents with the present life. It means that they must be interpreted in a way that their relevance to the present life is made obvious, or in existential terms 'where existence is grasped and expressed' or in other words it talks about man, must be clearly depicted. Besides, in interpretation the present reader will be related to the text as it talks to him, and gives him a self-understanding of his own being and summons him to have a free decision. In this way the historical documents are not only related to past but have existential relevance for the modern man. Bible being an historical document must be treated like any other historical document but the hermeneutical rules will only tell

¹⁶⁷ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Problem of Hermeneutics in New Testament and Mythology*, pp. 68-90; Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, pp. 45-59.

¹⁶⁸ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Problem of Hermeneutics in New Testament and Mythology*, pp. 76-78.

¹⁶⁹ Rudolf Butmann, *Primitive Christianity In Its Contemporary Setting*, pp. 11-12.

about 'what it is' which is related to the past, whereas it is the existential interpretation which relates it to the present or the modern man.¹⁷⁰ Moreover existential philosophy is scientific therefore its language is in accord with the intellectual and conceptual life of today therefore its interpretation is in non-mythological language, for this reason Bultmann termed it the 'right philosophy' for interpretation.¹⁷¹ So existential philosophy can interpret the message of the New Testament in non-mythological language, and can communicate to man self-understanding in scientific language or in demythologized form. Thus for Bultmann historical interpretation which in its initial stages took the help of hermeneutical rules is brought to its proper completion with translation or interpretation of mythology from the New Testament through existential philosophy.

CONCLUSION

Al-Ta'wīl and demythologizing are two modes of interpreting or giving meaning to an obscure text, both are based on certain principles and suppositions which originate from very diverse backgrounds, one representing Muslim traditional and other modern philosophical. Consequently there is a marked difference present in underlying assumptions and the principles with which they approached the text, as a result of it same text spoke a different language despite some apparent similarities in their results as would be clear in the coming chapter. Coming back to the principles and suppositions as discussed above, again there are certain aspects where the thought of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann meet still the gap remains unbridged. In interpreting the text both considered that there are levels of meanings present in it, and for correct understanding interpreter must cross from the apparent to hidden meanings. With the difference that for al-Ghazālī presence of more than one meaning is due to nature of religious text. Metaphysical realities cannot be conveyed in literal wordings so the text

¹⁷⁰ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Problem of Hermeneutics in New Testament and Mythology*, p. 86.

¹⁷¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 55.

is narrating about other world and is functioning as a connection between the two entirely different worlds. Although for Bultmann too the text is connecting two different worlds but they are horizontal worlds, primitive and modern, and for al-Ghazālī the worlds can be imagined vertical or material and spiritual. For Bultmann primitive man borrowed the language to convey certain truths so the language has more than one meaning, but it is man talking to man unlike al-Ghazālī where God is talking to man. So the status of text is revelatory for one and historical for other. Coming to principles of interpretation of al-majāz and myth where both these terms denote a duality of meaning or borrowing words to convey some other reality. In the former language rules are the initial step in crossing the duality of language from the literal to metaphorical meanings so a relation is present between the outer word and the inner meaning, which is further supported by theological and culminated in Sufistic interpretation. On the other side myth is to be put aside to approach the hidden meaning, thus there is no relation linguistically or theologically or otherwise between the apparent wordings and the inner sense. It seems that philosophical interpretation is being put in the mouth of the author as he was unaware of this modern philosophical way of thinking. It can be said that Bultmann is using unknown glasses for the author and reading the text through it and with that giving a new meaning to the text. In few words it can be said that al-Ghazālī's principles were connected to text and with that his interpretation was linked with the author, thus he provided a methodology for interpreting the 'text'. As for Bultmann his principles whether of primitive and modern worldview or difference in myth and science or mythical language all revolves around the concerns of the modern man for the ancient text. So, it not a methodology of interpreting the text rather it is to provide an acceptable meaning to the modern man. With these differences it remains to see how these diverging principles were applied to the Gospel of John and to what extent they are successful to interpret most ambiguous gospel for Christians.

CHAPTER THREE

APPLICATION OF THEIR PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AND ITS COMPARISON

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of John has a unique place in Christian thought, its richness and profoundness must have been the compelling factors for al-Ghazālī and Bultmann to select it as their main project in interpretation. However, the accuracy and results of interpretation depends on the approach or the mindset with which the task is accomplished. Al-Ghazālī and Bultmann, in their interpretation, converge on many issues but diverge drastically at others due to difference of approach and the mindset. A remarkable similarity between them is that they deviated from the established course of scholarship in Biblical studies in their times. Prior to them Biblical scholarship was directed towards historical and literary criticism, which was the search in origins with evaluation of the historical and literary worth of the text. Certainly they are important to reconstruct an original text but due to their overt rationality they lose the sight of another equally important factor and that is what the text means or stands for? For al-Ghazālī and Bultmann both, this was the center of attention. Instead of historical rationalism the question of 'meaning' of the text became central for them, which they dealt with unprecedented methodologies. Although for both 'meaning' was central but they stand poles apart in their approach towards 'meaning'; for al-Ghazālī 'meaning' was related to author whereas for Bultmann it was associated with reader. Thus, both looked at the text from a very different perspective; consequently, their results varied even though at times there is similarity in tools used by them in interpretation. As said earlier, their approach in interpretation varies to a great extent therefore for the sake of convenience certain common elements are selected for comparison like reason, language, theology and in the end the heart of their interpretation that is Sufism and philosophy would be discussed in what follows.

Before entering in the details of interpretation for al-Ghazālī and Bultmann it would be proper to say a few words about the status of gospel. Traditionally this gospel was ranked high among other gospels. It is well reflected in the saying of St. Augustine

where he symbolized it with an eagle due to its deep vision, 'John the apostle, not undeservedly in respect of his spiritual understanding compared to the eagle, has elevated his preaching higher and far more sublimely than the other three'.¹ Among birds eagle is famous for his power, strength, sharp vision, and being able to look straight into the sun. Here for Augustine, John like an eagle could look directly in the divine horizons unlike other gospel authors. Besides, it was always taken as the most impressive of the books as it narrates interesting aspects of the life of Jesus. Later Luther too, regarded it as the favourite gospel, 'chiefest of the Gospels, unique, tender and true'.² Thus, this gospel had an exceptional place among rest of the gospels and Christians in their history relied most on it whether in the matters of faith or worship. Therefore, any Christian in their history searching about Jesus and his works was directed towards it but the situation changed greatly since the emergence of modern critical method. Due to the results of modern studies, Gospel of John has been relegated to the back and does not enjoy the same position, now it is the last choice to get information about Jesus and his works. This change has had a profound effect on Christian faith and church; therefore it needs to be seen how this drastic change appeared and later influenced hermeneutics of Bultmann; to understand that let us have a quick look at the study of John in the modern period.

Historically authenticity of Gospel of John was settled around second century of Christian era and was not disputed again till eighteenth century when the issue was recovered with the modern historical method and was discussed at length. Prior to second century the early suspicions about the authenticity of the gospel were mainly due to lack of evidence in the apostolic writings. Plummer in his book, *The Gospel According to St. John* rejected these objections on the basis of evidences present in the

¹ St Augustine, Tractate 36 in *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia online*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/> (accessed on 13/6/2010).

² H. Latimer Jackson, *The Problem of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press 1918), p.1, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/jackson/index-2.html> (accessed on 13/5/2010).

writings of apostles for example Barnabas or Paul or Polycarp.³ Moreover, through internal and external criticism he also provided evidences to prove authenticity of the gospel.⁴ From the external evidences are the Ignatian epistles belonging to the year 150 of Christian era, epistles of Polycarp, Papias, Justin Martyr ascribed the gospel to apostle John. After 170 those who recognized John as author of the gospel were Titian in his epistle to the Churches of Vienne and Lyons, Celsus in Muratorian fragment, Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus bishop of Lyon and pupil of Polycarp, who in turn was disciple of St. John.⁵ Regarding internal evidences is the Christian traditional stance of referring the verses in the gospel showing intimacy of John with Jesus particularly the verse which explicitly narrates the relationship as beloved disciple of Jesus; in addition narrations of John are in the form of eye-witnesses.⁶ Thus, it means that the Gospel of John had authentic status by second century. After third century till the modern times the issue of authenticity was not raised again and the book was greatly esteemed in the church and among orthodox circles. Its status is further reflected from the fact that during these centuries Christian world faced many heresies,⁷ in which the debate was mainly centered on Christology,⁸ to solve these

³ See A. Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1891), pp. 18-19.

⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 19-20; Richard Heard, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers 1950), www.religion-online.org (accessed on 14/6/2010), Chapter 10; Robert M. Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (Harper and Row 1963), www.religion-online.org (accessed on 13/7/2010); Michael Little, "Gospel of St. John" in *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia* ed. Kevin Knight <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08438a.htm> (accessed on 15/7/2010).

⁶ See A. Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. John*, pp. 25-29; H. Latimer Jackson, *The Problem of the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 39-55; Richard Heard, *An Introduction to the New Testament*; W. Hall Harris, Background to the study of John in *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, D:\PDF Books\old books\R. Bultmann\Background to the Study of John Bible_org - Worlds Largest Bible Study Site.mht (accessed on 12/7/2010).

⁷ For Christian heresies see *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine world c. 650- c. 1450*, translated & annotated by Janet Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton and Yuri Stoyanov (Manchester: University Press); G. R. Evans, *A Brief History of Heresy* (Malden: Blackwell 2003).

⁸ For Christological debate see Hinnā Jarjis al-Khidārī, *Tārīkh al-Fikr al-Masīhī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibā'ah al-Qawmiyyah); J. Windrow Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology* (London: Lutterworth Press 1967).

theological issues the Christian orthodoxy heavily relied on the Gospel of John.⁹ Added to it is that the gospel had a special place in commentaries and exegesis due to its mystical tendencies; in fact it was the principal source of theological and mystical speculations and enjoyed this status till enlightenment.¹⁰ After the enlightenment with critical historical method and history of religion school change appeared where authenticity of the gospel or the 'Johannine question' was raised again. Moreover, its relation with synoptic gospels, literary style, date, composition, sources and purpose were searched with critical tools which resulted in losing its traditional position.¹¹ Modern scholarship rejected the authorship of John for the apostle son of Zabedee instead of it proposed various opinions, i.e. John the apostle was the author but in a secondary sense, or the author was some other John, possibly John the elder but not the apostle, or it is an anonymous writing, or it is a composite work of more than one hand, and possibly an elaboration of John the apostles' sayings, or going back to the traditional view of accepting John the apostle as the author. Reason for having variety of opinions goes back to ambiguity present in the early testimonies, whether the beloved disciple was used for James or for John, the evidence is not clear, similarly

⁹ See Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, tr. Kevin Smyth (New York: Herder and Herder 1968), vol. 1, p. 203.

¹⁰ See for example the commentaries of Origen, Theodore, Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, John Scotus Eriugena, Albertus Magnus, and of Thomas Aquinas, see Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, pp. 202-207.

¹¹ See Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan 1924); Ernest Findlay Scott, *The Literature of the New Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press n.d.); R. H. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (n.p.: Duckworth n.d.); Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*; ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black, *Exploring the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox 1996); James Moffatt, *The Historical New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1901); J. C. O'Neill, *The Study of the New Testament in Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West* ed. Ninian Smart (London: Cambridge University Press 1985), vol. 3; Lawrence M. Wills *The Quest of the Historical Gospel Mark John and the Origins of the gospel genre* (London: Routledge 1997); A. Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. John*; H. Latimer Jackson, *The Problem of the Fourth Gospel*; Richard Heard, *An Introduction to the New Testament*; A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting The New Testament* (London: SCM Press 1951); Simon J. Kistemaker *The Gospels in Current Study* (Michigan: Baker Book House 1972).

vagueness between John the apostle and John the elder leads to confusion.¹² Regarding the date of its writing, it was the end of the first century or the beginning of the second there is no agreed view due to lack of proper evidence. Additionally, comparison with synoptic gospels depicts that John was not much concerned with history like them but his attention was more on theological and mystical presentation whereas history was secondary. Another important question was the addressee of John, whether they were Jews or Gentiles of the Hellenistic world, modern studies probed in all these issues. Undoubtedly historical criticism shed new light on these old issues, but due to its pure rationalism and historicism its scope was limited, and could not explore new horizons. At the same time for Christianity historical research is crucial as truth of Christianity depends on the historical verification of these events and modern historical method aimed to verify these events but the results were tragic.¹³ In their endeavour for verification of historical facts, the problem faced by modern critics was twofold; dearth of historical evidence to verify the historical events on the one side and pure rationality with historical method which led to unavoidable results on the other. Rationalism of scientific age could only verify tangible and observable facts apart from it; it simply denied their possibility or existence. With this instead of establishing Christianity on verifiable proofs, historical critical method demolished the basic tenets of Christianity. Faced with the bankruptcy of historical criticism Christian theologians realized the

¹² See F. F. Bruce, "The Fourth Gospel in Recent Interpretation" in *Terminal Letter of the Theological Students' Fellowship* (Spring 1958): 2-6; Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels A Study of Origins*, pp. 430-461; Ernest Findlay Scott, *The Literature of the New Testament*, pp. 234-246; A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting The New Testament*, pp. 84-86.

¹³ To cite just one example in this regard is that there are dozens of works written on life of Jesus to prove that he was a historically authentic figure but the historical criticism was unable to prove his earthly life. Instead their results turned him in a myth or he was denied altogether or a sharp distinction was made between the historical figure and the Christ of faith. In this distinction the effort was to retain the Christ of faith in face of lack of historical evidences. See for detail David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, tr. Marian Evans (New York: Calvin Blanchard 1860); Albert Schweitzer *The Quest of the Historical Jesus from Reimarus to Wrede*, tr. W. Montgomery (London: Adam and Charles Black 19190); ed. Gregory W. Dawes *The Historical Jesus Quest* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox 1999); Martin Dibelius, *Jesus* tr. Charles B. Hedrick and Frederick C. Grant (New York: Westminster Press 1949); G. de Purucker, *The Story of Jesus* (Theosophical University press online edition 1998); Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (London: Watts & co. n. d.).

need for another approach. Turning away from the historical method towards 'meaning' of the text in the sense of what it 'stands for' became important for them. Bultmann too took this option in interpretation.

Looking at the gospel studies in Muslim scholarship it must be noted that it was not as advanced in the age of al-Ghazālī as it is in the modern west today; it was of preliminary nature but which laid the foundations for Biblical criticism later. From the issues discussed by Muslims were related to the authorship, date, transmission, and reliability of the text, reliability of the authors, internal contradictions and inconsistencies of the text. Generally these were refutations and can be classed as historical investigation which among al-Mu'tazilah was overshadowed by rationalism and by Ibn Hazm's literalism. Placing al-Ghazālī's *al-Radd al-Jamīl* in this scenario it can be said that he took a different route among his contemporaries, firstly it focused on a specific portion of the gospels and with that he pioneered Johannine studies. Secondly, instead of treading the old path of historical method he probed in the text or in its 'meaning', thus innovating a new way in Biblical studies.

In summary, al-Ghazālī and Bultmann shared a common feature of deviating from pure historical search to the meaning of the text, with a difference that the former investigated meaning of the text as intended by author whereas the later tried to bring to light its meaning for the reader. Still the place and worth of historical search cannot be denied particularly for the ancient text. The importance of the historical method is that it provides the necessary initial information to construct on it the required structure. Due to this importance of historical method we find that al-Ghazālī and Bultmann did not ignore it completely but their main task was the interpretation of the text; to know that let us move to their understanding for the Gospel of John.

AL-GHAZĀLĪ AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

It would be a mistake to borrow western critical methodology for the study of John and to evaluate in its light al-Ghazālī's perception for the gospel; western studies are the

outcome of western thought and reflect their mindset. Whereas Muslim studies have their own background, which needs to be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, there are similarities present in their studies, which make the comparison genuine.

Generally Muslims approached the books of Christians and Jew as revealed from God, as stated by al-Ghazālī in *Ihyā'* that God revealed His books on different prophets for the guidance of humanity, 'thus *al-Taḥrāh*, *al-Injīl*, *al-Zabūr*, *al-Furqān*, *ṣuḥuf* of Moses and Ibrāhīm and other scriptures were revealed'.¹⁴ But with the passage of time change appeared in them therefore the Holy Qur'ān leveled the charge of distortion in them. Muslims with this background studied their sacred literature.

Coming to Gospel of John¹⁵ al-Ghazālī selected it as it is the most authentic gospel among Christians.¹⁶ He did not give much space to historical questions neither did he deal with them in a critical way. In passing few historical issues pointed by him are about the authorship, which for him was John Ibn Zabedee,¹⁷ the disciple of Jesus,¹⁸ designated as the 'beloved disciple'.¹⁹ whereas Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār²⁰ and more explicitly al-Jāhīz²¹ rejected it. Perhaps al-Ghazālī narrated only the accepted notions among Christians in ascribing the Gospel to John. About the status of John he says, 'most honored among them to the extent that they call him Lord's beloved'.²² Its status is further verified by al-Ghazālī through selection of various verses from the books of the Old and New Testament showing similarity of content in them. From the books he mentioned are the Epistles of John; for al-Ghazālī the gospel and the epistles were from

¹⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr 1991), vol.4, p.82; vol.1, p.81, (my translation).

¹⁵ There is a difference in *Injīl* and gospel but the gospel was canonized by Christians thus giving it a status of authentic revelation.

¹⁶ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl* ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz 'Abd al-Ḥaqq Ḥilmī (Cairo: al-Maṭābi' al-Amūriah 1973), p.242.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 242, 252, 287, 305.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 252, 253.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 252.

²⁰ See Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbūt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah* ed. 'Abd al-Karīm 'Uthmān (Beirut: Dār al-'Arabiyyah 1966), p. 155.

²¹ See Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāhīz, *Thalāth Rasā'il* ed. J. Finkel (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Salafiyyah 1382 H.), p. 24.

²² al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd*, p. 252. (my translation)

the same author²³ as it was believed traditionally. Modern scholarship rejects that but they are grouped together with revelation as Johannine literature due to their similar content.

From the other books are letters of St Paul mentioned most, then the Gospel of Mark, followed by Matthew, Acts and in the end Luke. In the Old Testament the selection is from the books of Moses, Psalms and in the end books of Kings and Judges.

The selection of verses from the New Testament reflects place of apostles John, Paul and Peter, who were highly regarded among Christians, John was one of the 'prominent disciple and was known as 'Lord's beloved',²⁴ Peter and Paul were the great personalities.²⁵ Al-Ghazālī's opinion about St. Paul is in sharp contradiction to that of al-'Āmirī²⁶ and Qādī "Abd al-Jabbār. St Paul was a controversial figure for them and his teachings are totally contrary to that of other apostles. In Qādī's view he had good relations with Romans and distorted Christianity to win their hearts.²⁷

From gospels apart from John he cited from Mark six times, Matthew four and Luke once. Preferring Mark over Matthew is remarkable as Mark is taken to be the source of other gospels in modern times. In the Old Testament the selection of the verses is according to the revelatory status and due to the importance of Psalms among Christians as he explicitly mentioned their status, for al-Tawūrāh he says, 'it is the book of Moses',²⁸ for al-Mazāmīr, it was revealed to David,²⁹ and for Kings and Judges, it was part of *kutubuhum al-'Atiqah* which were read in their churches'.³⁰ Other than

²³ Ibid., pp. 252, 287.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 252.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 302.

²⁶ See Abū al-Ḥasan al-'Āmirī, *Kitāb al-'Ilām bimanāqib al-Islām* ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ghurāb (Riyadh: Dār al-Aṣālah 1988), p. 208.

²⁷ See al-Qādī, *Tatbīr*, pp. 156-173.

²⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd.*, pp. 239, 284, 286.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 287.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 239.

the canonical writings he made a passing remark on the commentaries from the apostles and the Fathers.³¹

Unlike Bultmann, al-Ghazālī did not write a complete commentary on the gospel rather he studied a particular theme i.e. divinity of Jesus. For that he selected six verses, five from John and one from Mark and rearranged them according to his theme. These six verses, he divided in pairs of three, through the first three he denied the divinity of Jesus and through other three he proved his humanity. Rest of the verses from the Old and the New Testament were cited to support the theme of his study. His whole study can be divided in two portions, first is the main thesis of refuting the divinity of Jesus comprising of six verses and second the concluding portion which he designated as 'problematic issue' is the prologue of the gospel. In this rearrangement separation of the prologue from the rest of the verses and interpreting it independently is a distinctive feature of al-Ghazālī. Prologue has a different character from the rest of the gospel, and is thus a modern concept. One of the concerns of historical criticism in modern thought is whether prologue was added late in the gospel or not. Al-Ghazālī was not concerned with the historical issue; his rearrangement reflects thematic perspective only. For him the misinterpretation of the prologue caused confusion and led Christians to believe in divinity of Jesus, to clarify it al-Ghazālī dealt with it separately. At the same time it may be noted that to rearrange the layout of the Gospel by changing verses from its original place is unprecedented, as far as I know, among Muslims of his age. Bultmann in his commentary on John too rearranged the Gospel as will be discussed shortly.

Selection of John reflects al-Ghazālī's awareness of the differences present between John and the synoptic gospels. There is a marked difference in the picture of Jesus in them, in John the Christ figure or a divine being is prominent whereas synoptic gospels picture Jesus in human terms. Besides, synoptic gospels are more concerned with

³¹ Ibid., pp. 292, 296.

historical presentation whereas history is the least concern of John. For al-Ghazālī divinity of Jesus was the main problem therefore he selected John.

Theologically John is the only gospel which provides scriptural evidence for divinity of Jesus. Due to it Massigon rightly commented that al-Ghazālī's book is a work on John's Christology.³²

Gospel of John is also marked for its spiritual teachings, which is another important reason for al-Ghazālī to choose it. Spiritual nature of this gospel is well depicted in the words of Lootfy Levonian, 'the Fourth is the Gospel of His spiritual teaching; and it is here that we see Jesus grappling with the Jews about this basic problem of the religion, and trying to point out to them the true meaning of the spiritual'.³³ Al-Ghazālī was attracted to this aspect of the gospel and for him it was misinterpreted by the followers of Jesus. Moreover, the teachings of Paul too are mystical therefore al-Ghazālī found great similarity in the teachings of two. In his view these apostles, John and Paul, represented correct Christian faith which was altered in later periods.

In al-Ghazālī's age prevailing trend in refutations was theological; although divinity of Jesus is a core theological issue still al-Ghazālī in his refutation gave less importance to theological argumentation. The reason might be that theological studies to some extent are biased. Normally theologians use their own spectacles to see the 'other' whereas mystical dimension is wider in its vision. Describing the difference in the two 'Abd al-Majīd al-Sharafī mentions that the two differ widely, the criterion of judgment among theologians is taken from their own religious background particularly for ritualistic and legalistic differences, which leads to a wide gap between the religions under study, on the other hand Sufis take a different course they focus less on legalistic and ritualistic differences without diminishing their importance in religion.³⁴ Perhaps this was the

³² See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd*, p.113.

³³ Lootfy Levonian, *Studies in the Relationship Between Islam and Christianity Psychological and Historical* (London: George Allen & Unwin 1940), p. 86.

³⁴ See 'Abd ul-Majīd al-Sharafī, *al-Fikr al-Islāmī fī al-Radd 'Alā al-Naṣārā* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisīyyah 1986), pp. 429-430.

reason for al-Ghazālī to avoid conventional theological debate with Christians, and in its place to prefer the Sufi path. However, theological arguments are not absent in *al-Radd* while in interpretation of John two dimensions are merged i.e. theological and Sufi. Divinity of Jesus as said is theological issue yet in its interpretation al-Ghazālī takes a wider Sufi perspective where 'son ship' is not only a biological relationship but can have various other connotations. Besides, he condemned Christian theological literalism due to which their interpretation of John is mistaken. John specifically and Paul and Peter as well, according to al-Ghazālī perceived and presented the teachings of Jesus in a broad perspective which Christian theological literalism misunderstood. In a nutshell it can be said that instead of pure rational and historical criticism he incorporated rational with supra rational facets in his refutation; that is interpreting the Biblical text in the light of spiritual theology. It is the mystical approach which is dominant in al-Ghazālī's al-ta'wil and is not anti rational in his scheme. As said before, interpretation of John in *al-Radd* is comparable to *Ihyā'*, as the two resemble in the manner and aim of study, both try to revive religious teachings through rereading in the light of spiritual wisdom.

Moreover, few other methodological features in al-Ghazālī's study of John are like use of comparison. He compared John with other writings of the New and Old Testament particularly Paul. Also we find comparison of events or of miracles of Jesus with Moses and comparison of text for the wordings of 'shinning hand' in the miracle of Moses in the Holy Qur'ān and al-Tawrah.³⁵ In this method al-Ghazālī also compared meaning of some important terms of John with earlier translations. It may be noted that looking back in the earlier translations for determining exact meaning is another distinct feature of his work. Jew and Christian scriptures are not present in their original languages; the oldest manuscripts are the translations only, al-Ghazālī's comparison points to this important aspect of Biblical studies. Additionally without exploring the

³⁵ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd*, p. 239.

details of historical question of original languages, al-Ghazālī only mentioned that al-Tawrah was translated from al-'Ibrānī (Hebrew),³⁶ and Gospel of John from Coptic,³⁷ and compared the translated text with the text of ancient languages. As said above Coptic version was the most reliable version for the Arabic translation.³⁸ Going back to the earlier translations and comparing it with later ones was done by al-Bīrūnī before al-Ghazālī. While discussing the concept of al-Masiḥ in Judaism and in Christianity al-Bīrūnī looked in the Hebrew and in the Syrian versions.³⁹ This methodology among Muslim scholars was ground-breaking in textual studies and points to the fact that at least a preliminary knowledge of these languages was available to them. Comparison with earlier translations is unthinkable without their knowledge, therefore it may be said that scholars like al-Bīrūnī and al-Ghazālī knew these languages to some extent.⁴⁰ As stated above al-Ghazālī interpreted John in the light of the New and Old Testament, which means the addressees for John were Jews in his opinion. Although the issue was not raised in historical critical manner, neither he questioned that whether they were the Jews of Palestine or of Diaspora as it is discussed in the modern studies. From John it is evident that the community was of believers, who were well versed in Jewish religion and thought. As John never went in explanations of the basics of religion so it means they were well acquainted with what was told to them, and he was only reminding them of their faith. Regarding it al-Ghazālī's explicit reference is in very first verse of John in form of dialogue between Jesus and Jews, where Jesus reminds them that his teachings are similar to that of the Old Testament and his

³⁶ Ibid., p. 240.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 296.

³⁸ See . Abū al-Ḥasan al-ʿAmirī, *Kitāb al-ʿIlām bimanāqib al-Islām*, p. 204.

³⁹ See Al-Bīrūnī, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, ed. & tr. Edward Sachau (Lahore: Hijra International 1983), pp. 18-23.

⁴⁰ Both al-Bīrūnī and al-Ghazālī share the methodology of having full grasp of the subject and the opinion of the opponent before writing or refuting it and language is one of the basic tool in understanding the 'other' particularly in religious discourse. See al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* and al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb al-Hind*.

message is not new.⁴¹ Similarly his citation from Acts clearly states that the addressees were Jews,⁴² or his comments that following of Jesus by Jews was a compulsion.⁴³ Moreover, explanation of the concepts like 'Son', 'God', and so forth were made in Jewish understanding.⁴⁴ Making Jews the recipients of the gospel reflects Islamic understanding where Jesus was the prophet to Banī Israel.⁴⁵ He was like Abraham or Moses and so forth, and al-Ghazālī compares their teachings to show the similarity of their message and that they form one group.⁴⁶ This might have led Chaldaic to criticize al-Ghazālī.⁴⁷ Despite the fact that al-Ghazālī was a Muslim it cannot be denied that Jesus was a Jew and his teachings were grounded in Judaism.

Linked with the question of addressees is the presence of problematic words like 'son' or 'father', due to these words Bultmann concluded that John wrote the gospel for the Jews of Diaspora and borrowed the Greeks ideas to convey his message. For al-Ghazālī, the concepts and vocabulary all was rooted in Judaism. Consequently, though both agreed that John addressed Jews but deviated on whether they were of Diaspora or not and whether the vocabulary was Jewish or Greek. Related to problematic vocabulary in al-Ghazālī' view two things must be taken into consideration, firstly it has roots in Judaism, so Jews were familiar with this terminology and John did not bring any new idea. Secondly, for al-Ghazālī Jesus was prophet and in the sharī'ah of every prophet there are some distinctive features. Jesus too must have certain features in his sharī'ah which were only for them.⁴⁸ Thus, Jesus used 'Son' or 'God' metaphorically and pointed their real meaning by explaining metaphors which means that it was allowed for them.⁴⁹ Thus, for al-Ghazālī the ideas and the terminology of John are not

⁴¹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd*, p. 244.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.302.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 284, 286, 287.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 254, 258, 260, 261, 263, 281, 282, 284, 285.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 239, 264, 265, 282, 286, 288, 301, 303, 304, 305, 309, 311.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁴⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd*, p. 265.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

borrowed from outside and have its roots in Judaism. In giving sanctity to John's vocabulary al-Ghazālī opinion is comparable to al-Jāhīz⁵⁰ and al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār,⁵¹ as both do not favor it. With this we now turn to Bultmann and his perception of the Gospel of John.

BULTMANN AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Gospel of John was ranked high among other books of the New Testament; in his interpretation this gospel is the prism through which he looks at the other gospels. In Johannine studies his influential works are *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* and *Theology of the New Testament*. It is in the latter where his theological and interpretative thought culminated therefore in our work we will concentrate on it.

Bultmann appeared on the scene when historical critical method in Biblical studies was on the verge of declining. As historical criticism searched for the origins only Bultmann was not much concerned about these questions. Although he inquired certain aspects of it but for him this leads to a dead end, instead his concern was the meaning of the text. He paid attention to what the message of Jesus meant for the early generations and how it transformed their life, what were the intellectual themes working in surrounding Jewish and other religious setup of early Christianity, and more importantly what this message means for the present age, which was best represented in the Gospel of John. For Bultmann in John its true meaning appears as a decision for the present unlike any other writing of the New Testament. John's understanding was not the outcome of the situation that is delay in Jesus' return but was the true meaning of the gospel. On this understanding Bultmann developed his demythologizing. With these preliminary words about status of the Gospel of John let us return to some of the historical issues related to the gospel as mentioned by Bultmann.

⁵⁰ See Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāhīz, *Thalāth Rasā'il*, pp. 25-28.

⁵¹ See al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fi Abwāb al-Tawhīd wa al-'adl*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Khuḍīri (Egypt: al-M'ūassah al-Maṣriah al-'Āmah n. d.), vol. 5, pp. 108-111.

To have a clear picture of Bultmann's position it may be noted that within the scenario of historical studies in twentieth century there were opposing extremes. On the one hand were radical opinions coming particularly from Germany and on the other was the re-emergence of traditional thought, though not of same old intensity but was moving in that direction while believing that a genuine tradition lies behind the Gospel of John. And the major disputed issues among them were historical worth of the fourth gospel, its date, authorship, origin, source, compilation, dependence on synoptic gospels, purpose of writing and so forth.⁵² Generally Bultmann's stance is among those who moved away from the traditional camp.

Bultmann considered the Gospel of John and the Epistles as one collection due to their close resemblance, but this does not imply that they were authored by same person. Epistles might be the product of school of John,⁵³ but there is no sound information about their authorship.⁵⁴ Later following the footsteps of Bultmann not only the authorship to John the apostle was denied even its alternate John the Elder was rejected as being a shadowy figure due to lack of evidence and it was ascribed to an anonymous author.⁵⁵ Whereas from the modern traditional camp, on the basis of internal evidence Westcott,⁵⁶ Streeter⁵⁷ and Richard Heard⁵⁸ affirmed that the author was the apostle John. Thus, though Bultmann rejected the authorship of John the apostle but within modern scholarship his authorship is supported by strong voices and for them the internal evidence which supports the authorship of John is the verse of the 'beloved

⁵² See Moises Silva, "Approaching the Fourth Gospel" in *Criswell Theological Review*, 3.1(1988), pp. 17-29.

⁵³ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, (USA: Charles Scribner's Sons 1955), vol. 2, p. 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵⁵ See R. H. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. 1966), P. 176.

⁵⁶ See B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 1962), pp. v-xxviii; James D. Dvorak, The Relationship between John and the Synoptic Gospels, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, p. 209.

⁵⁷ See Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, p.433.

⁵⁸ See Richard Heard, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Chapter 10.

disciple'.⁵⁹ Indeed this verse is the main problem related to authorship and is known as Johannine question. Explicitly the verse only states that the author was an eye witness, 'this is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.'⁶⁰ Whether the beloved disciple was John the apostle or someone else gospel does not provide any clue, neither is any information there that the verse was originally written by the author or was added afterwards. Based on the study of forms Bultmann concluded that the verse was added late by a redactor, and this happened twice. Once chapter 21 was affixed to the Gospel and then the verses 23, 24 were added.⁶¹ In that case the verse cannot be an evidence for the authorship of John. Though Bultmann opposed the traditional view, still there are some evidences in the gospel supporting the verse of beloved disciple. For example descriptive narrative of death of Jesus which ended with, 'he who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth',⁶² there is close resemblance in the wordings of eye witness here and in the above verse (21: 24).⁶³ Besides, the detailed information in the Gospel of John show close acquaintance of the author with Jesus, which include the names of persons, places, geographical knowledge of Palestine, and some historical facts which are absent in the synoptic gospels.⁶⁴ Based on it Scott⁶⁵ and Streeter favoured the traditional view of John's authorship and that he was the beloved disciple, because there must have been at least one among the Twelve who understood the Revelation of the word and John was one of them.⁶⁶ So this supports the traditional view.

⁵⁹ John 21: 24; 13: 23; 19: 26.

⁶⁰ John 21: 24.

⁶¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John A Commentary*, tr. G. R. Beasley-Murray, ed. R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1971), pp. 715-716.

⁶² John 19: 35.

⁶³ See Ernest Findlay Scott, *The Literature of the New Testament*, p. 239; Richard Heard, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Chapter 10.

⁶⁴ See Ernest Findlay Scott, *The Literature of the New Testament*, pp. 239-241.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 242.

⁶⁶ See Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, p.432.

Coming to the date of writing according to modern critics the gospel was written as late as the middle of second century, but this view was altered since the discovery of Rylands Fragments in 1933.⁶⁷ These fragments were from the first quarter of second century and contain few verses of the gospel; with it the modern opinion came to agree with the traditional view.⁶⁸ According to Bultmann too, the gospel must have been within the first century after the fixation of synoptic gospels and due to the testimony from papyri quotations which are from the early second century.⁶⁹ Moreover, the place of writing is unknown and its original language was Greek.⁷⁰

As for the arrangement of the gospel Bultmann proposed a different layout for the gospel in his commentary.⁷¹ Reason behind it is that the study of literary styles in form criticism pointed to certain inconsistencies in the gospel which is either because of irregularity in order, interpolations by editors, or use of different sources by authors.⁷² Historically these irregularities were pointed by Tatian in Diatessaron, and in modern times by Moffat in *The New Testament: A New Translation*, J. Wellhausen and others.⁷³ These are some of the preliminary historical questions related to the gospel and in them Bultmann followed modern critics as against modern traditionalists. Thus, for Bultmann time difference separates John from Jesus and from the early church whereas John's acquaintance with synoptic gospels is not a settled problem as well. Nevertheless, due to some common themes or traditions present in John and synoptic gospels that Bultmann favours certain knowledge which John had of synoptic gospels

⁶⁷ See *An unpublished Fragment of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. C. H. Roberts, (Manchester: University Press 1935), second impression, p. 11.

⁶⁸ See Moises Silva, *Approaching the Fourth Gospel*, p. 17; Ernest Findlay Scott, *The Literature of the New Testament*, p. 235.

⁶⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 10, these fragments were edited by H. Idris and T. C. Skeat in 1935 and by Roberts in 1935 which indicate that John was known in Egypt by the end of first century.

⁷⁰ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 10.

⁷¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John A Commentary*.

⁷² Ibid., also see Robert M. Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, chapter 11

⁷³ See for detail Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, pp. 44-74; E. J. Goodspeed, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1937), chapter 19 <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/goodspeed/ch19.html> (accessed on 10/6/2010).

or of their sources. For example, miracle stories although they are presented differently, in synoptic gospels in form of a report of an occurrence and in John as symbols pointing to something else.⁷⁴ Due to these differences the picture of Jesus in synoptic gospels and in John is completely different. Further, in synoptic gospels there are shorter discourses of Jesus as compared to John which are longer dialogues on definite themes. In John Jesus does not appear as a rabbi concerned with the Law or as the prophet proclaiming the advent of the kingdom of God rather as revealer appointed by God.⁷⁵ He talks about his coming and going and the message brought from God. Instead of parables of synoptic gospels in John are symbols of good shepherd, true vine, light or truth. Thus, the themes and the world of John are very dissimilar to synoptic gospels.⁷⁶

Now comparing it with the writings of St. Paul, here according to Bultmann, John and Paul do have some similarities still they do not follow the same direction of thought. From the similarities present among them are Gnostic ideas taken from Hellenistic culture, like redeemer myth, or the dualistic terminology of 'earthly-heavenly', 'light-darkness', 'truth-falsehood', with a difference that Paul is more near to Jewish thought as compared to John. Despite the resemblances, John is not the culmination of Paul or the two are not moving in same linear direction. John being late to Paul was no doubt influenced by him. Still John had 'his own originality and stands in an atmosphere of theological thinking different from that of Paul'.⁷⁷ The difference in the two, as said, was that Paul remained within Jewish theological interpretation whereas John deviated from it and gave it a radical interpretation.

Bultmann while comparing synoptic gospels, John and Paul followed the history-of-religions school, and in its light identified mythological terminology. Besides, form criticism helped in determining terms of Gnostic dualism and their development,

⁷⁴ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

particularly in knowing the origin of the words, their use by authors and later by redactors. Moreover, the dualistic terminology of light-darkness, earthly-heavenly and so forth is the dialecticalism of Hegelian philosophy to which Bultmann gave specific understanding. In summary it can be said that Bultmann used the modern tools of critical studies and philosophies to look in the book of John. With these few words on the Gospel of John now we move to the early Christianity in the eyes of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann.

AL-GHAZĀLĪ AND THE EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Early Christianity was the area of interest for al-Ghazālī and Bultmann with a difference that John for al-Ghazālī was not the transmitter of Greek philosophy neither his mystical inclination was the result of the gnosis rather it was a pure religious inspiration coming from the teachings of Jesus. Whereas Bultmann considered John to be well versed in Greek philosophy who borrowed its worldview to put across the message of Jesus but both of them seems to agree that John himself was not Hellenizing Christianity. For Bultmann John borrowed the terminology to express his ideas as that was the available terminology and for al-Ghazālī the vocabulary was rooted in Judaism. Al-Ghazālī's description for the early period of Christianity is very brief. He discussed their faith and how the later generations deviated from the early understanding. For him there were two reasons behind it; one was the strict adherence to the letter of the word and that veiled the true meaning from them. The second was the influence of Greek philosophy on Christianity particularly on theology due to which new concepts crept in and molded the religion in a different direction.

Taking the first aspect, it needs to be identified historically when and how the change from the original understanding to literal meaning appeared? According to al-Ghazālī the change appeared due to the blind following of their elders. Christians were stern about the meanings given to scriptures by ancients, and considered it to be the religion

of Jesus.⁷⁸ When did this change take place in Christian history al-Ghazālī is not explicit and mentions it in broad terms only. He refers to Christian epochs in general that during these periods their books were distorted. He calls them the era of *al-awwalūn*,⁷⁹ for the early generations and *al-ākhirūn*⁸⁰ or *al-mutā'khhirūn*⁸¹ for the later ones. This distinction between ages appears again when he describes development of faith in Christian sects.⁸² Here the two phases of early and late generations are designated by *al-qudamā'* and *al-mutā'khhirūn* respectively.⁸³ But the point to be noted here is that al-Ghazālī charged both, *al-qudamā'* and *al-mutā'khhirūn* with corruptibility of faith. Thus the early generation here is not to be counted among *al-awwalūn* mentioned before. And this makes it difficult to identify these groups and to have an exact historical demarcation of the two phases from these terms. But it can be deduced that the age of Jesus, his disciples and perhaps the first centuries are termed as the early generations and of course the period after that as late generations. As al-Ghazālī considered the interpretations given by St. Paul, John, Peter and by the commentators of Gospels to be the correct one.⁸⁴ And it is in the age of *al-mutā'khhirūn* that the corruption in their religion appeared. They strictly followed the literal sense given by *al-awwalūn* and ranked it as the religion of Jesus.⁸⁵ Here Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār agrees with al-Ghazālī that the change appeared after a passage of time but for Qādī the process of change was slow and took long time which started just after Jesus.⁸⁶ Al-Juwaynī by pointing the age of authors is to some extent more exact in identifying the time.

⁷⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 235.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 278.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 271-279.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 278-279.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 284, 287, 292.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 235.

⁸⁶ See Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbit*, p. 152.

Related to it is the status of St. Paul and St. John who are considered to be the pillars of Christianity and for al-Ghazālī they belong to the early generation before change appeared in Christianity. Opinion of Muslim authors, particularly about St. Paul, varies widely from al-Ghazālī; for them he played a major role in distorting Christianity.⁸⁷ To what extent al-Ghazālī was correct about these two disciples can be judged only after evaluating his interpretation of their sayings. Further, al-Ghazālī also charged later age Christians for refusing to accept metaphorical interpretation and considered that the text can only accept literal meanings.⁸⁸

The second aspect which is the influence of Greek philosophy on their religion is also connected to their strict adherence with the literal meaning. Christians in al-Ghazālī's opinion were influenced by Greek philosophy in the period of al-mutākhkhirūn and they explained theology accordingly, which was taken as the only possible interpretation. Elaborating the influence of Greek thought on their society, in the later period, he divided the Christian populace in two; the uneducated masses and the educated circle.⁸⁹ Leaving aside the common masses due to their ignorance and no training for rational understanding, he concentrated on the educated circle. It is the intellectual elite who were greatly influenced by the Greek thought and followed philosophy blindly thinking that the philosophers have attained great wisdom and so their knowledge cannot be questioned.⁹⁰ In reality their perception of philosophical notions was wrong and they incorrectly applied them on Christianity.⁹¹

Concrete example of Greek influence on Christian theology in divinity of Jesus is the relation between soul and body.⁹² Divinity of Jesus Christ is a complex dogma and it is

⁸⁷ See Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tahbīt*, p. 156-160; al-'Āmirī, *al-I'lām*, p. 208.

⁸⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p.235.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.236.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² The relation between soul and body is a philosophical idea discussed by al-Ghazālī in *al-Maqāsid al-Falāsifah* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Maḥmūdiyyah al-Tijāriyyah 1936), p. 54; for philosophical details see 'Abdul Raḥmān Badwī, *Aristuww 'inda al-'Arab* (Kuwait: Wakālah al-Maṭbū'āt 1978), p.77; Muḥammad

not easy to understand the nature of Christ and his relation to God. Therefore Christians took the help of 'relation between soul and body from Greek philosophy. According to al-Ghazālī, Christian theology committed a mistake in making a parallel between Jesus and God with soul and body; they are different from each other and do not share similar grounds to establish the relationship.⁹³ While specifying the mistakes in Christian thought al-Ghazālī pointed to their incorrect perception of syllogism, which they applied for the relation between soul and body.⁹⁴ Refutation of al-Ghazālī can be summarized that in syllogism *al-'illah* (commonality) between *aṣl* (original case) and *far'* (sub case) should be present and here in case of God and Jesus *'illah* or the commonality is absent so how could it be applied to God?⁹⁵ And if it is considered as analogy still it is wrong. In analogy there must be resemblance between the two sides but in this case the resemblance cannot be known.⁹⁶ Moreover, syllogism employed here requires deep thinking and is not in common use even among jurists so how could it be used for God.⁹⁷ Further the condition for the relation between soul and body according to the philosophers is that there must be *munāsabah* (conformity or agreeability) between the two i.e. between God and Jesus, and God is above that.⁹⁸ Even if conformity is assumed it does not establish the relation imagined by Christians. For philosophers the relation is organizational where both share emotions and feelings, and God transcends that.⁹⁹ If the aspect of pleasure or pain is excluded, in that case too God is the creator and sustainer so all depends on God.¹⁰⁰ Here as Christians have borrowed Greek ideas to elaborate divinity of Christ so they must accept all other

Khīr Ḥasan 'Arqūsūsī and Ḥasan Mullā 'Uthmān *Ibn Sīnā wa al-Nafs al-Insāniyyah* (Beirut: Mu'assah al-Risālah 1982), pp. 109-112.

⁹³ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 237.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 237.

⁹⁵ Ibid.; for detailed discussion on *al-qiya's* see al-Ghazālī, *Mi'yār al-'Ilm*, and *Muḥik al-Nazar*.

⁹⁶ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 237.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 238.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

concepts of philosophy too, like eternity of world, One can create only one, God is an abstract idea and so forth, whereas according to al-Ghazālī they all are contrary to Christian religious teachings.¹⁰¹

Looking back in Christian history for the allegations of al-Ghazālī we find that it was in the second half of third and later in fourth century of Christian era that the Christian theological controversies about Trinity and the status and relation of Jesus with God were at its peak. The Nicene Creed determined the nature of Christ as fully God who was made man but was silent about the exact relation of Jesus with God. Further debates in these controversies were to determine this relation. There were two tendencies to solve it; one was to merge the human in the divine and the other was to keep them separately in one being. The first was the approach of school of Alexandria and the other of school of Antioch.¹⁰² The school of Antioch was literalist in its interpretations as compared to Alexandrians,¹⁰³ and insisted on difference of being in God and Jesus and followed Origen's interpretation literally.¹⁰⁴ In order to explain divinity of Jesus they compared it with the union in soul and body.¹⁰⁵ Both these schools fall under Eastern Christianity and Muslims interacted with them in that period. Their major sects, in al-Ghazālī's times, were Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites believed in union or al-Itihād but disagreed on the nature of relationship between divinity and humanity of Jesus.¹⁰⁶ According to al-Ghazālī roots of this dogma

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁰² See Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 131; George Every, *Understanding Eastern Christianity* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications 1978), pp. 43-47.

¹⁰³ See Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 133; George Every, *Understanding Eastern Christianity*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁴ See Lūis Ghardīah and J. Qanawātī, *Falsafah al-Fikr al-Dīnī bayn al-Islām wa al-Masīhiyyah*, tr. Şubhī al-Şāliḥ and Farid Jabr (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm lil Malāyīn 1967), vol. 2, pp. 284-285.

¹⁰⁵ See Jean Danielou and Henri I. Marrou, *The Christian Centuries A New History of the Catholic Church*, tr. Vincent Cronin (New York: McGraw-Hill 1964), p. 218; Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 133.

¹⁰⁶ For Christian sects and their theological controversies see, Jean Danielou and Henri I. Marrou, *The Christian Centuries A New History of the Catholic Church*; Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*; Aziz Suryal Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity*. From Muslim theologians see, Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tanbih* ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ghuḍīrī and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Hādī

go back to Greek philosophy and Christians revolve in the circle of divinity and humanity of Jesus, moving from one end to the other in search of a solution. These were the brief comments on primitive Christianity by al-Ghazālī; as stated he did not write as an historian therefore a detailed discussion on Christian history is absent in *al-Radd*. It is only in relation with interpretation that how and when Christians deviated from the right path or in other words from the wider vision to a narrowness of literalism that al-Ghazālī mentioned few historical changes.

BULTMANN AND THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY

The historical setting of primitive Christianity has been discussed in detail in *Primitive Christianity and Theology of the New Testament* by Bultmann. In them he elaborated the original message of Jesus, its development in the early church, the Hellenistic church, by St. Paul and by St. John. He followed historical critical method with form criticism and the history of religion school to reconstruct the historical picture of Christianity. From synoptic gospels he tried to recover the message of Jesus and from Acts the early church. In synoptic gospels according to the two source theory Mark and Q were the original sources for Matthew and Luke, with that was the old tradition, the ideas developed within the church and thirdly the additions or the editorial work of the evangelists.¹⁰⁷ For Acts and Pauline letters too, again historical critical method was needed to verify its information as it was the early church which collected, selected and even modified the gospels therefore the theological tendencies of the church were reflected in them.¹⁰⁸ To differentiate in these various additions historical critical tools were indispensable.

Christianity, according to Bultmann, emerged and was cradled among various religious and intellectual shades which influenced and shaped the theological development.

(n. p.: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī n. d.), pp. 86-96; Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fi Abwāb al-Tawhīd wa al-'Adl* ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ghuḍīrī, vol. 5, pp. 114-136; al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil fi Uṣul al-Dīn*, pp. 581-594.

¹⁰⁷ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

There was Judaism, Greek philosophy, Hellenistic culture with mystery religions and Gnostic movement present at that time and all had an influence on Christianity. Moreover, Bultmann distinguished between the message of Jesus and the teachings of Judaism, the early church, Pauline or Johannine thought. Elaborating the development of thought in Bultmann's view early church, St Paul and St. John took the terminology from the prevailing religions or the philosophies and presented the message of Jesus in a different way. The message of Jesus which stands very much in opposition to Judaism in its teachings and spirit, was initially clothed in Jewish thought and terminology, as Jesus was himself a Jew. Jesus borrowed from Judaism some of the concepts and gave them a different understanding. Jews believed in the near end of the world, where God will intervene with a new future in the form of establishment of kingdom. It was a nationalistic or political hope and a messiah from the line of David was to restore the lost kingdom.¹⁰⁹ Whereas Jesus preached a kingdom of God, which is an eschatological concept and meant that it will destroy the present course of the world, the satanic powers and would bring an end to all pains and sorrows. It would bring salvation, and would be miraculous that God will bring the change without the help of man. It is not political or national kingdom but a cosmic change will occur where an old age will come to an end and a new will dawn. The Judgment of the world would be held by God and His Son, who would appear on the clouds, the dead would arise, and rewarded according to their deeds. Here Jesus took the Jewish context and their imagination to present his message, for Bultmann the resurrection of the dead, their judgment or their blessedness are the figurative expressions.¹¹⁰ Otherwise message of Jesus which is eschatological is rooted in the idea that 'the time is fulfilled, and the Reign of God is at hand',¹¹¹ this points 'to a new future and characterize the present as the time of

¹⁰⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, p. 80-82.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹¹¹ Mark 1:15.

decision',¹¹² it is now that man must be ready to return, it is the time for decision, 'now is the last hour, now is the either-or, now is the question: do men really want God's reign? Or is it the world they want?'¹¹³ It is the decision in the present moment where man must surrender fully, this is the crux of Jesus' teachings and not the past or the future is important for him as it is in Judaism. Another difference in the message of Jesus and Judaism is that although Jesus adhered to the authority of the Old Testament but strongly rejected the formalism or the ritualism of Jews. Instead of it Jesus demanded radical obedience through the commandment of love of neighbor. It is a practical ethic therefore had a far reaching effect, moreover it is directed towards individual.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, Jesus introduced a different relationship with God as compared to what was taught in Judaism. In Judaism God is transcendent in the sense that He is far above his creation whereas Jesus taught a personal relation with Him, which is well depicted in his prayers where God is addressed as the Father, He is near to man and listens and answers his prayers. In addition, He forgives man and is the God of grace as against Judaism where demand and judgment of God is stressed. The grace of God means that whenever a sinner decides to return to Him, He accepts his repentance, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son—but even then his father's love is already going out to him'.¹¹⁵ Thus, repentance is not only human achievement but is gained through grace of God, when a sinner surrenders wholly to the God.¹¹⁶

From above it becomes clear that the message of Jesus was very different from Judaism, it was a call for an individual for a decision for his present, and its piety and ethic was a protest to the legalism of scribes. In the nutshell, according to Bultmann, message of

¹¹² Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, p. 87.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹¹⁴ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 11-13.

¹¹⁵ Luke 15:21.

¹¹⁶ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, pp. 77-78; *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 24.

Jesus formed a unity of eschatological proclamation and the ethical teaching.¹¹⁷ This message of Jesus after him passed through various modifications and changes starting from the very beginnings of the early church and continued in later phases. The difference in the early church and the message of Jesus, as stated by Bultmann, is that 'Jesus proclaimed the message. The church proclaims him'.¹¹⁸ The difference in the two is that in his message, Jesus was a teacher and a prophet, whereas the church added the component of messiah ship, and proclaimed that he was messiah. In this way not the message of Jesus rather he himself became the center of preaching, or 'the proclaimer became the proclaimed'.¹¹⁹ Early church in this change borrowed from the Jewish eschatological expectations the concept of the messiah or son of man and turned this imaginary figure into physical and visible figure of Jesus. For the early church Jesus was the messiah who was killed on the cross and was to come on the clouds of heaven to judge and to bring salvation, this according to Bultmann turned the myth into a tangible historical figure and it was the major change in the message of Jesus.¹²⁰ Apart from it the Hellenistic church which was the soil of Greek philosophy with Gnosticism played a decisive role in the development of theology by St. Paul and St. John. The Hellenistic church deviated from the early church in eschatological understanding; soon irruption of the kingdom of God was not their main concern rather in these churches cultic religion around Jesus was established. The title *Christos* a translation of messiah which meant lord of redemption was applied to Jesus as a proper name for him. Another title *kyrios*, was commonly used for him, which was for a cultic deity who died, resurrected and was worshiped by his followers. Thus, Gnostic dualism, teachings of the Old Testament and the gospel tradition from St. Paul, were the diverse components which turned Hellenistic church in syncretism. Amalgamation of these elements, Jewish thought, mystery cult or the Gnostic dualism, is evident in

¹¹⁷ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 19.

¹¹⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, p. 93.

¹¹⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 33.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

the teachings of Jesus in Hellenistic church.¹²¹ Among these elements, in Bultmann's opinion, Jewish thought is prominent in the theology of St. Paul and Gnostic dualism in Johannine theology. From Gnosticism, John borrowed the mythological terminology of light darkness, truth falsehood, above below or from God from devil, and so forth to convey the message of Jesus. For that reason, according to Bultmann terminology of John is foreign to the real message of Jesus and appeared late in Christianity. Thus, Christianity passed various phases of change and in these phases the real teachings turned unrecognizable with the passage of time.

From above it may be stated that a change definitely took place in the original teachings of Jesus, in the opinion of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann but they differed in its time. For al-Ghazālī it was not in the age of Jesus, St. Paul, or St. John but appeared after them. On the other hand for Bultmann from the very beginning St. Paul, St. John or the early church borrowed the language and ideas from the existing religions and philosophies to convey the message of Jesus so the change appeared in the very early period. Thus, the early generation was not reliable for Bultmann whereas that was not the case for al-Ghazālī.

AL-GHAZĀLĪ AND THE RATIONAL INTERPRETATION

In al-Ghazālī's thought reason played a crucial role in determining the nature of the text whether it can accept al-ta'wīl or the apparent sense must be retained. So with the tool of reason revelation is perceived, in other words reason and revelation stands on parallel grounds. In case of contradiction they both are to be given due importance and the contradiction too, is to be resolved in the light of both.

In fact the emphasis on 'reason' in his dialogue with Christians is because reason is a common denominator among all. Therefore before proceeding with al-ta'wīl he mentioned two principles and termed them al-aṣlīn they are 'rational and acceptable

¹²¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, pp. 175-178.

among the learned'.¹²² In the translation of J. W. Sweetman these principles are, 'if the passages presented are in accord with what is rational, their literal meaning should be allowed to stand, and if they are opposed or resist a rational explanation, it will be necessary to resort to ta'wīl, to believe that the realities of them are not intended, and to fall back on the metaphorical meaning. The second principle is that when the indications are contradictory, one affirming and the other negating, the contradiction should not be allowed to stand unless we have come to the conclusion that it is impossible for us to reconcile the two and bring them down to one single agreed meaning'.¹²³

Following these principles and taking reason as a criterion of judgment, al-Ghazālī in his refutation discussed at the outset the contradictions present in the gospels and to resolve that al-ta'wīl is the only way for him. Here al-Ghazālī's approach is comparable to al-Juwaynī's who resorted to al-ta'wīl in the face of contradictions.¹²⁴

This methodology is not new in al-Ghazālī's writings, he followed it wherever there is apparent inconsistency present in reason and revelation, so it is pursued in *Ihyā'*, *Iqtisād*, *Jawāhir*, *Qānūn al-ta'wīl* and so forth. For example in the narration where death is slaughtered in form of a sheep in the Hereafter, or the narration which says that the actions would be weighted in the Hereafter, or verses narrating anthropomorphic qualities of God, in all these cases apparent meanings contradict reason. Al-ta'wīl here helps in resolving it by putting aside the literal sense for the hidden meanings.¹²⁵

Coming back to the principles mentioned above by al-Ghazālī which were the guidelines in his gospel study. He selected six verses, three from the Gospel of John proving divinity of Jesus in Christian view and compared them with other three from

¹²² See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 242.

¹²³ J. W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, part two, vol. 1, p. 267.

¹²⁴ John 14:9.

¹²⁵ See al-Ghazālī, "Qānūn al-Tā'wil" in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 127; *Jawāhir*, pp.29-30; *al-Iqtisād fī al-I'tiqād*, pp. 52-55.

Mark and John talking about his humanity. The inconsistency in the two sets must be resolved in a way that a clear rational picture may emerge. To reach this result some of the verses need to be interpreted metaphorically to have uniformity in meaning. In this process first step would be the identification of the verses which can accept al-ta'wil and which cannot, here al-Ghazālī used reason for identification. For the sake of convenience these verses are put in the following table, where verses narrating his divinity are grouped 'A', and those narrating his humanity are in group 'B'.

| | Group A | Group B |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | <p>The Father and I are one. The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me? The Jews answered, It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God. Jesus answered, Is it not written in your law, I said, you are gods'? If those to whom the word of God came were called gods'—and the scripture cannot be annulled—can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, I am God's Son'?</p> | <p>But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Mark13:32)</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | (John 10:30-36) | |
| 2 | Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. (John 17:11) | After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:1-3) |
| 3 | Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one (John 17:17-22) | Abraham is our father. Jesus said to them, If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did (John 8:39-40) for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me. (John 12:49-50) |

As the contradiction between these two sets is obvious so it must be resolved otherwise it would lead to wrong understanding of the text. To resolve it rationally foremost thing is the proper knowledge of the text, in regard to the words and the text on the whole, which in *uṣūl* is termed as *al-dalālah*.¹²⁶ To know the words in their clarity,¹²⁷ scope i.e. general, specific, absolute and qualified, and their actual use i.e. literal (*ḥaqīqah*) or metaphorical (*majāz*) form.¹²⁸ Similarly textual implications are of various degrees which need to be specified.¹²⁹ Thus, to reach the correct sense of the text all these components are indispensable further they also help in differentiating between the literal and non-literal aspects of the text.¹³⁰ Particularly indicators *dalīl yā'ba ibqā'hu 'alā ḥaqīqatīhi* which does not accept the apparent meaning must be identified, which demands that the text to be diverted towards metaphorical interpretation.¹³¹ These indicators are of various forms; here al-Ghazālī pointed to certain linguistic and textual indicators which will be discussed in the following section. These linguistic indicators or *majāz* are mainly present in the verses of group 'A' of above, and are absent from the other, so they must not be taken literally whereas in the other group it is the absence of indicators that they cannot be diverted from their literal connotation. Thus it is reason which identifies the category of the text and is the first step in *al-ta'wīl*.

¹²⁶ For detail see al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, and *Mi'yār al-'Ilm*.

¹²⁷ See footnote no. 105 above.

¹²⁸ See M. H. Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Malaysia: International Islamic University 1991), pp. 101-117; Imām 'Alī bin Muḥammad al-Āmadī, *al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām* ed. al-Jamīlī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī 1986), vol.2.

¹²⁹ Shāfi'ite school mainly divide it in two categories; Pronounced meaning (*dalālah al-manṭūq*) and Implied meaning (*dalālah al-maṣhūm*). Both are derived from the words and the sentences of the text, only the difference is that in the former it is the obvious words whereas in the latter reasoning is used. And the Ḥanafite School divide it in the following four divisions, in fact the difference in the two schools is mainly of terminology otherwise the content leads to same. Explicit meaning (*'ibārat al-naṣṣ*) is what is explicitly clear from the words of the text and is most authoritative meaning. Implied (*ishārat al-naṣṣ*) meaning is the one which is taken from the signs and allusions of the text. Inferred (*dalālah al-naṣṣ*) meaning is the one which is not conveyed by signs but inferred by logical reasoning. Required (*iqṭidā al-naṣṣ*) meaning is the one on which the text silent but it must be read into it to complete the meaning. For detail see M. H. Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, pp. 118-123; al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, vol. 1 & 2.

¹³⁰ See M. H. Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, pp. 118-123

¹³¹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p.298.

According to al-Ghazālī Christians refused to employ rational tools in understanding their texts henceforth they were not able to differentiate between the levels of text and its implications which resulted in an illogical and confused interpretation, added to it is their blind following of others even in case of obvious contradictions which led to misconceptions in their religion.¹³² Divinity of Jesus is an example of such unreasonable interpretation of the text by Christians. The verses with indicators pointing to be diverted from the literal meaning were kept as they were which resulted in contradiction either with reason or with verses related to his humanity. For example the verses from group 'A' contradict with verses of other group and also with simple reason. In order to reconcile and harmonize such contradictions Christians interpreted them in a way which caused further confusions in their religion. And divinity of Jesus is amalgamation of such confusions, as in words of al-Ghazālī, 'at times they turn their God man and at times turn him to God again'.¹³³

Illustrating the irrational aspect of Christian thought al-Ghazālī took the example from the verses which says, 'when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs'.¹³⁴ And at other place it comes, 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father'.¹³⁵ These verses contradict divinity of Jesus as hunger and lack of knowledge are human qualities; to reconcile them Christians explained that the curse of Jesus for the tree,¹³⁶ in the former verse, was to show his power to kill the living. Whereas according to al-Ghazālī, the gospel clearly stated that Jesus felt hungry and went to the tree to eat from its fruit, here the human condition is explicitly stated by 'hunger'. The Christian interpretation that he cursed

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 266.

¹³⁴ Mark 11:12-13.

¹³⁵ Mark 13:32.

¹³⁶ Mark 11:14.

the tree to show his quality of all powerful is irrational.¹³⁷ Similarly the interpretation of, 'No one knows the day, the hour, the angels or the Son except the Father 'only',¹³⁸ that Jesus denied to have the knowledge of the day, angels and his own self is evidently unreasonable.¹³⁹

Another such example mentioned by al-Ghazālī is their faith that all the prophets entered hell fire, 'they have, for example, conspired together to say that the children of Adam have been punished by reason of the disobedience of their father, and that all the prophets and saints have been cast into the fire (Hell), and that God has then promised to redeem them with a generous ransom, but the perfect in generosity in regard to ransoming, gives himself as a ransom. But his simple (incorporeal....) essence suffers no damage or hurt. Then he is united to the humanity of Jesus, on whom be peace, and because the humanity united to Him has been crucified, His crucifixion is a cause of the salvation of the prophets and the saints, and their deliverance out of Hell...May God forgive the error of this foolish mob!'¹⁴⁰

In case of Jesus praying to God for the guidance and safety of his disciples,¹⁴¹ al-Ghazālī comments that how could he pray and ask someone else if he was God?¹⁴²

Coming to the second set of verses selected by al-Ghazālī, which is placed above in group 'B', here the indicator or *dalīl* is not present. In absence of indicator the text cannot be diverted from the apparent to metaphorical meaning. Apparently these verses are narrating human conditions of Jesus like lack of knowledge in the first verse where he denied from himself and from angels knowledge of the hour. In the second he prayed to God for disciples, asking someone else shows lack of power and authority which is a human quality. The last one clearly states that he was a prophet of God and

¹³⁷ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p.257.

¹³⁸ J. W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, part two, vol. 1, p. 275.

¹³⁹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p.259.

¹⁴⁰ J. W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, part two, vol. 1, pp. 289-90; al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, pp. 285-286.

¹⁴¹ John 17:11.

¹⁴² See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 249.

had delivered to people what he heard from God. The argument which al-Ghazālī established here is since there are no indicators present in the text therefore the implications of the words is what they stand for. Such text cannot be diverted to another interpretation. It can be compared to the status of *muḥkam* in the Holy Qur'ān which is defined as clear, unambiguous and plain text and does not accept *al-tā'wīl*,¹⁴³ further it has also been defined as the one which contain commandants of *al-amr*, *al-nahyī*, *al-ḥalāl* and *al-ḥarām*.¹⁴⁴ It means that the function of *muḥkam* is to convey clear injunctions of religion. Beliefs particularly in God are the most crucial element of religion which must be conveyed in clear and obvious wordings. Working on these lines al-Ghazālī in his study of divinity first looked in the text to identify its category, whether it is a plain text or accepts *al-tā'wīl*. And in categorization he followed the logical process of determining what the word implies or what does it stand for. As said above that the elements of divinity of Jesus as claimed by Christians are not present in *mukam* or clear text rather they are present in text having indicators pointing towards diversion from the plain meaning. And as these statements are unclear therefore cannot be used as foundations for establishing faith, only clear verses could be the standard to erect faith on them. As humanity of Jesus is conveyed in unambiguous statements hence al-Ghazālī took them as standard and interpreted others in their light consequently invalidating divinity of Jesus.

From above it can be stated that al-Ghazālī remained rooted in Islamic thought therefore he borrowed the methodology from his own background and applied it on the Christian text, as objected by Sweetman¹⁴⁵ and Chidiac¹⁴⁶. When looked in haste this is the obvious conclusion that he is not objective in his study and has imposed Muslim thought on Christianity. Contrary to it the fact is that the methodology

¹⁴³ See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍal Ibrāhīm (Qum: Maṭba'ah Amīr 1363), vol.4, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ See J. W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, part two, vol. 1, p. 299.

¹⁴⁶ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 167.

followed by al-Ghazālī does not carry any religious connotation, rather it can be qualified as 'general rules'. They are the rules and principles for reading of any text and to identify to which category it belongs. Further, the principle of establishing faith on clear text is a rational and not a religious principle. Besides, the notion of 'commonalities' present in Abrahamic faiths further supports al-Ghazālī's stance for putting at par with the common elements present in faith in these religions and comparing with a methodology shared by all. Thus, it can be said that al-Ghazālī's discussion is based on choosing an appropriate methodology based on reason as it is common among all.

BULTMANN AND THE RATIONAL INTERPRETATION

Reason plays a leading role in Bultmann's scheme of reading the text and its interpretation. Bultmann shares with al-Ghazālī that the inconsistencies and irrationalities in the text indicate that the literal meaning of the text is not the correct one and its interpretation must be in accord with rational parameters. Although 'reason' is the common tool among them in interpretation but they differ in its implementation. Moreover, the meaning of 'reason' varies in the thought of the two, for al-Ghazālī reason does not contradict revelation or it is simple intellect whereas for Bultmann reason is in the modern terms i.e. unaided human reason and it stands in a sharp contrast to revelation. Besides, its domain is the physical world and operates on the scientific assumptions.

Coming to the Gospel of John there are two levels of inconsistencies present in it in Bultmann's opinion, on the one side there are internal contradictions and on the other are the irrationalities which are not acceptable for the modern man. Taking the later first here Bultmann reads the text in the modern man's perspective. Modern man's perception of his own self and that of nature is of closed continuum where unnatural occurrences do not take place, thus phrases like 'descended into hell' or 'ascended into heaven' has no meaning for him. Moreover, the modern man is master of his own self

and bears the responsibility of his actions, feelings, thought, likewise devils or spirits has no place in his life. This worldview is contrary to the worldview of the New Testament. In New Testament there are doctrines like atonement, cross, resurrection or that death is the punishment of sin are irrational elements for the modern mind. Death is a natural process, as stated by Bultmann,

“Human Beings are subject to death even before they have committed any sin. And to attribute to human mortality to the fall of Adam is sheer nonsense, for guilt implies personal responsibility, and the idea of original sin as an inherited infection is sub-ethical, irrational, and absurd”.¹⁴⁷

Same is in case of atonement, how can death of one man be repentance for another or the doctrine of resurrection of Jesus, in all these doctrines there are irrationalities which are not acceptable for the modern man.

Apart from the irrational doctrines there are contradictions in the New Testament, some of the examples as mentioned by Bultmann are, death of Christ is sometimes a sacrifice and sometimes a cosmic event, at times Jesus is Messiah and at others second Adam, concept of Virgin birth contradict pre-existence of Jesus, and to believe that the law was given by God does not match with the theory that it comes from angels.¹⁴⁸

They are simple contradictions which are not acceptable for modern man. From the irrationalities are relation of fall of Adam with original sin or the death of one man is repentance for all. These are illogicalities in Christianity and cannot be accepted by rational mind. Here Bultmann and al-Ghazālī share a similar approach that there are apparent contradictions present in the New Testament, but they both differ in their method of resolving them. As stated above, for al-Ghazālī it is the indicators within the text which help in resolving the contradictions, thus it is text oriented interpretation. On the other hand, for Bultmann as will be explained in the following lines, interpretation is reader oriented. The mythical worldview of the gospel in which the

¹⁴⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, p. 7.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

functioning of cause and effect in nature is disturbed i.e. resurrection, virgin birth or ascending and descending from the skies takes place is not acceptable for the modern man. Keeping in view the requirements of the modern reader Bultmann rejects the mythical projection of it and demands for the interpretation of mythical elements while keeping the kerygma or the message of Christianity. Consequently, al-Ghazālī and Bultmann agree on the presence of irrationalities in dogmas or contradictions in the gospel but take different routes in interpreting them.

Apart from the above contradictions there is another peculiar sort of paradox present in the gospel in Butlamnn's opinion which are absent in al-Ghazālī' thought and has been radically expressed by John only. This dichotomy for Bultmann arises because the reality of man is opposed to the world in the New Testament. The distinction between man and world is not new according to Bultmann, as he states,

"Whereas to ancient man the world had been home—in the Old Testament as God's creation, to classic Greece as the cosmos pervaded by the deity—the utter difference of human existence from all worldly existence was recognized for the first time in Gnosticism and Christianity, and thus the world became foreign soil to the human self".¹⁴⁹

For Bultmann this distinction is vital, when the gulf between the reality of man and of the world is perceived, only than one can understand double meaning present throughout the gospel, and this requires interpretation,

"Criticism is especially called for, however, by a peculiar contradiction that runs throughout the New Testament: on the one hand, human beings are cosmically determined, and, on the other hand, they are summoned to decision; on the one hand, sin is fate, and on the other hand, it is guilt; alongside of the Pauline indicative there is the imperative and so on. In short, human beings are understood, on the one hand as cosmic beings and, on the other hand, as independent persons who can win or loose

¹⁴⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 165.

themselves by their own decisions. Hence the fact that many words in the New Testament directly speak to us today, while yet others are unintelligible and remained closed to us".¹⁵⁰

This duality or paradox is presented in mythological language which demands interpretation. The task of demythologizing is to interpret myth so that the modern man can understand in terms of his own existence. For Bultmann there is duality of mutually opposing realities, on the one side is human being as an authentic reality who takes decision on his own, and on the other is world or everything apart from man, which surrounds him but at the same time is different from him. Man has to master the world and secure his self. In the gospel language man is fallen under the world, its powers, and under death, which is not the creation of God but came due to Adam's fall.¹⁵¹ Moreover, it is Adam's sin together with death which is related with flesh.¹⁵² And by flesh is meant all what is sensual, visible, or measurable. When this world takes over and man subordinates to it, he obeys it, in that case man lives according to flesh.¹⁵³ This life is unauthentic or insecure life, whereas authentic life is the one which is lived according to 'invisible', 'immeasurable' or 'life according to spirit' and 'in faith'. Such a life comes in through faith in God's grace and what is invisible and unfamiliar, and gives man his future, not death. It is the grace of God which forgives sins and frees man from his past.¹⁵⁴ Thus, Bultmann here interprets sin as bondage with the past and it is through grace that man is forgiven from sin and is freed from the past. In other words, man secures his freedom when he is freed from the past and is opened to the future. For Bultmann these paradoxes are more radically and clearly perceived by John as compared to St. Paul or others, there are various examples of paradoxes mentioned from them is revelation. Before going in its details, it may be noted that here Bultmann

¹⁵⁰ Rudolf Bultman, *New Testament and Mythology in New Testament and Mythology and other basic writings*, ed. Schubert M. Ogden, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1984), p. 11.

¹⁵¹ Romans 5: 12.

¹⁵² Romans 8: 13.

¹⁵³ See Rudolf Bultman, *New Testament and Mythology in New Testament and Mythology*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

interprets paradoxes in John through form and redaction criticism. In both types of criticisms the interpreter tries to explore the change in thought that has occurred using the critical historical and literary methods. The critic believes that religious documents are not the production of one author rather many hands were involved in its formation. Moreover, the form critic believes that the early church played a major role in the formation of these documents. These documents developed as an answer to the requirement of the early community regarding preaching, prayer, rituals or religious debates. Though the kerygma is present within these elaborations of the early church but it is through the identification of these forms or units by using historical and literary method that the original message of Jesus can be discerned. Similarly for the redaction critic the documents were not authored by one hand and the redactors made changes in them either to make corrections or to alter a religious idea and identification of it is possible by historical literary criticism.

Coming to John some of the paradoxes mentioned by Bultmann in it are,

“Within this world of death life appeared,¹⁵⁵ into the world of darkness came the light,¹⁵⁶ -it came by the coming of the son of God into the world. Jesus is he. Though he came after the Baptist in time, he nevertheless was prior to him.¹⁵⁷ He even claims that he was before Abraham;¹⁵⁸ yes, even more: that he was before the foundation of the world.¹⁵⁹ It is he in whom the Christian Congregation believes as the one ‘who is from the beginning’”.¹⁶⁰ In him the ‘word’ which in the beginning was with God became flesh,¹⁶¹ and came into its (his) own property-i.e. into the world, which belongs to it, and hence to him, as the one through whom it came into being.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵ 1 John 1:2.

¹⁵⁶ John 1:5.

¹⁵⁷ John 1:15.

¹⁵⁸ John 8:58.

¹⁵⁹ John 17:5.

¹⁶⁰ 1 John 2:13.

¹⁶¹ John 1:1.

¹⁶² John 1:9.

These are mythological statements according to Bultmann and needs interpretation, and the beginning of John's epistle and the prologue of the gospel presents a similar idea that the 'life' was with God, which appeared visibly and tangibly in Jesus. Moreover, his coming in this world is to be understood as 'an arrival from elsewhere', Jesus is whom, 'the Father has consecrated and sent into the world'.¹⁶³ For Bultmann, the idea here revolves around a form or unit of 'sending' and 'coming' of Jesus in the world. His sending is expressed as the eternal life, to 'know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent'¹⁶⁴ and comes as 'father who has sent me' (six times) and only as 'who has send me' (nineteen times).¹⁶⁵ Its counter is 'coming', 'for I went forth from God and have come. For I am not here of my own accord, but he sent me',¹⁶⁶ or he 'came from the father'.¹⁶⁷ His coming in mythological language is being expressed as coming down from heaven or will ascend again to it,¹⁶⁸ or as his glorification and elevation as pre-existence son.¹⁶⁹ Behind this mythical language, as interpreted by Butlamnn, is the idea that Jesus is the revealer and the unit of his 'coming' and 'going' with elevating him as the 'eternal life' depicts him as the judge. Further, the only Son is the deed of love of God, 'for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life',¹⁷⁰ thus, those who believe in him, as Son of God coming from Him receive love of God. And the meaning of it is that Jesus is the truth bearer, who believes in him will receive truth,¹⁷¹ or light, 'that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness',¹⁷² or God 'gave' him so that 'whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal

¹⁶³ John 10:36.

¹⁶⁴ John 17:3.

¹⁶⁵ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 33-34.

¹⁶⁶ John 8:42.

¹⁶⁷ John 8:42, 13:3, 16:27, 17:8.

¹⁶⁸ John 6:62.

¹⁶⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 35.

¹⁷⁰ John 3:16.

¹⁷¹ John 18:37.

¹⁷² John 12:46.

life',¹⁷³ or God has sent him, 'so that we might live through him',¹⁷⁴ or he was sent as, 'the expiation for our sins'.¹⁷⁵ In the light of these statements Jesus is called 'the savior of the world',¹⁷⁶ tracing the roots of this title, in Bultmann's opinion it was present in Hellenistic culture and in early Christian church or among Jews as messiah. And John borrowed it while blending the two ideas, of pre-existence being who became man and must be exalted again¹⁷⁷ from Gnosticism and as Son of Man who is the judge of the world¹⁷⁸ from Jewish and early Christianity. Consequently, for Bultmann the unity of 'coming' and 'going' of Jesus as a judge forms the concept of eschatology, which has been understood differently by St. Paul and John. St. Paul gave it an historical coloring whereas John gave it existential dimension, by relating 'judgment' with 'sunderance' in eschatology. It is in the act of encounter of judgment with Jesus that sunderance between faith and unfaith, between sighted and the blind takes place. Thus, it is not dramatic cosmic event but an act of decision.¹⁷⁹

Taking another example of paradoxical or the double meaning, which according to Bultmann only John realized and presented it in a distinct and radical way is the concept of revelation.¹⁸⁰ Paradoxical nature in the concept of revelation is in the verses where a unity of Jesus the Son with God the Father appears when Philip asked, "Lord show the Father, and we shall be satisfied". The answer he gets is: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father Do you not believe that I am in the Father and Father in me?",¹⁸¹ or "no one comes to the Father, but by me",¹⁸² or "I and the Father are one".¹⁸³

¹⁷³ John 3:16.

¹⁷⁴ 1 John 4:9.

¹⁷⁵ 1 John 4:10.

¹⁷⁶ John 4:42.

¹⁷⁷ John 1:51, 3:31, 12:23.

¹⁷⁸ John 5:27.

¹⁷⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 36-38.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁸¹ John 14:8.

¹⁸² John 14:6.

In Bultmann's opinion the unity between Son and the Father here is formulated from the Gnostic myth as it is said, 'he is not alone, but the Father who has sent him is with him',¹⁸⁴ or the expressions like Father 'loves' his Son,¹⁸⁵ and the Son 'abides in his love',¹⁸⁶ are mythical, or are mystical formulation of early church to show the mutual knowledge of Son and the Father.¹⁸⁷ However, it is not due to these formulations that John puts the Son and the Father on par, rather John elaborates it in his explanation of 'I in the Father and the Father in me' as, 'the words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me is doing his works'.¹⁸⁸ It is not mythical, mystical or metaphysical unity rather it is the encounter of God with man through Jesus or it is the revelation, which is presented in seemingly contradictory statements and John emphasizes on these double meanings to express the relation or encounter of God with man.¹⁸⁹ In presenting the contradictory verses John on the one side equates God and Jesus in dignity and rights to the extent that God even delegates His rights to Jesus, like God gave Jesus His name,¹⁹⁰ gave 'all things' into his hands,¹⁹¹ gave him power over all flesh,¹⁹² on the other side Jesus is obedient to commands of God and does nothing on his own, 'I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me'.¹⁹³ According to Bultmann John repeats again and again the verses related to submissiveness of Jesus, and the repetition is not to show the humility of Jesus rather its opposite, to establish his authority, it is a paradoxical

¹⁸³ John 10:30.

¹⁸⁴ John 8:16, 20; 16:32.

¹⁸⁵ John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17.

¹⁸⁶ John 15:10.

¹⁸⁷ John 10:14.

¹⁸⁸ John 14:10.

¹⁸⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 50.

¹⁹⁰ John 17:11.

¹⁹¹ John 3:35, 13:3.

¹⁹² John 17:2.

¹⁹³ John 6:38.

authority of human being speaking the word of God, in other words it is the revelation as understood by John.¹⁹⁴

In both the above examples Bultmann employed critical historical method and form criticism to show that the units, either of 'coming' and 'going' or of 'glory' and 'obedience', carry double meaning, which were not only well understood by John but were radically interpreted by him. For John, Jesus was not a divine being but a human being only, and as human being who in his decisive act showed the true nature of relation of God with man, in his encounter with God on one side and with man on the other.

Coming to redaction criticism here Bultmann showed that the later redactors changed the text of John by inserting passages or changing them from its place to another to give a new and different meaning. Events related to Jesus are given particular futuristic meaning to make it in accordance with the teachings of the church. For example, in eschatological passage the wordings 'on the last day'¹⁹⁵ were added by later ecclesiastical redactor to give the event futuristic meaning.¹⁹⁶ Similarly the passage was inserted at another place, 'but I will raise him up at the last day',¹⁹⁷ to give it future coloring.

Another example of later addition in John's Gospel is the concept of atonement that Jesus' death on the cross is sacrifice for all that is relation of Jesus' blood with cleansing of all sins is not the idea of John.¹⁹⁸ According to Bultmann, for John it is the whole concept of Jesus' ministry and not the event of his death on the cross only. The verse of cleansing of sins with blood of Jesus is a redactor's addition, which is clear from the verse next to it, 'if we confess our sins, he (God) is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness'.¹⁹⁹ Even the other two verses which refer

¹⁹⁴ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 52.

¹⁹⁵ John 6:30.

¹⁹⁶ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 39.

¹⁹⁷ John 6:44.

¹⁹⁸ See 1 John 1:7.

¹⁹⁹ 1 John 1:9.

to Jesus as the 'expiation for our sins'²⁰⁰ are additions made by redactors.²⁰¹ Taking the example of sacraments of supper and baptism, which in Bultmann's view were linked to Jesus blood and water by later redactor in order to give it a specific meaning.²⁰²

Further a deeper meaning for wound which is added by the redactors appears as, 'and at once there came out blood and water', in Bultmann's opinion its deeper significance is that 'both sacraments, Lord's supper (blood) and baptism (water) are founded upon Jesus' death.'²⁰³

For Bultmann the whole idea of Jesus death as atonement for the sin has no place in John, and whatever traces of it are present are additions made in it. No doubt that Jesus' death is a sacrifice but as his life is sacrifice so is his death,

"His death is to be understood in connection with his life as the completion of his work. His life work as a whole is a sacrifice—an idea well expressed in the description of Jesus as he 'whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world'.²⁰⁴ Neither does 'he gave his only Son'²⁰⁵ specifically mean God's giving him up to death, but His sending Jesus to men. Neither is it said that his sacrifice is an atoning sacrifice for sins."²⁰⁶

It is not the atoning death which brings forgiveness of sins rather release from sins will come through Jesus' word, or through the 'truth' of his word, 'if you continue in my word, you are my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free—free from sin.'²⁰⁷ At another place cleansing from the sins is through the word, 'and given them the words that the Father had given him',²⁰⁸ therefore Jesus' death is

²⁰⁰ 1 John 2:2; 4:10.

²⁰¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 53-54.

²⁰² See John 6:53-56.

²⁰³ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 54.

²⁰⁴ John 10:36.

²⁰⁵ John 3:16.

²⁰⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 55.

²⁰⁷ John 8:31-34.

²⁰⁸ John 17:6.

not a special thing which forgives sin but it is his whole life which completes his work.²⁰⁹

From the above discussion it is clear that Bultmann approached the text rationally and evaluated critically the contradictions present in it. Thus, he pointed out that there are internal irrationalities and its worldview is inconsistent with the modern thought moreover, John intentionally presented his ideas in paradoxes or through double meanings which apparently are confusing. As already said al-Ghazālī and Bultmann both share the opinion that there are contradictions or irrationalities present in the text. But how does Bultmann resolve these inconsistencies, does he provide a methodology as we find it for al-Ghazālī? At the outset it can simply be said that there is no methodology provided by Bultmann to resolve the contradictions present in the text. No doubt he mentions the irrationalities present in the text but there is no criteria for the identification or differentiation between rational and irrational elements in the text. For example death of Jesus at times is sacrifice and at others a cosmic event or he is messiah at times and second Adam at others and so on, which statement among these two is the correct one so that the other could be interpreted accordingly. Here Bultmann is silent giving no such criteria for selection, he only points to the irrationality and stops there. The only explanation given is that they are not acceptable to the modern mind so they must be interpreted to make them acceptable for him. And it goes without saying that this is not a methodology but only opinion of Bultmann where science is taken as a standard to evaluate things. So the standard to judge or select an acceptable from the unacceptable is modern reason which looks through the glasses of science. This puts Bultmann on the side of the reader in interpretation instead of the text. Moreover, looking from the modern perspective whatever is unacceptable for the modern man is myth, in other words whatever is unscientific is mythical; here again 'myth' is made a standard to judge the text which is

²⁰⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 55.

not a methodological standard but an opinion of people living in certain age and is liable to change with the passage of time. Thus, whether it is the case of internal irrationalities or the mythical worldview in both places Bultmann has not provided a proper method for their interpretation. As for the paradoxes in John here too instead of giving a method to resolve these paradoxes Bultmann reads them in the light of existentialism, a modern philosophy which is foreign for John. The only tools used by him are the tools of the modern critical method which in his own opinion are inadequate for the study of the gospel. With this we come to another important aspect that is role of language and its rules in interpretation in the thought of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann.

LINGUISTIC INTERPRETATION AND AL-GHAZĀLĪ

Language and its tools is a common heritage of civilizations, and its laws like the laws of mathematics transcendent human divisions created by thought or religion. Although meanings which the word carries is a production of a particular age and group but the laws which govern the language has universal nature. Study of a book, religious or otherwise, through these tools would be above religious or cultural inclinations and prejudices. And it can be said that al-Ghazālī excelled in it among other Muslim refutations on Christianity.

To refute the dogma of divinity of Jesus al-Ghazālī gave attention to the language of John as it is the basic tool to reach the correct meaning. Within language tools indicators play a major role in determining the nature of the text, in *ḥaqīqī* (plain text) and *majāz* (metaphorical or figurative text) category. Here al-Ghazālī concentrated on indicators to differentiate between *ḥaqīqī* and *majāz* categories. Moreover, it must be kept in mind that majority of the Muslim scholars, and al-Ghazālī is one among them, who considered *majāz* legitimate and worthwhile in religious literature due to its profundity and beauty which is absent in direct literal expressions.

Before entering in the discussion of language indicators for the identification of non literal expressions it needs to be verified that whether gospels like the Holy Qur'an contain such expressions or not. Looking for it, it is surprising that such expressions are not only used frequently by Jesus but he even justified them. From them are like simile,²¹⁰ metaphor,²¹¹ and so forth,²¹² most famous term in this regard is parable.²¹³ It is a transliterated form of the Greek word *parabole*, meaning 'throwing beside or placing beside'²¹⁴ and is a translation of Hebrew *mashal*.²¹⁵ The Hebrew word is from the root *m-sh-l* which means 'to be like'.²¹⁶ After tracing its history and various uses in Hebrew literature Scott concludes, 'The *mashal* belongs to the connotative aspect of language; it employs non literal language, speaking by indirection and suggestion. It demands interpretation precisely because it is about something else....In connotative language something hidden always needs interpretation.'²¹⁷ Such expressions which require uncovering the inner aspect by interpretation parallels *majāz* by al-Ghazālī. Its purpose as explained by Jesus is, 'Let anyone with ears listen! Then the disciples came and asked him, why do you speak to them in parables? He answered, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not

²¹⁰ It is likening of one thing to another usually with words 'like' or 'as'.

²¹¹ To compare between two objects without the use of 'like' or 'as' is metaphor.

²¹² For example, hyperbole is to exaggerate something, hendiadys is a combination of two or more words, idioms of understatement like irony, meiosis, euphemism, ellipsis, metonymy, synecdoche, see Robert I Bradshaw, *Figures of Speech* (http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_idioms.html#top) (accessed on 27/3/2010).

²¹³ *Majāz* is a broad concept as compared to parable, it can be said that parable is one form of *majāz*. Here the two are compared not because they are the exact parallels but due to similarity in their content i.e. presence of metaphorical language.

²¹⁴ *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Definitions* http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms.html (accessed on 25/3/2010)

²¹⁵ See Bernard. Brandon. Scott, *Hear then the Parable A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1990), p. 7; *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Definitions*.

²¹⁶ See B. B. Scott, *Hear then the Parable*, p.9.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

listen, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.²¹⁸ It is clear from the passage that Jesus preferred figurative language while talking to non believers, pointing that their eyes and ears are close, but he had hope that in future they might have faith, as he said that they would turn. Here a question arises why Jesus is talking in figurative language to non believers? It seems that Jesus had dual purpose behind it; one is to clarify relationship between faith and comprehension and secondly his hope for future. Equating faith and comprehension means that they both come together, as it is said that guidance comes from God. Faith leads to proper understanding or in a right direction to what Jesus said and meant. It can be compared to what comes in the Holy Qur'ān, "God is not ashamed to strike a similitude even of a gnat, or aught above it. As for the believers, they know it is the truth from their Lord; but as for unbelievers, they say, what did God desire by this for similitude? Thereby He leads many astray, and thereby He guides many." (2:26). Perhaps John used various forms of figurative expressions to this effect, as faith and comprehension goes together. Purity of faith helped the early followers of Jesus to comprehend easily the correct meaning of the text which after a passage of time became vague and incomprehensible for the later generations and resulted in literalism. Al-Ghazālī's linking of figurative expressions to the mystical dimension points to the same direction as will be clear from what follows. Second purpose of Jesus is related to the future, he conveyed his message in such expressions that the people could sustain it for a longer period of time. Figurative language has this quality; it is easily remembered and later communicated to coming generations. Particularly in case of ancient cultures

²¹⁸ Matthew 13:9-15; see also Mark 4:10-12; Luke 8:9-10.

where reliance was on memory, and parables of Jesus had this quality; they could be remembered easily due to its language and structure.²¹⁹ It means that when people are well acquainted with the concepts, examples and words of a message it could easily be remembered, again this reminds the Qur'ānic verse, "And We have sent no Messenger save with the tongue of his people, that he might make all clear to them." (14:4)

From above it can be concluded that metaphorical language has legitimate place in the gospel narratives, and it is not only useful but is as important as literal expressions are. Regarding the correlation between the figurative and non figurative expressions, as stated in the previous chapter, in al-Ghazālī's view they must complement each other. In case of contradictions, which are outwardly only, they must be resolved. Wrong interpretations might be the reason for these apparent inconsistencies. Once proper rules for interpretation are followed inconsistencies could be avoided.

Coming to *majāz* and its categories in John here we find al-Ghazālī mentioned various sub divisions of it. As it is the expression which is not used in its proper meaning or is not in its right place and its subdivisions are like comparison of two dissimilar objects, with a connecting word or without it, common word in place of specific or whole in place of part, *mujmal*, *mushtarak*, *mushkil* and so forth are present with all these varieties in John. Presence of these indicators prohibits the text to be taken in literal sense or in other words they are expressions pointing to something else. Their correct meaning can be discerned only by putting aside the outer coverings. As there is lot many indicators present in John so for the sake of convenience let us take first three verses taken by al-Ghazālī which are mentioned as group 'A' above. Literally these verses lead to 'union' between Jesus and God whereas for al-Ghazālī presence of indicators prohibits the literal interpretation. Wordings of the text imposes that it must be diverted to non literal sense, from the indicators present in these verses are metaphors, similes and the textual implications.

²¹⁹ See B. B. Scott, *Hear then the Parable*, p.35.

Briefly, in these verses the first one²²⁰ is in a form of dialogue between Jesus and Jews. Here Jesus claimed to be one with the Father which was blasphemy for Jews so they wanted to stone him. On that Jesus reminded of his good deeds and inquired of which of these works are they stoning him. Their answer was not due to good deeds but due to blasphemy, i.e. being a man you are claiming to be a God. So Jesus reminded them of their law where they are called 'gods' because of word of God or al-kalimah is with them, so how much elevated status would be for the one whom God has sanctified and has deputed him to people. Second one²²¹ is a prayer of Jesus for his disciples that they may be united with God as he is united with Him. And the third verse²²² again is prayer for glory and unity for disciples as it is for Jesus.

Metaphors, according to al-Ghazālī, in the first and third verse are present in the words al-kalimah and al-majd respectively. In the first verse comparison is made between Jews and God because of al-kalimah or 'word'. This does not stand for its apparent meaning that is the part of speech, but for the message of God given to them and which has raised them to the status of god. This diversion is clarified by Jesus by likening it to, 'if those to whom the word of God came were called gods'. Again the word 'god' is a metaphor conveying the meaning of respect which they have received from God because of al-kalimah. Thus, due to these indicators the apparent meanings of the 'word' or 'god' cannot be taken as they are. Rather they are diverted to non literal expression which again is pointed by Jesus by his election and deputation as a prophet. In the second verse again a comparison or union between God and man is made due to al-majd which is not the godhead but the glory. It is the glory which elevated Jesus to high status and he prayed for his disciples for the same. Indicators in the second and third verse are kamā nahnu 'as we' in both comparison is carried between God and

²²⁰ John 10: 30-31; for full text see above group 'A'.

²²¹ John 17:11.

²²² John 17:17-22.

Jesus and they both are made one. And it is the words 'as we' which hinder the literal interpretation. Thus, the union is not the literal union between Jesus and God.

It may be added that in the first verse sarcastic questioning of Jesus 'of which good deeds do you stone me?' is not mentioned by al-Ghazālī whereas sarcastic questioning cannot belong to ḥaqīqī expression as stoning someone on good deeds is impossible so it is pointing towards majāz as well.

Discussion of indicators is followed by interpretation given by al-Ghazālī which is similar in content for these three verses. According to him union with God in these verses is not apparent or physical union but is spiritual in nature, it is union of will and love. In mystical terms it is when servant attains the nearness to God; he loses his will and is united with God. Interpretation of al-Ghazālī leads to the issue of 'religious language' which will be discussed in the following chapter.

From other examples mentioned by al-Ghazālī is the verse of Luke, 'do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.'²²³ Here the comparison is made between God and the word 'father' due to a common quality of mercy with the indicator 'as'. From the example of 'āmm i.e. a general word used for specific meaning, is al-majd as mentioned in the Gospel of John, 'The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one',²²⁴ here the word al-majd or glory if taken literally is conveying a general meaning, which al-Ghazālī elaborated with example, when someone says, 'I have given the gift you gave me' but the general statement has been specified by Jesus with the words, 'you gave me'.²²⁵ And in reality what was given to Jesus was prophet hood and miracles. Therefore the apparent meaning cannot be taken, and it must be diverted to

²²³ Luke 6:35-36.

²²⁴ John 17:22.

²²⁵ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 254.

another meaning for sound understanding.²²⁶ What Jesus gave them was guidance and message of God and that is the specific meaning intended here. Further al-Ghazālī negates Christian claim that the specific meaning can be taken as 'union', which will make them all gods. For the simple reason that sharing Godhead is rationally impossible²²⁷ and as stated above in such cases reason must be given priority. In *mushtarak*, words like god, father, son and rabb are taken in more than one meaning; their interpretation as discussed by al-Ghazālī will follow in the coming sections. Another example of it is the word *rū'yah* or sight, which is used for *al-baṣar* i.e. sense of sight or also for *al-baṣīrah* i.e. vision or wisdom. The verse al-Ghazālī mentioned to clarify the difference is, 'Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad. Then the Jews said to him, you are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.'²²⁸ In Christian opinion the word 'seen' is used in common meaning of sight through the organ of eye, and that makes Jesus prior in time from his own age, consequently it means that he was God. Whereas for al-Ghazālī the word 'seen' is not used for sight but for vision, and so the statement must be diverted from the literal meaning, due to time difference in the two Abraham did not see Jesus, but when he was informed about the prophet Jesus and his works, he was happy.²²⁹ Moreover it is evident from above that Jesus chose the examples from his culture but presented them in a striking way, for example the word 'god' was used for man but the way he presented 'I and Father are one' was so striking that Jews reacted angrily. It is one of the qualities of parables that they make the linguistic expression forceful and arresting which is evident in the sayings of Jesus. It reminds the opinion of Muslim scholars, as mentioned above, that *majāz* is profound, remarkable and outstanding as compared to plain expressions. One of the reasons for Jesus to select these expressions

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 255.

²²⁸ John 8:56-58.

²²⁹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 301.

might be that his addressees were Jews who due to their hard heartedness and literalism were in need of forceful and arresting expressions.

These are few examples of linguistic indicators which indicate that the text of John has many figurative expressions particularly in the verses related to divinity of Jesus. To interpret such expressions al-Ghazālī took help of the method of textual implication so in what follows is the application of it on interpretation.

TEXTUAL IMPLICATION

One of the methods used by al-Ghazālī in interpretation of linguistic indicators is al-dalālah or the textual implications based on principles of uṣūl. Important thing in al-dalālah is that the text itself plays role in determining its meaning. There are two types of textual implication known as al-manṭūq and al-mafhūm. In dalālah al-manṭūq the interpretation is based on direct words and sentences of the text whereas in dalālah al-mafhūm it is the reasoning within text which leads to certain meaning. Further the meaning arrived at must be in harmony with and not divergent to the overall text.

Al-Ghazālī in his interpretation relied more on the pronounced meaning i.e. dalālah al-manṭūq with its divisions of required and alluded meaning. It is the direct and obvious meaning of the text, and is more reliable and represents the main theme of the text.

Mentioning first the explicit meaning of the text is evident in *al-Radd* as the words ṣraḥ al-naṣṣ and wāḍiḥ al-naṣṣ are repeatedly used,²³⁰ and is also mentioned in the title of this epistle biṣariḥ al-Injīl. Here al-Ghazālī clarified his methodology of taking the explicit text, and this does not mean that he accepted the authenticity of Christian books as said by Chidiac.²³¹ At the same time it may be noted that to interpret on basis of explicit text is not a 'religious' principle rather it is a rational and common understanding.

²³⁰ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, pp. 245, 246, 249, 250, 251, 252.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 59.

Taking few more examples of interpretation where various textual implications played its role we have the verse where Jews wanted to stone Jesus on his claim of being god. Al-Ghazālī's interpretation is based on the wording of text itself, as he says, 'it is the wording of Jesus which proves that he took it in a metaphorical manner as he stated that it is written in your Law that God said, 'you are gods'.²³² Further al-Ghazālī inferred that in reality you are not gods but the word god has been applied to you because of 'al-kalimah' and we all share in that. From the same verse prophet hood of Jesus is inferred as well because although all share the same status due to al-kalimah or the message of God but Jesus is exalted above all by 'choosing him' as the text says, 'as for me, God chose me and sent me into the world'.²³³ Thus, this verse which is one of the key verses for the divinity of Jesus for Christians has been proved otherwise by al-Ghazālī. Mistake committed by Christians is that they read the verse plainly whereas according to al-Ghazālī its literal sense is impossible. There are linguistic indicators which prohibit the plain reading and due to that it must be interpreted. Further within text there are signs pointing towards certain meanings, which according to al-Ghazālī are the correct criteria to understand the text, in other words text is itself a guide towards its correct reading. Therefore this verse is not telling the divinity of Jesus but is telling about his humanity and the elevated status due to prophet hood. Moreover, divinity of Jesus as deduced by Christians from this verse parallels *mafhūm al-mukhalafah* or the divergent meaning.²³⁴ But in it there are certain conditions which must be taken care of, most important among them is that the meaning arrived at should be in harmony with the overall text.²³⁵ In al-Ghazālī's opinion if divinity of Jesus is the valid interpretation then it opposes the metaphorical expressions present in

²³² Ibid., pp. 244-245.

²³³ Ibid., pp. 244-246.

²³⁴ For detail on divergent meaning see al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, vol. 2, pp. 191-210.

²³⁵ See M. Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p. 127.

the text, in that case Jesus would be blamed of misguidance therefore such interpretation cannot be taken as the correct one.²³⁶

Another example is the verse of John which says, 'since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent'.²³⁷ The verse is explicitly stating, according to al-Ghazālī, humanity of Jesus. In it the words 'eternal life' are vital as they explain true meaning of the verse. In addition the explanation of 'eternal life' is present within the text that it is the knowledge of 'only true God' and 'Jesus Christ whom you have sent'. So true God is only one God and Jesus is his messenger.²³⁸ Further the verse also clearly states the prophet hood for *massih* and this title among Christians is applied on the combination of *lāhūt* and *nasūt*. To avoid it Christians interpreted it that *massih* here is for the human aspect only of Jesus. This according to al-Ghazālī goes against the customary understanding of Christians, and from the conditions of *mafḥūm al-mukhalafah* is that it must not be against the common understanding.²³⁹ Giving an example of it al-Ghazālī mentions that it is like saying 'I saw ink and the intention is the bottle as the two are distinct from each other'.²⁴⁰

Third example is of *al-dalālah al-ma'nā* in this regard, in the verse of John it comes, 'Philip said to him, Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied. Jesus said to him, have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of

²³⁶ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 246.

²³⁷ John 17:2-3.

²³⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 260.

²³⁹ See M. Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p. 126.

²⁴⁰ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 260.

the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father'.²⁴¹ It is one of the crucial passages of divinity of Jesus according to Christians and al-Ghazālī from its very wordings proves the exact opposite of it. As stated in the passage disciples requested Jesus to show them God, his answer was, 'whoever has seen me has seen the Father'. From it al-Ghazālī inferred that it is diversion of attention, as seeing God in this world is not possible so he switched to another aspect of knowing God, that is towards himself as being a prophet he represented God on earth and to know him is to know God.²⁴² To clarify it Jesus explained it as, 'The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own', to strengthen it further Jesus says, 'but the Father who dwells in me does his works', so whatever comes from Jesus, speech or actions like miracles, is coming from God as he is telling about God.²⁴³ Whereas divinity of Jesus which Christians understood from it, Jesus himself denied it by saying, 'Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these.' If Jesus is God then the verse leads to absurdity for man can never be better than God, further it is clarified by, 'because I am going to the Father', al-Ghazālī questions that if he was himself Father or God how could he say I am going to Father. It is unthinkable for someone for example Zaīd to say that I am going to Zaīd.²⁴⁴ In his view the confusion among Christians is in the words, 'Do you not believe that I am in Father and the Father is in me?', here the unity is one of order and of will i.e. Jesus' action and will is what God wants from him, which Jesus affirmed by saying, 'the words that I say to you I do not speak on my own'.²⁴⁵ Thus al-Ghazālī proved that the clear implication and the meaning of the text tell that Jesus is not God. With these few examples it is clear that the text of John carries within it

²⁴¹ John 14:8-12.

²⁴² See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 306.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 307.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

implications which guide and help in correct reading of it. Christians, according to al-Ghazālī, did not follow the proper method of approaching the text therefore they erred in their interpretations. Apart from textual implications there is another aspect in al-ta'wil from language side is the contextual and historical perspective of the words as will be clear from what follows.

Contextual and Historical Approach

A text which has traveled long and has passed through generations and cultures the task of its interpretation is manifold. In such an enterprise internal as well as external aspects of the text both are important. What has been said above is related to the internal aspect, whereas context and the history of words are the external factors.

Contextual approach here means to put the words in their original context in order to outline the intended meaning in its religious and social scenario, moreover to look in the development of its meaning historically. Al-Ghazālī used contextual and historical method not only for arriving at the correct meaning of the text but for differentiating between the meanings in the early age i.e. Jesus with his audience and the later generations, so it was twofold task for him.

Taking the two pairs, as an example, of 'god', 'rabb' and 'father', 'son' which al-Ghazālī studied contextually and historically. His argument is that these words when looked in their historical and contextual scenario gave different meaning as compared to what later Christians understood. For him two things are evident; firstly their use goes back to Judaism and secondly they were commonly used with a wide range of meanings.

Starting with the first pair which falls under *mushtarak* has more than one meaning. Al-Ghazālī mentioned few verses where Jews used the word 'god' for people other than God, from these verses are what came in Exodus, 'The Lord said to Moses, See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.'²⁴⁶ And

²⁴⁶ Exodus 7:1.

in John where Jesus reminded Jews by saying, 'is it not written in your law, I said, you are gods?'²⁴⁷ So historically the word was commonly used. Further al-Ghazālī looked for its meanings among Jews and the early Christians. It was used both literally and metaphorically, regardless that it was used for the true deity or not. In literal usage, as in the above verse Moses was made god of Pharaoh.²⁴⁸ In metaphorical sense it conveyed sanctity and glory²⁴⁹ as Jesus said, 'if he called them gods, unto to whom the word of God came'. Similarly the word 'rabb' has more than one meaning, it was used for God and for lords or kings as well.²⁵⁰

With this al-Ghazālī concluded that 'god' and 'rabb' were in common usage among Jews and early Christians and its meaning was not limited to one particular understanding. To prove it he mentioned Paul's saying, 'there is no God but one. Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist'.²⁵¹ There are clear and pronounced indications of what al-Ghazālī wanted to prove. Paul explicitly stated that 'god' and 'lord' are used for God and gods as well, but differentiated between the two by qualifying God with the act of creation by saying, 'from whom are all things and for whom we exist'. Then he praised God with oneness with the statement, 'there is no God but one', and denied the attribute of divinity from anyone else by saying, 'there is no God but one'. As for Jesus he used the title 'lord' in the meaning of king with whom all the power lies but without the attribute of divinity.²⁵² Thus it makes clear that these words were used in different meanings in the times of Jesus and it was in later generations' age that they took the literal meaning as the only true meaning.

²⁴⁷ John 10:34.

²⁴⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 284.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

²⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 8: 4-6.

²⁵² See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 285.

The other pair is of the words 'father' and 'son' here too al-Ghazālī proves that these words had various meanings and people were accustomed with them in the times of Jesus and prior to him. For that he takes certain passages from Jewish and Christian scriptures like, 'Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, Let my son go that he may worship me. But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son'.²⁵³ And in Psalms it came, 'I say, you are gods, children of the Most High, all of you'.²⁵⁴ Even Jesus used these words for himself and for others, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'.²⁵⁵ And in Luke it is used only for others, 'lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful'.²⁵⁶ From these verses it is clear that the words 'father' and 'son' were known terms and were commonly used for God and for people as well.

As for their figurative usages it is said by John, 'Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God'.²⁵⁷ Taking in consideration the historical and the contextual meaning al-Ghazālī commented on the figurative relation of 'father' and 'son' as understood by John, that father stands for the feelings of care, mercy and love for the child, and he always wants the good for child and to protect him from any harm. And the 'son' stands for respect, honor and esteem for the father, and fulfils whatever commanded by the father.²⁵⁸ This relation al-Ghazālī compared with the relation of God and prophets. God is caring and merciful for his prophets like father, similarly prophets like sons show respect and honor for God and exalt him high. Due to the similarity present in this relation that 'father' was used for God and 'son' for Jesus. Commenting on it al-Ghazālī pointed it out that Christians commonly call their priest 'our father', it is due to respect they raise him to the status of father otherwise he

²⁵³ Exodus 4:22-23.

²⁵⁴ Psalms 82: 6.

²⁵⁵ John 20:17.

²⁵⁶ Luke 6:35-36.

²⁵⁷ 1 John 5:1.

²⁵⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, pp. 287-288.

is not their biological father, in similar sense Jesus used the word 'father' for God.²⁵⁹ Al-Ghazālī further proves it from the statement of Psalms which says, 'As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him'.²⁶⁰ Thus, for al-Ghazālī for the correct understanding of the text the words must be looked in their historical and contextual background particularly it is important for the ancient documents. With the passage of time the words develop new meanings which might be foreign for the late generations altogether and in that case possibility of misunderstanding the text and its wrong interpretation are great. To avoid such mistakes it is important to know their meaning among early users. Another step taken by al-Ghazālī in this regard is exploring the meanings in old languages. For few significant terms he referred to their meanings and usage in Hebrew and Coptic languages. In the process of translation the sense of words is damaged to some extent and to recover that it is essential to go back to the original text. Although al-Ghazālī was restricted to few terms and his work was not extensive as is down in the modern age but it is a noteworthy methodology in interpretation.

Concluding the above discussion it is clear that in interpretation of John al-Ghazālī followed the method developed in *uṣūl* for the understanding of the religious text. In it the wordings of the text play a vital role, they help in differentiating between *majāz* and *haqīqī* divisions further *al-dalālah* which is textual implications guide to the true sense of the text. Keeping in view the requirements of Christian text and their religion al-Ghazālī added to above method historical, contextual and the meanings in ancient languages for words. With these additions in the methodology of *uṣūlī* he was able to encompass various aspects of linguistic interpretation and this turns his interpretation unprecedented.

Bultmann and the Interpretation of Mythical Language

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 288-289.

²⁶⁰ Psalms 103:13.

For al-Ghazālī and Bultmann language of John demands interpretation and cannot be taken literally. However its interpretation by al-Ghazālī varies widely from that of Bultmann, for al-Ghazālī as stated above it is the presence of indicators within the text which prohibits the literal meaning and demands its diversion from literal to non-literal one. In Bultmann's opinion it is not the text but the reading of the modern man which imposes interpretation. Moreover, according to al-Ghazālī the textual indicators are wording of the text, which were misinterpreted by the later generations, on the other hand for Bultmann the mythical language was borrowed by John from the prevailing culture of Hellenism and Judaism and within the frame of this language the ideas of Jesus were presented. And behind the mythical worldview of the gospel, John presents his radical understanding of Jesus' message which needs interpretation.

Generally, according to Bultmann the worldview of the New Testament is mythical which presents Jesus as a man born of virgin mother, or as one who died on the cross for the redemption of sins for others or who after his death came to life on the third day and ascended to the skies. This mythical picture is contrary to the modern scientific worldview therefore it is impossible for the modern man to have faith on it, this language requires interpretation.

Coming to John the mythical language in it, for Bultmann as stated already is a borrowed language from the Hellenistic culture and from the Jewish surroundings, through this language John discusses the place of man in the cosmos and his encounter with God and with Jesus. In his relationship with God and Jesus, man comes across various forces of truth and evil. The way man reacts to them and chooses his path, is the central themes of John, which is represented in mythical language or in the form of units of darkness, light or life and death or bread and vine.

In Johannine thought, and for St. Paul too the mythical language of the 'only begotten'²⁶¹ Son and the wickedness of the world,²⁶² stand as opposed to each other.

²⁶¹ John 3:16; 1 John 4:9, 14.

The world is the world of man and is evil, which can be saved only through the 'Son'. Thus, world stands against God and would be lost if judged, it is saved only through the 'Son'. These two opposites God and the world are elaborated through various contrasting concepts, which appear in mythical terminology. However, in reality it is the philosophy of human existence and freedom, as stated by Bultmann, that 'the cosmological dualism of Gnosticism has become in John a dualism of decision'.²⁶³ And its interpretation in John according to Bultmann, while using the method of form criticism is as follows:

The essence of the cosmos or the world is, 'it (the light) was in the world, and the world came into being through it, yet the world did not recognize it (the Logos)',²⁶⁴ Bultmann reads this verse in the light of another verse, 'the light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not grasped it',²⁶⁵ which means that the essence of the world is darkness, darkness is not a shadow lying upon it but it is its own nature, as depicted in the verse, 'the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light'.²⁶⁶ From this it follows that man is blind to know or to acknowledge it,²⁶⁷ and that the nature of the world is falsehood as against Jesus who is witness to truth,²⁶⁸ or brings truth,²⁶⁹ and grace.²⁷⁰ Therefore Jesus accuses Jews of being devil as they refuse to follow the truth;²⁷¹ they are liars²⁷² and are followers of falsehood. Bultmann's interpretation of these contrasting forces of John is that darkness with falsehood forms bondage or they are the evil forces to which the world has fallen. This state of fallenness is expressed as sin, as opposing to it is truth, light and grace or the word of Jesus which

²⁶² 1 John 5:19.

²⁶³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p.21.

²⁶⁴ John 1:10.

²⁶⁵ John 1:5.

²⁶⁶ John 3:19.

²⁶⁷ John 9:39; 12:40; 1 John 2:11.

²⁶⁸ John 18:37.

²⁶⁹ John 17:17.

²⁷⁰ John 1:17.

²⁷¹ John 8:43.

²⁷² 1 John 2:22.

promises freedom from the bondage. In John's mythical language these contrasting forces are expressed as to love darkness more than light is evil,²⁷³ to be blind means to remain in sin,²⁷⁴ this is the state of death to which the world is inflicted, and it is through Jesus that death can be overcome,²⁷⁵ with the word of Jesus dead are resurrected,²⁷⁶ or where Jesus is being symbolized as water and bread of life,²⁷⁷ or as light of life,²⁷⁸ or life itself.²⁷⁹

According to Bultmann, John borrowed the mythical expressions for the contrasting forces of light and darkness, truth and falsehood, life and death, bondage and freedom from Gnostic dualism but he gave them his own understanding particularly in relation to creation of the world. For John, world is a creation of God and everything was created by the word, and the word is life and light for men. Bultmann relates these forces and interprets John's perception in a way that the process of world's creation and the existence of man are presented as two opposing forces, standing against each other in a contrast. Within this opposition, light is the phenomenon of guidance, it is through it that man finds his way and can orient himself about his surroundings. The light mentioned by John is the true light,²⁸⁰ not the literal one rather the one which illumines the life of man and shows him the way to achieve self understanding and assurance. As contrary to it, is darkness, which is shutting oneself, to be away from God, or not to have the self understanding. This is revolt against God, against truth, in other words is falsehood. Further, this falsehood is opposite to truth, here Bultmann

²⁷³ John 3:19.

²⁷⁴ John 9:41.

²⁷⁵ John 5:24.

²⁷⁶ John 5:25.

²⁷⁷ John 4:10; 6:27.

²⁷⁸ John 8:12.

²⁷⁹ John 11:25; 14:6.

²⁸⁰ See John 1:9; 1 John 2:8.

equates truth with the reality of God, therefore when Jesus tells the truth²⁸¹ or the spirit guides into truth²⁸² is in fact guides into the reality of God. As stated by him, "And Jesus does not merely tell the truth but also is the truth."²⁸³ So truth is not the teaching about God transmitted by Jesus but is God's very reality revealing itself-occurring!-in Jesus".²⁸⁴

As Jesus is the truth, it is interpreted by Bultmann that whoever has seen him i.e. Jesus has seen the Father,²⁸⁵ and that the Father is in him and works through him.²⁸⁶

Moreover, as Jesus is truth he is 'the life' also,²⁸⁷ and being word incarnate he is full of 'grace' and 'truth',²⁸⁸ and it is in him that God's reality encounters man. As stated, truth is the reality of God who is the only true reality and denial of it is the 'death' or to fall into the unreal. In the light of this Bultmann interprets the verse, 'and this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent',²⁸⁹ here life and eternal life are used interchangeably by John in Bultmann's opinion, which means openness to God and to him who makes God manifest.

Conversely, to turn away from truth means to turn away simultaneously from life and from reality, which is death. In his revolt man still remains a creation of God; therefore man has to choose either to be from God or from the falsehood. To be from God is reality and to be from the world is unreality which in mythical language of John comes in opposing terms as, 'to be of God' or 'to be of the world'; 'to be born of God',²⁹⁰ 'from above',²⁹¹ 'of the spirit',²⁹² or 'to be born of the flesh'.²⁹³ It is through these

²⁸¹ John 8:45.

²⁸² John 16:13.

²⁸³ John 14:6.

²⁸⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 19.

²⁸⁵ John 14:9.

²⁸⁶ John 14:10.

²⁸⁷ John 14:6.

²⁸⁸ John 1:14.

²⁸⁹ John 17:3.

²⁹⁰ John 1:13; 1 John 3:9; 4:7.

²⁹¹ John 3:3.

²⁹² John 3:6.

opposing forces, for Bultmann, that the idea of bondage or freedom is expressed. Bondage is to surrender oneself to the forces of darkness, world or sin and freedom is to acknowledge and to open oneself to the truth and reality. Behind the idea of bondage and freedom is the search for human existence or for life as eternal life, which is gained through true understanding of the self. It is the knowledge or the 'light' which illumines the path through which freedom is achieved. Thus for Bultmann the mythical terminology of John which is taken from Gnosticism is in fact conveying double meaning. It is the philosophy of human existence where man has to take decision to choose between the paths, of God or to be alienated from Him.

As already stated Bultmann in linguistic interpretation takes the mythical aspect of the language only, for him the figurative expressions fall under mythical language. Here Bultmann differs from al-Ghazālī, as for al-Ghazālī the figurative expressions are the forms of language and its interpretation must be according to its rules. For Bultmann not the language rules but the mythical expressions are to be interpreted existentially with the study of forms to recognize the development of thought.

Faith, which is one of the main themes of John, is articulated, according to Bultmann, in various figurative expressions. Its importance is clear from the verses like, 'that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name',²⁹⁴ God sent his 'only Son' so 'that whoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life',²⁹⁵ and those 'who believe in his name' the Incarnate One gave the 'power to become children of God'.²⁹⁶ Some other figurative conveying the same idea are to 'come' to Jesus means to believe in him,²⁹⁷ to 'follow' as the 'light of this world' also means to 'believe' in him,²⁹⁸ or to 'drink' of the 'water' he bestows,²⁹⁹

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ John 20:31.

²⁹⁵ John 3: 16.

²⁹⁶ John 1:12.

²⁹⁷ John 5:40; 6:37.

²⁹⁸ John 8:12.

²⁹⁹ John 4:13; 6:35.

or to 'accept' and 'receive' him,³⁰⁰ or to 'love' him.³⁰¹ Further in Bultmann's opinion John remained within Christian understanding in his concept of faith. Believe or faith for John is to have faith in Jesus in his person or words and in his works at the same time, the two are identical therefore to say to 'believe him' and to 'believe in him' are identical for John. In Bultmann's words,

"It is not as if one first have to believe him, trust him, in order that one might believe in him, but that one ought to believe him, and in so trusting him is in fact believing in him; one can do neither without doing both. Thus it becomes clear that in the proclaimed word the Proclaimer himself is present, acting. This unity is what John is expressing in this usage: 'to reject him' and 'not to receive his words' are identical".³⁰²

With this concept of faith where the words and works of Jesus or the proclaimer and the proclaimed are identical, so believe in Jesus is same as to in his words or his works.³⁰³ Further, Bultmann interprets 'hearing' and 'seeing' of Jesus in relation to faith. Both 'hearing' and 'seeing' are parallel to believe and are used as alternate expressions in John,³⁰⁴ that is 'hear' and 'believe' and also 'see' and 'believe' are used jointly. To 'hear' means to 'hear and keep'³⁰⁵ and not only mere perception, rejection of Jews to have faith was due to their incapacity to 'hear',³⁰⁶ similarly the phenomenon of 'seeing' being related to faith is not seeing of visible worldly things but is a inner perception of invisible things. Due to this inner perception or 'sight' one can recognize Jesus as the Son of God Incarnate, 'and we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the savior of the world'.³⁰⁷ Consequently faith is related to historical Jesus, to know him and to believe on him is to know the truth and reality. In

³⁰⁰ John 1:12; 5:43.

³⁰¹ John 8:12; 14:15.

³⁰² Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 71.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ John 5:37; 8:38.

³⁰⁵ John 12:47.

³⁰⁶ John 8:45.

³⁰⁷ 1 John 4:14.

Bultmann's view this understanding of sight is conveyed in the verse where Philip requested Jesus to show them the Father, 'lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied', and Jesus' answer was, 'have I been with you so long, and you have not yet come to know me, Philip? He who has once seen me thenceforth sees the Father'.³⁰⁸ Similarly the verse, 'and we beheld his glory'³⁰⁹ here 'beheld' is the perception which is based on faith and not only to see or to be eye witness in sense of historical inquiry for Jesus. Further Bultmann equates sight with knowledge as 'seeing' is the act of faith so knowledge and seeing are used alternatively in John,³¹⁰ therefore faith is genuine only when it is based on knowledge that is the faith which is abiding or keeping, as expressed by John, abiding in the Revealer himself,³¹¹ abiding in God,³¹² abiding in the light,³¹³ in love,³¹⁴ and abiding of his words in the believers.³¹⁵ Although faith and knowledge are counterpart but they come through Jesus only, which is expressed in mythical way as 'if you abide in my word you shall know',³¹⁶ or in the unity of Father and Jesus as it comes, 'Father is in me and I in the Father',³¹⁷ or 'in that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I in you',³¹⁸ and also, 'the glory which thou hast given me I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into unity'.³¹⁹ Thus, it is the unity of faith and knowledge which comes from God through Jesus. Apart from the term 'unity', it is also expressed as 'glory' or 'eternal life' which Jesus gave it to his

³⁰⁸ John 14:8; 12:45.

³⁰⁹ John 1:14.

³¹⁰ John 14:7, 9, 17; 1 John 3:6.

³¹¹ John 15:4-7; 1 John 2:6, 27.

³¹² 1 John 4:13, 15.

³¹³ 1 John 2:10.

³¹⁴ John 15:9; 1 John 4:16.

³¹⁵ John 15:7; 1 John 2:24.

³¹⁶ John 8:30.

³¹⁷ John 10:38.

³¹⁸ John 14:20.

³¹⁹ John 17:22.

followers, 'I have glorified myself in them',³²⁰ and, 'the glory which thou hast given me I have given to them',³²¹ the glory is the knowledge which in faith is given to the believer, and the eternal life is, 'to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent'.³²² The knowledge here is the knowledge of God and Jesus, and each can be known only through the other. Faith and knowledge are identical, as stated by Bultmann, 'Jesus' relation to God is never called 'believing' but always 'knowing'. But all human knowing of God must always be a believing knowledge'.³²³ As for the content of faith which is at the same time knowledge, Bultmann interprets it in terms of human existence. Important thing to note here is that Bultmann differentiates between the thought John and Paul on faith, for Paul according to him faith is the antithesis 'faith-works of the law' which is not so for John.³²⁴ So the Jewish concept that man can earn righteousness by his own works is negated instead John addresses to man's longing for life and attacks the false understanding of it. Man thinks that he knows the world or has it but that is not true, he is in darkness, blind or it is death. And he thinks he knows God but the true God, the true light, the true bread of life are all unknown to him, the world is a liar it does not know Jesus or does not have faith in the true life.³²⁵ Here as faith and knowledge are equated by Bultmann, so to know Jesus is to have faith in him and consequently it is to know or to have faith in God. Further, faith here stands in sharp contrast to world, perhaps it is the antithesis of faith as faith was antithesis of law in Pauline thought in Bultmann's view. It seems that it is the dialectical glasses through which Bultmann is evaluating Pauline or John's thought. In Paul's thought it is the work which is replaced by world for John. Without going in detail that whether work can be replaced by world as an antithesis of faith, it must be noted that dialectical philosophy is very much immersed in modern rationalism, where

³²⁰ John 17:10.

³²¹ John 17:22.

³²² John 17:3.

³²³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 74.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

unaided human reason is the tool to judge the truth of anything. Here faith is being brought down to this world and is being judged by human reason which is very much opposite of al-Ghazālī's thought. For al-Ghazālī instead of bring down faith the other way is taken that is man is being elevated up to perceive the true knowledge. Thus, the assumptions in al-Ghazālī and Bultmann's thought to understand John are absolutely contrary and as a result of it their interpretation disagrees. Coming back to Bultmann's existential interpretation for the mythical language of faith is that it is the knowledge through which man can overcome the world, the evil and the sin. As the world is in darkness and stands in opposition to faith so the demand of faith is that it must surrender its wrong understanding of itself. Self security which the world has erected around itself must be ruined down and instead to turn to life or the true light as brought by Jesus. Thus, 'faith is turning away from the world, the act of desecularization, the act of all seeming security'.³²⁶ Turning away from world at the same time does not mean to leave the world in speculative or mystical meditation; it is to live into the world and not out of it, in the sense of putting aside all human standards. Still it is unlike Gnostic dualism, for John it is dualism of decision where man has to take the decision to be of this world or to be of God, it is a decision against the world. This existential message is being conveyed in mythical language in John in the wordings of life, eternal life, glory, darkness, bread of life and so forth. It may be noted from what has been said above that the main task of Bultmann is interpretation of the text and language is the basic component in it. But he has not proposed any method of its interpretation based on language rules. Instead a philosophical interpretation is presented, thus it is conceptual interpretation and not linguistic although the foundations of his interpretation is based on language or mythical expressions. The only thing he does is detecting the meanings of the words either by going back to the ancient languages or the historical context but in both cases the

³²⁶ Ibid.

meanings is not what the words stands for in the text rather it is existential imposition on them. It is what the word means in existential setting, this naturally cuts the relation between the author and the text and in place the assumptions present in the mind of interpreter are forced in the mouth of the author. And the interpreter approaches the text with certain pre-suppositions, which are the outcome of the age of the interpreter. Now modern man as well is having a particular mindset and whatever is against that, is termed 'myth' by him. For this reason whatever is not according to the modern worldview is mythical in the gospels and needs interpretation. Unlike al-Ghazālī as here we find a methodology based on language rules to understand and interpret the text. This automatically keeps the meaning within the text and as intended by the author. While comparing majāz and myth a common element in them is that language is the outer covering and beneath it the real meaning hidden, or in other words they are pointing to something else. So they both converge on differentiating between outer and inner aspect for the text. But they differ in their method and assumptions of approaching the meaning or the inner aspect of the text. In majāz although there is a crossing from the outer to the inner aspect but the outer side has its importance that it is only through it that the inner can be known unlike myth where the outer is put aside altogether. Thus, language and its governing rules play a key role in majāz which is absent in myth. Besides, the other major difference is in their method of determining the meaning of the inner side. What the text means in majāz the outer aspect or the language is important so it is through language and its rules that the meaning is recognized. Same is not the case in myth, here not the language but the meaning is brought in from outside. Still they again agree on that the text is historically and socially fixed and takes its ideas and perceptions from the existing cultures but they disagree on interpreting these ideas.

THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION AND AL-GHAZĀLĪ³²⁷

Al-Ghazālī is one of the great figures of al-kalām therefore it is unthinkable that his kalāmī inclinations did not play their due role in his refutation of Christian faith. The basic structure of *al-Radd* to a great extent is theological but at the same time there is less attention paid on conventional theological arguments presented by Muslim theologians in his age. As the aim and spirit of al-kalām is to elaborate faith through reason so al-Ghazālī took this principle to elaborate Christian faith. Perhaps the rationale of avoiding conventional arguments is to establish common grounds in the two faiths and to convey his point of view in a better way. Prominent theological elements can be summarized as 'common faith', theological arguments and the Biblical theological context.

Common Faith

Muslims in their study of other religions followed the principles laid down by the Holy Qur'ān, one of them is oneness of faith, "The Messenger believes in what was sent down to him from his Lord, and the believers; each one believes in God and His angels, and in His Books and His Messengers; we make no division between any one of His Messengers. They say, we hear and obey." (2:285)

The pillars of faith mentioned in the verse are the common heritage of believers.

Another principle related to the manner of dialogue with ahl al-kitāb is, "Say: People of the Book! Come now to a word common between us and you, that we serve none but God, and that we associate not aught with Him, and do not some of us take others as lords apart from God." (3:64).

It is in the light of Qur'ānic teachings that al-Ghazālī discussed the common nature of faith in two religions. From the common faith is belief in one God and the prophet hood of Jesus. These two pillars of faith in the words of John are, 'to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life that they may know you, the

³²⁷ Although theology is not the accurate translation of *al-kalām* but in the absence of exact parallel term and for the sake of convenience theology will be used here.

only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.³²⁸ Other than it is believe in Salvation and Hereafter.³²⁹ The first two are related to divinity of Jesus therefore are discussed in detail by al-Ghazālī. To rely on the Qur'ānic principles for the interpretation of Christian books might be objectionable but in case of Abrahamic faiths it is justified because of sharp similarities present in them.

In the concept of God al-Ghazālī concentrated on the attributes of God, His relation with man and particularly with prophets. In attributes of God first of all the question arises how to know them? In other words what rules we would use in knowing and determining the divine attributes? In al-Ghazālī's opinion Christians erred in essentials for gaining knowledge about divine attributes. The knowledge about God must be gained through *al-barāhīn al-yaqīniyyah* or through explicit text.³³⁰ By the former he means assured and indisputable proof which leaves no place for doubt and the latter is the clear and obvious wordings of the text, again which is above doubt.³³¹ Only from reliable proofs knowledge of God and His attributes can be gained unlike Christians who relied on uncertain and disputable proofs which has weaken the whole structure, as stated by him 'da'īfah al-mabānī wāhīah al-quwah'.³³² Due to irrational construction of faith that al-Ghazālī repeatedly reminds them of place of reason and proper understanding in faith.³³³

From the weak and uncertain proofs are *iḥtamālāt* or assumptions in faith. Most clear example of it is divinity of Jesus which is not based on assured proofs but on assumptions, whereas his human conditions are very obvious for example his sense of hunger and pain.³³⁴ Because of these assumptions they are confused about the concept

³²⁸ John 17:2-3.

³²⁹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamil*, p. 286.

³³⁰ Ibid., p. 258.

³³¹ Al-Ghazālī discussed in detail *al-barāhīn al-yaqīniyyah* in *Mi'yār al-'Ilm*, pp. 245-247; *al-Mustafā*, vol. 1, pp. 43-49; *Muhk al-Nazar*, as discussed in these books *Ilm al-yaqīn* is gained through reason, internal senses, external senses, experience, *tawātūr*, *wahmiāt* and known facts.

³³² See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamil*, p. 235.

³³³ Ibid., pp. 255,

³³⁴ Ibid., p.255.

of God and His attributes that even the clear text on it has been misinterpreted. Thus, the problem here goes back to wrong foundations instead of assumptions if they had relied on clear and explicit text they must have realized the mistake.

The attributes of God mentioned in Christian scriptures are that He is transcendental, it comes in Matthew, 'for you have one Father—the one in heaven'.³³⁵ He is one, 'and this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God'³³⁶ and, 'there is no God but one.'³³⁷ No one is equal to Him, as it is said, 'yet for us there is one God, the father'.³³⁸ He cannot be seen, it comes in John, 'whoever has seen me seen the Father',³³⁹ is a reply of Jesus to his disciples when they asked to show them God.³⁴⁰ About His majesty and glory, 'I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him',³⁴¹ He bestows, creates and sustains all, 'For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God'.³⁴² And, 'yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist'.³⁴³ He guides and protects, 'Holy Father, protect them in your name'³⁴⁴ He is the Omniscient, 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father',³⁴⁵ and also, 'But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory'.³⁴⁶ It is clear from these verses that God in Christianity is one with all transcendental qualities; He is the creator, sustainer, omnipresent, omniscient, all-Powerful, and eternal.

³³⁵ Matthew 23:9.

³³⁶ John 17:3.

³³⁷ 1 Corinthians 8:4.

³³⁸ Ibid. 6.

³³⁹ John 14:9.

³⁴⁰ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 306.

³⁴¹ Ephesians 1:17.

³⁴² Hebrews 3:4.

³⁴³ 1 Corinthians 8:6.

³⁴⁴ John 17:11.

³⁴⁵ Mark 13:32.

³⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:7.

About His relation with man it comes, 'Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one',³⁴⁷ and , 'The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one'.³⁴⁸ Oneness or unity in these verses, according to al-Ghazālī, is figurative and is pointing to the relationship which should be present between man and God. It is the unity of 'will' and complete submission of man to the will of God. In this relation man loses his own will, his desire and will subordinate the will of God.³⁴⁹ It is total submission to God which means obedience and worship is for God alone.

In prophethood, a second important pillar of faith, here al-Ghazālī restricted the discussion on the prophet hood of Jesus. The verses mentioned about his prophet hood are, 'and Jesus Christ whom you have sent',³⁵⁰ and 'for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak'.³⁵¹ Prophets are the chosen ones and have high status as it is said, 'the Father has sanctified and sent into the world'³⁵² They are trustworthy and faithful, 'was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house'.³⁵³ They are chosen for guidance and hidāyyah, 'by this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit'.³⁵⁴ Al-Ghazālī interpreted 'Spirit' as the teachings and hidāyyah which Jesus gave them and they were guided on the path of God.³⁵⁵ It also comes that his teachings are from God, 'for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak'.³⁵⁶ Prophets, and Jesus was among them, are human

³⁴⁷ John 17:11.

³⁴⁸ John 17:22.

³⁴⁹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamil*, pp. 245, 248, 250.

³⁵⁰ John 17:3.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 12:49.

³⁵² John 10:36; 17:22.

³⁵³ Hebrews 3:2.

³⁵⁴ 1 John 4:13.

³⁵⁵ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamil*, p. 253.

³⁵⁶ John 12:49.

beings as it comes, 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you',³⁵⁷ and, 'a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God'.³⁵⁸ Humanity of Jesus was emphasized by al-Ghazālī through human conditions like hunger, 'Jesus was hungry',³⁵⁹ lack of knowledge, 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father'³⁶⁰ and lack of power, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'³⁶¹

Further prophets are attested by God through miracles³⁶² in it God intervenes in the human world and the normal process of cause and effect is altered. Jesus performed many miracles like to resurrect the dead, to heal people, to restore the sight of blind and so forth. These acts were signs of his humanity and prophet hood which Christians misunderstood and elevated him to divine status. Other prophets too had miracles.

Comparing turning of stick by Moses with the resurrection of dead by Jesus the former is more astonishing as to give life to inanimate thing is greater than to bring a thing to its original condition.³⁶³ Moreover, Christians also believed that their prophets resurrected son of a widow, stopped sun from its movement or Moses parted the water, or his shinning white hand.³⁶⁴ So in al-Ghazālī's opinion in presence of these examples it cannot be concluded that miracles of Jesus proof his divinity rather they prove his humanity and that he was a prophet like other prophets.

Reason behind miracles as pointed by al-Ghazālī is that God supports His messengers with these acts; they are against the natural order of the things to proof the truth of

³⁵⁷ Acts 2:22.

³⁵⁸ John 8:40.

³⁵⁹ Mark 11:12.

³⁶⁰ Mark 13:32.

³⁶¹ Mark 15:34.

³⁶² *Mu'jizah* (miracle) is from 'ajz is an inability to perform an act and as defined by al-Jurjānī it is an unnatural act to prove the prophecy of a prophet, see al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, *Mu'jam Mufradāt al-Alfāz al-Qur'ān*; 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Jurjānī, *al-Ta'rifāt*.

³⁶³ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 239.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

prophets.³⁶⁵ Besides, miracles are from God so they show His majesty and power and not of man. Related to humanity of Jesus is the miracle of his birth through an unnatural process signifying his unique status which is not given due importance by Christians.³⁶⁶ His unnatural birth was from God and testify his humanity but was misinterpreted by Christians as sign of his divinity.

Relationship of prophets with God and with other people is grounded in obedience and submission. The message of God conveyed by them to people required acceptance and submission from people. Obedience to prophets is in fact obedience to God. Jesus was asking acceptance and submission to his message as a requirement of his office but it was interpreted wrongly by late Christians by elevating him to the status of God. These verses were taken by late Christians as the proofs of his divinity like, 'Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one',³⁶⁷ and, 'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one',³⁶⁸ Unity in these verses as interpreted by al-Ghazālī is the unity of will which results from total submission and obedience of man to the will of God. It is the level of 'abūdiyyah or servant hood attained by total submission. Here the will of man is merged in will of God that he likes what God wants and dislikes what He dislikes.³⁶⁹ It is the level of prophets and which they try to inculcate in their followers as clearly stated by Jesus. Al-Ghazālī compares it with the ḥatīth of the prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) where it is said that constant effort of man can make him so near to Allah that he becomes one with Him in all his actions, here the union

³⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 240.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 241.

³⁶⁷ John 17:11.

³⁶⁸ John 17:20-22.

³⁶⁹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamil*, p. 250.

in them is not the physical union but it is the union of will, that man's likes and dislikes are all according to what God wants.³⁷⁰ The verses mentioned above are giving the same meaning but are wrongly interpreted by Christians.

From above it can be concluded that foundation of the two religions is same and due to these commonalities that al-Ghazālī compared Christianity with Islam and proved that original teaching of Christianity are different from the late interpretations, and the real message of Jesus is best understood in the original teachings which is still present in their books but covered deeply under the interpretations imposed by later generations.

THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

‘Ilm al-Kalām broadly speaking is founded on rational approach in elaborating and evaluating faith. In it the evidence is taken from scripture and reason, as al-Ghazālī mentioned it in *al-Iqtisād*, that most authentic source to know religion is the narration of the prophet and reason,³⁷¹ as reason is a vital tool in understanding revelation.³⁷²

Thus proofs for faith are taken from these sources. Moreover, in the concept of divinity the nature of divine being and his attributes must be proved rationally, with clear demarcation between permissible and not permissible for the divine being. Another factor for al-Ghazālī to rely on kalām in his refutation is that Christians in divinity of Jesus compare and rationalize the union between God and Jesus with the philosophical concept of relation between soul and body. Philosophical interpretations from Christians required that the same tool of rationality must be employed. Here in theological interpretation proofs from the Christian books and then rational arguments would be discussed.

In scriptural studies al-Ghazālī selected the portions which are the proofs of divinity of Jesus according to Christians. For example the verse of John where Jews wanted to

³⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 245.

³⁷¹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fi al-‘Itiqād*, p. 2.

³⁷² Ibid.

stone Jesus on his claim of being God,³⁷³ as already discussed above it does not prove divinity of Jesus because the linguistic indicators prohibit the literal meaning. Even if the verse was a protection as claimed by Christians that too does not solve the problem as Jesus came for Salvation of people and fear cannot be ascribed to a liberator for all.³⁷⁴ Another verse is from Epistle of John where it comes, 'God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God'.³⁷⁵ Literal interpretation of the verse will lead to al-ḥulūl or incarnation of God not only in Jesus but in all who believe in him. And Christians do not believe in that.³⁷⁶

According to al-Ghazālī instead of having support from their books for union between God and Jesus there are verses which prove just the opposite. There are evidences from their books which clearly state difference in the two beings that is God and Jesus.

From them is what comes in Matthew, 'and call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah'.³⁷⁷ Here the difference in two beings is obvious; Jesus is a teacher on earth and God as father in heaven.³⁷⁸ Difference is not only limited to their beings but to their working as well, as mentioned in Matthew, 'yet not what I want but what you want'.³⁷⁹

Moreover, the scriptures narrate human conditions of Jesus which are strong proofs to negate his divinity. Apart from hunger, pain³⁸⁰ and lack of knowledge³⁸¹ as already discussed above, there is submission and subordination of Jesus to the will of God which denies his divinity,³⁸² 'Then Jesus looked up and said, Father, I thank you for

³⁷³ See John 10:30-36.

³⁷⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, pp. 246-247.

³⁷⁵ 1 John 4:15.

³⁷⁶ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, pp. 252-253.

³⁷⁷ Matthew 23:9-10.

³⁷⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, pp. 261-262.

³⁷⁹ Matthew 26:39.

³⁸⁰ Mark 11:12-13.

³⁸¹ Mark 13:32.

³⁸² See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, pp. 262, 280.

having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me'.³⁸³ Humble prayers and beseeching God is also against his divinity, as it comes, 'my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me'³⁸⁴ and, '*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?)'³⁸⁵ And asking God why He has forsaken him cannot be attributed to God.³⁸⁶ Similarly seeking protection for his disciples from the All Powerful is not the quality of God,³⁸⁷ 'protect them in your name that you have given me'.³⁸⁸

It also comes in their books that Jesus was a prophet with specific shari'ah or commandments to be followed, which again negates the concept of his divinity,³⁸⁹ as it comes in John, 'for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak'.³⁹⁰ For al-Ghazālī miracles of Jesus in their books further enhance his prophet hood and are not signs of his divinity as believed by Christians.³⁹¹ His disciples explicitly stated that the miracles were from God, 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you'.³⁹²

From above it is evident that the nature and attributes of God as mentioned in Christian books is that God is one, eternal, omnipresent, all powerful, with the attributes of glory and majesty. And Jesus was a prophet, a messenger, a creation with all the human conditions and was trustworthy. With this al-Ghazālī concluded that Christian books does not support their claim of divinity of Jesus.

³⁸³ John 11:41-42.

³⁸⁴ Matthew 26:39.

³⁸⁵ Mark 15:34.

³⁸⁶ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, pp. 262, 280.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

³⁸⁸ John 17:11.

³⁸⁹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, pp. 262, 281.

³⁹⁰ John 12:49.

³⁹¹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, pp. 239-240.

³⁹² Acts 2:22.

Rational arguments although are not directly linked with al-Ghazālī's interpretation of John but without them his overall theological interpretation would be incomplete therefore briefly these arguments are in what follows. Here al-Ghazālī is restricted to the issue of al-itihād with brief discussion of Trinity as compared to other Muslim theologians who gave more space to them.³⁹³

Christians in union believe that God created the human aspect of Jesus and then was united with him. This union resulted in a third existence different from the first two, a combination of God and man on the pattern of soul and body in man.³⁹⁴ There is no proof for it, according to al-Ghazālī, and is based on *zan* (conjecture), its irrationality in fact is evident.³⁹⁵ Its reality is not known even for Christians,³⁹⁶ whereas faith must be based on clear and solid proofs. As al-itihād is a combination so it is natural that in the process each part must be dependent on the other. Here in this case one part is God and the other man so in their combination God would be in need of man to form the unity, which is impossible.³⁹⁷ Another logical hindrance in it is the maintenance of all the qualities of the two in the third existence. These qualities are altogether distinct from each other i.e. of God and man, in what way to keep them in one entity, as believed by Christians.³⁹⁸ Further, it is also impossible because if God united with *nāsūt* (human aspect of Jesus) after creating it, it would result in a change for God. This change if it is *wājib al-wūjūd* (necessary existence) then it is impossible to attribute it to a created existence and if *mumkin al-wūjūd* (possible existence) then it cannot be attributed to God as all His attributes are eternal.³⁹⁹ Refuting the Christian objection that creation and within it the world would be impossible to attribute to God as that

³⁹³ See like Qāḍī Abdul Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, vol. 5, pp. 86-145; al-Bāqilānī, *al-Tamhīd*, pp. 78-96; al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil*, pp. 570-609.

³⁹⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, pp. 268-269.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.270.

would result in change. For al-Ghazālī creation is an eternal attribute of God with fore-knowledge of the time of creation so there is no change for God whereas in unity with nāsūt God is attributed with it after creation.⁴⁰⁰ While Christian clarification is based on the relation of body and soul, both has their own qualities and exist separately in one entity. The body is qualified by feelings, growth, change and decay whereas the soul with speech, thought and perception, still al-Ghazālī points that al-ḥaqīqah al-thālithah (third or distinct reality) is full God and full man at the same time with all the qualities of the two thus is impossible.⁴⁰¹

Three major sects of Christianity differ on their understanding of union and among them Jacobites and Malkites have similar concept as compared to Nestorians. For the former two union is not imtizāj wa ikhtilāt (mixing of the two)⁴⁰² but is a conceptual union whereas for the latter it is itihād fī mashi'ah (union of will).⁴⁰³ Conceptual union is that human hood of Jesus and God are two separate existences and they retain their distinct qualities and masīḥ represents these two realities where God is united with the general concept of man.⁴⁰⁴ This makes God dependent on man,⁴⁰⁵ which is already refuted. Secondly general concept of man does not have physical existence so Crucifixion would be for God only.⁴⁰⁶ Later on, al-itihād meant union with the specific man still as masīḥ is the reality of God so it is God who died on the cross,⁴⁰⁷ which is a very strange phenomenon, as commented by al-Ghazālī,⁴⁰⁸ and more strange that they maintain it as their faith.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 270-271.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 274.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. 275

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p. 281.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 275.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 276-277.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 276.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 278.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 279.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

For the third sect al-Ghazālī discussed the meaning of *mashī'ah*, if oneness of will is in the commandments and orders of God so Jesus is not an exception. All prophets obeyed God in it. And if it meant oneness of action that whatever God wants and acts is exactly what Jesus wanted and acted would be wrong. How could Jesus say on the cross that it is not his will but that of God? Or 'my God, my God why have you forsaken me'? This clearly differentiates between the *mashī'ah* of God and Jesus.⁴¹⁰ Thus, reason and scriptures does not support faith of union, so it remains to see al-Ghazālī's theological interpretation.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Al-Ghazālī in *al-ta'wīl* remained to a great extent within Biblical context only at few places he referred to non-Christian sources and that too for the sake of comparison. Biblical context means to explore divinity of Jesus as it was understood and conveyed in the sayings and interpretation of Jesus, his close disciples and the early generation. Prime source of knowledge, for al-Ghazālī, is the sayings and interpretations given by the lawgiver of a particular religion, through his narrations the details of the religion are to be grasped. In Christianity sayings and the interpretation of Jesus is most important, whereas Christians instead of it relied on the Greek philosophy. This is referred by al-Ghazālī as what was given by *al-mutashar'in* (lawgiver) and Christians did not pay heed to it.⁴¹¹ For this reason we find al-Ghazālī often mentions, '*al-mutashari'* interpreted it so',⁴¹² particularly in case of difficult passages. So from the six main verses five are the sayings of Jesus narrated by John and in other places too it is the sayings of Jesus which are focused most. As for difficult passages Jesus does not leave without clarifications, he interprets them himself. An example of it is the verse, 'Philip said to him, Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied. Jesus said to him, Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 281-282.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., p. 242.

⁴¹² Ibid., pp. 247, 248, 250, 255.

seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.⁴¹³

Before commenting on the verse al-Ghazālī pointed it out that Jesus (peace be upon him) took care to clarify himself every unclear statement made by him.⁴¹⁴ Then he interpreted in the light of what Jesus said. Thus when Jesus was asked by his disciples to show them God, he diverted their attention towards himself by saying, 'whoever has seen me has seen the father'. Commenting on it al-Ghazālī pointed that as it is impossible to see God in this world so Jesus directed their attention towards himself, being a prophet he represents God on earth. Jesus clarified it by saying, 'the words I say to you I do not speak on my own', more explanation of it is, 'but the Father who dwells in me does his works', thus every action and word is not from Jesus himself but from God, so Jesus clarified that he is prophet and conveying the message of God.⁴¹⁵

In Biblical context apart from the elaborations of Jesus, al-Ghazālī concentrated on John and Paul as the most reliable sources in Christianity with that he incorporated sayings of other disciples, and the Old Testament.

In this way al-Ghazālī tried to probe in the theological perception of Jesus and his disciples and in these sayings it is evident that divinity of Jesus was never claimed by Jesus or by his disciples rather he claimed to be a prophet of God and called people to believe him. Therefore, it was later age Christians who invented theology of their own

⁴¹³ John 14: 8-12.

⁴¹⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 306.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

and imposed it on Jesus and his disciples. In fact figurative expressions were misinterpreted as literal by late Christians. Whereas sayings of Jesus and his disciples provides enough proof that they interpreted them figuratively. In such expressions unification of will and action of God and man is stated which is attained by full submission to the will of God. According to al-Ghazālī figurative expressions of Jesus in Bible are justified because he was *ṣāhib al-shar‘iah* who had his own laws and regulations. And the words like ‘son’, ‘father’ and ‘god’ for man were used by Jews and Christians alike, or in other words it was the theological context of Jesus. The problem in his opinion arises with late generations when metaphor was turned in literal form. Al-Ghazālī here has followed his forerunners al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī, for them such expressions were in use among Jews in the times of Jesus. For al-Juwaynī it was allowed for them to call Jesus god or lord as he was guide towards righteousness.⁴¹⁶ But Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār being a rationalist rejects any such interpretation. For him to use metaphors of ‘son’ or ‘father’ to express the relationship of man and God is sheer absurdity, as there is no resemblance between the two.⁴¹⁷ From above it can be concluded that it was a debated issue that whether metaphors could be used for the relationship of God and Jesus in Bible and there were different opinions on it. Majority of the scholars accepted its presence but they differed for its theological interpretation, some either avoided it as al-Qāḍī⁴¹⁸ and al-Jāhīz⁴¹⁹ or opened the way for it as can be seen from the writings of al-Bāqillānī⁴²⁰ and al-Juwaynī.⁴²¹ Whereas al-Ghazālī not only accepted Biblical figurative language and interpreted it accordingly but he also gave it a theological legitimacy, by postulating that every *shar‘iah* has its own regulations and so is the case with Jesus. In this way al-Ghazālī is more sympathetic with Christians

⁴¹⁶ See al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmīl*, p. 608.

⁴¹⁷ See Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, vol., 5, p. 109.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁴¹⁹ See al-Jāhīz, *al-Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, p. 103.

⁴²⁰ See Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd*, p. 95.

⁴²¹ See al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmīl*, p. 608.

against the objections raised by Chidiac.⁴²² Still being sympathetic does not mean in any case to accept whatever interpreted by Christians rather it is after taking their sacred books as the source he interpreted their faith in its light. Another important factor in his theology which distinguishes him is that his theology is not pure rationalism, in it we find merging of reason with spirituality. Therefore his al-ta'wil is incomplete without incorporating the Sufi aspect in it but before that let us see Bultmann's views on it.

THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION AND BULTMANN

Bultmann is a modern age theologian, who called for the theological interpretation of the New Testament according to the demands of the modern man to make it meaningful for today. According to Bultmann theology of the New Testament emerged late with the early church with its proclamation or faith in Jesus Christ as the salvation bringer through death on cross and resurrection.⁴²³ Though message of Jesus is contained within theology but it is the aims and motives of the early church which gave it a proper shape and this process continued in Christian history. Coming to John, as interpreted by Bultmann in *Theology of the New Testament*, main themes discussed in it from the theological perspective are the divinity of Jesus, Incarnation, revelation, salvation, eschatology, miracles and the sacraments.

In John there are several passages which present Jesus as pre-existence divine being or as a son of God, for example, he is regarded as the 'life' who appeared in the world of death,⁴²⁴ or as 'light' who appeared in the darkness of the world,⁴²⁵ or was prior in time from John the Baptist,⁴²⁶ or from Abraham,⁴²⁷ or from the world itself,⁴²⁸ and was from

⁴²² See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 166.

⁴²³ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 3.

⁴²⁴ 1 John 1:2.

⁴²⁵ John 1:5; 3:19.

⁴²⁶ John 1:15, 30.

⁴²⁷ John 8:58.

⁴²⁸ John 17:5, 24.

the beginning.⁴²⁹ Moreover, the word which was with God from the beginning, became flesh in him,⁴³⁰ and came in the world which is created through him.⁴³¹ These and various other statements in Johannine writings are the problematic statements as when taken apparently lead to divinity of Jesus, or a being who was God and man at the same time. For Bultmann divinity of Jesus is not the intended meaning of John, though he uses mythological language but behind the myth John is presenting a different picture of Jesus. Jesus was a simple human being and a historical figure who conveyed the truth about human existence and about the encounter and relation with God. Divine qualities which were attributed to Jesus like that of pre-existence being or union of son and God, with miraculous acts and his fore-knowledge of certain happenings are not the signs of his divinity, according to Bultmann, rather they are misunderstood as John has borrowed the Gnostic and Jewish terminology but has presented these ideas in a paradoxical or double meaning.

For Bultmann, the statements which talk of Jesus as divine being in mythological language forms a unit of 'coming' and 'going' in John's thought and through this i.e. journey of coming and going he performs the task or the mission of teaching the message. In this process of 'coming' and 'going' Jesus is presented as not a being of this world but of another world that has been sent here to teach the message. As it comes in John, 'whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world',⁴³² and his sending is testified by his works,⁴³³ moreover his sending is to believe⁴³⁴ or to acknowledge⁴³⁵ the eternal life that is to, 'know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent'.⁴³⁶ Here according to Bultmann, John used 'Father' for God or simply 'he who

⁴²⁹ 1 John 2:13.

⁴³⁰ John 1:1, 14.

⁴³¹ John 1:9-11.

⁴³² John 10:36.

⁴³³ John 5:16.

⁴³⁴ John 6:29; 11:42; 17:8.

⁴³⁵ John 17:25.

⁴³⁶ John 17:3.

has sent' in the meaning of 'my commissioner the Father, or only 'my commissioner', consequently on it people confessed 'and we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his son as the Savior of the world',⁴³⁷ counterpart of 'sending' is his 'coming' or 'having come', which has been expressed in various statements, 'came into the world',⁴³⁸ or, 'came from the Father or the God',⁴³⁹ or simply 'has come',⁴⁴⁰ again his coming is to confess faith in him.⁴⁴¹ His 'coming' and to have faith on him, was denied by Jews.⁴⁴² Within the unit of 'coming' and 'sending' the expressions like he came down from heaven⁴⁴³, or will be ascended to it again,⁴⁴⁴ is in Bultmann's view are clear mythological formulations. Similarly his 'elevation',⁴⁴⁵ or 'glorification',⁴⁴⁶ or glorified as pre-existence with the Father,⁴⁴⁷ are mythological in nature, even the phrases where love of God is manifested through Jesus or his designation as the only son, 'in this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only son into the world, so that we might live through him',⁴⁴⁸ or 'for God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life',⁴⁴⁹ are mythological. According to Bultmann John used purposefully mythological statements in the units of 'coming' and 'going'. It is to convey that Jesus was sent to 'bear witness to the truth',⁴⁵⁰ or as 'light',⁴⁵¹ or who believes in him 'have life and have abundance',⁴⁵²

⁴³⁷ 1 John 4:14.

⁴³⁸ John 3:19; 9:39; 11:27; 12:46; 16:28; 18:37.

⁴³⁹ John 8:42; 13:3; 16:27, 30; 17:8.

⁴⁴⁰ John 5:43; 7:28; 8:14; 10:10; 12:47; 15:22.

⁴⁴¹ John 11:27.

⁴⁴² John 8:14.

⁴⁴³ John 3:13; 6:33, 38, 41.

⁴⁴⁴ John 6:62; 3:32.

⁴⁴⁵ John 3:14; 12:32, 34; 8:28.

⁴⁴⁶ John 12:23; 13:31; 17:1; 7:39; 12:16.

⁴⁴⁷ John 17:5, 24.

⁴⁴⁸ 1 John 4:9.

⁴⁴⁹ John 3:16.

⁴⁵⁰ John 18:37.

⁴⁵¹ John 12:46.

⁴⁵² John 10:10.

or have 'eternal life',⁴⁵³ or to get 'expiation from sins',⁴⁵⁴ or his sending was 'to save the world'.⁴⁵⁵ In fact to save the world is the main purpose of Jesus' 'sending' in the world, in other words he is the salvation bringer, to picture Jesus as 'the saviour of the world',⁴⁵⁶ he was called the Christ or messiah. As salvation bringer his coming is the eschatological event, or in other words the unit of his coming and going is presented as the judgment of the world, 'for judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind',⁴⁵⁷ and the Father gave authority to the son to raise the dead and to judge them.⁴⁵⁸ In Bultmann's opinion judgment in John's thought has double meaning of 'judgment' and 'sunderance', that is in encounter with Jesus that division between faithful and unfaithful or between those who can see and those who are blind takes place. Judgment is not cosmic or a dramatic event but is a response of man towards the message of Jesus, and people are ignorant of this fact that it is his message which divides them in two groups, of true and false disciples. The difference in John and Paul's thought regarding judgment or the eschatological event is that Paul historicized it whereas John gave it an interpretation of decision for man which is radical and faced by everyone in life.

From above it is clear that for Bultmann 'sending' and 'coming' of Jesus in John's thought has specific meaning, it narrates the encounter of man with God as a moment of decision to be faithful or not to be. It is not a futuristic eschatological event but is related with man's present moment. Although John in his elaboration has borrowed the Gnostic mythology and the Jewish eschatology but it is through the double meaning he has conveyed his interpretation of decision. Further, it is the unity of 'coming' and 'going' that Bultmann elaborated the theological issues of divinity, incarnation, revelation and so forth in Johannine understanding.

⁴⁵³ John 3:16.

⁴⁵⁴ 1 John 4:10.

⁴⁵⁵ John 3:17.

⁴⁵⁶ John 4:42; 1 John 4:14.

⁴⁵⁷ John 9:39.

⁴⁵⁸ John 5:21, 26.

Coming to the divinity of Jesus in John which is the central theme of the gospel, it starts with, 'the word became flesh'.⁴⁵⁹ This notion is dominant throughout the gospel and leads to the concept of incarnation of God in human Jesus; it remains to see in what way Bultmann interprets it.

Jesus was simply a human being, a historic character as stated by Bultmann, he was 'a definite human being in history: Jesus of Nazareth'.⁴⁶⁰ He was a man who lived in a specific time and place, though he was a son of God who became man but still he was a genuine man and not a divine being, 'which again does not mean that in his personality the divine became visible so as to fill men with enthusiasm and touch their feelings or to fascinate and overwhelm them'.⁴⁶¹ In fact for John the divine and human stand in opposition to each other. If that is so, than in what sense son of God is related to human Jesus? Particularly where unity of son with Father is explicitly stated as, 'I am in the Father and the Father in me',⁴⁶² or, 'no one comes to the Father, but by me',⁴⁶³ or 'I am the Father are one'.⁴⁶⁴

In the statements of the 'word became flesh', or those which convey the union of son with Father are undoubtedly taken from the Gnostic mythology, a dominant theme of John, but at the same time John is not confined to its mythological meaning neither is he limited to metaphysical or mystical understanding. Rather John is to be understood, according to Bultmann, in a paradox of glorification of son in the historical figure of Jesus as simple human being. It is through the units of various terms communicating his 'coming' and 'departure' that the paradox becomes clear.

For Bultmann in Gnosticism the 'divine man' or the incarnation of son with Father is a concept different from John. In Gnosticism it is the union of two opposites for example light and darkness, or divine and man, which takes place as a cosmic event of

⁴⁵⁹ John 1:14.

⁴⁶⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 41.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² John 14:8, 10.

⁴⁶³ John 14:6.

⁴⁶⁴ John 10:30.

eschatological nature. In Gnostic thought man's true nature is imprisoned in the material body and in the soul, which is released through unification with the pre-existence being. John does not follow Gnosticism regarding imprisonment of human nature or the unification of divine with human being. Neither for John in the relationship of son with Father or in 'word became flesh' there is imparting of 'gnosis', it is not a process of communicating mystical or secret teachings which can lead someone to salvation. Even though Jesus while leaving the world said, 'I have manifested thy name to the man whom thou gavest me out of the world',⁴⁶⁵ but according to Bultmann, Jesus never gave any information about God, 'he does not communicate anything, but calls men to himself'.⁴⁶⁶ Jesus talks about himself in the sense that he himself is the bread of life,⁴⁶⁷ or light,⁴⁶⁸ or life.⁴⁶⁹ This knowledge is about Jesus himself, which develops relation between him and man, and is not giving any information about God or knowledge of mystical nature or secret teachings of any kind. Here Bultmann stressed on negating the mystical knowledge being given by John. Rather it has been imposed on him to explain the unity between son and the Father,⁴⁷⁰ or their mutual knowledge,⁴⁷¹ otherwise John's interpretation is not of mystical nature. Negation of mysticism in John is evident from the verse where Philip demanded from Jesus to see God, as a reply to it Jesus answer was, 'I in the Father and the Father in me': 'the words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me is doing his works'.⁴⁷² Here Jesus denies the perception of God through eye sight but it is through work of Jesus that He can be known, as stated by Bultmann, 'He is perceptible only to that man who has the openness to let himself be

⁴⁶⁵ John 17:6; 26.

⁴⁶⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 41.

⁴⁶⁷ John 6:35.

⁴⁶⁸ John 8:12.

⁴⁶⁹ John 11:25; 14:6.

⁴⁷⁰ John 10:30.

⁴⁷¹ John 10:14, 38.

⁴⁷² John 14:10.

reached by the work of Jesus yes, God in Jesus encounters even him who shuts himself up against his word—encounters him to judge him',⁴⁷³ further he elaborates it, 'God Himself encounters men in Jesus, a Jesus moreover who is a man in whom nothing unusual is perceptible except his bold assertion that in him God encounters men'.⁴⁷⁴ According to Bultmann, John denied the perception of God through eyes but affirmed it in an encounter through Jesus only, whether a man opens or shuts up himself, that man knows God. The encounter with Jesus in Bultmann's thought is through the paradoxical nature of revelation, which he interpreted existentially, other than that it is not conveying mystical knowledge about God.

It is not only the mystical or the secret teachings of gnosis negated by Bultmann in the divine human relation of Jesus with God in the concept of incarnation but also the metaphysical relation or union between pre-existence being and God is denied. The Christological or the metaphysical assertions about the two-nature theory are late formulations and John does not explain incarnation in metaphysical terms.⁴⁷⁵ In John the stress is more on Jesus himself and his works, not in the sense of metaphysical explanations. Rather it is the encounter of man with Jesus, or in the words of Bultmann it is the paradoxical nature of revelation, as interpreted by John, where the true understanding of the 'word became flesh' is clearly perceived.

From above it may be concluded that incarnation, which is a dominant theme in John, has not been understood by him in Gnostic, or mystical or metaphysical terms. The relation of divine and human in it is the revelation of Jesus which is expressed in radical way by John as against synoptic gospels or by Paul. For John Jesus was not a mythical figure or a divine being, but a concrete historical man, who did not impart mythical, mystical or metaphysical truth but called man towards himself. It is in this decision that man encounters God; it is a decision where man has to choose between God and

⁴⁷³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 50.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

the world. For Bultmann to interpret incarnation of Jesus in John in mythical or metaphysical terms would be an enforcement of certain ideas which John never expounded. The misunderstanding about John that its divine human relation is taken literally by him is the result of few misconceptions about Jesus as it appears in it. Therefore before going in details of the concept of revelation and its relation with divinity of Jesus it would be appropriate to have some words regarding it.

In John divinity of Jesus is supported by miraculous knowledge and works of Jesus, which according to Bultmann were not interpreted by John in their apparent meaning therefore they are misunderstood. As far the miraculous knowledge of Jesus is concerned it is mentioned in various forms in John but he took in a different way. In the story of the Samaritan woman,⁴⁷⁶ the knowledge of her past for John is the symbolic picture of the tradition, and it stands for the feeling of a believer being searched and known by God, an encounter of his existence with the revealer.⁴⁷⁷ In the statement where it comes that Jesus could see through men, it is not super natural ability but is the knowledge about man and their relation with God, same is the case in his saying, 'but I know that you have not the love of God within you',⁴⁷⁸ it is the knowledge of resistance of man which causes them not to accept the truth.⁴⁷⁹ When he says to his disciples, 'now we know that you know all things',⁴⁸⁰ is a confession of disciples to understand Jesus as he has spoken plainly and not in riddles, it is the situation of the disciples which comes due to the genuine understanding about Jesus, otherwise he has not spoken something new to them.⁴⁸¹ In the story of Lazarus⁴⁸² or the betrayal of Judas⁴⁸³ here for Bultmann it depicts the insight perception of Jesus for

⁴⁷⁶ John 4:17.

⁴⁷⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 42.

⁴⁷⁸ John 5:42.

⁴⁷⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 42.

⁴⁸⁰ John 16:30.

⁴⁸¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁸² John 11:4, 14.

⁴⁸³ John 6:64, 70; 13:18.

human nature. Resistance, which appeared among his disciples so faith has no guarantee, he himself or the church might face the resistance. This knowledge of Jesus was the result of an insight in the nature of revelation and human response to it and not a super human ability to see the future.⁴⁸⁴ As for escaping of Jesus from the hands of enemy is not because of his prior knowledge but his fate is determined by God and not by man.⁴⁸⁵ It seems to be a contradiction in Bultmann's thought, as the knowledge of Jesus was from simple human perspective and the notion of God is expressed through existentialism whereas here God is given another worldly status and Jesus has a relation with Him.

It can be seen that in rejecting fore-knowledge of Jesus, Bultmann is on the one side apologetic and on the other has taken the psychological and sociological perspective to interpret Jesus' perception. In his denial of divinity of Jesus or his super human ability, he has also negated the traditional understanding of Jesus.

Coming to the miraculous works of Jesus, this according to Bultmann, led to confusion in understanding John. Miracles are not considered by John as super human quality of Jesus, they are termed as 'signs' in the meaning that they signify glory of Jesus, or in the sense that they are pointing to something else and not as an extra ordinary occurrence in themselves, they are symbols or pictures. For example the wine miracle⁴⁸⁶ symbolizes the glory of Jesus not as a miracle worker but in whom grace and truth is revealed, cure of the official's son,⁴⁸⁷ or of lame man,⁴⁸⁸ symbolizes Jesus as life, similarly his bread miracle,⁴⁸⁹ cure of the blind man,⁴⁹⁰ and the raising of Lazarus from dead,⁴⁹¹ are all symbolic and represent food, light and life respectively. The important

⁴⁸⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 43.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ John 2:1-12.

⁴⁸⁷ John 4:46-54.

⁴⁸⁸ John 5:1-9.

⁴⁸⁹ John 6:1-15.

⁴⁹⁰ John 9:1-7.

⁴⁹¹ John 11:1-44.

thing for Bultmann is that miracles are for John 'symbols' or 'signs' only, they do not point to some extra ability or quality of Jesus as divine being. They only represent his glory or revelation, and if they are not taken as signs than according to Bultmann it is an offense.⁴⁹²

Thus, Jesus was not a divine being but a human being who lived in a particular historical situation. Picture of Jesus which leads to his divinity is the clothing borrowed from the Gnostic redeemer myth. Otherwise the interpretation of Jesus by John is not from the mythological, mystical or metaphysical stock, it is only the mythological language used by him otherwise his interpretation is a call for decision. His miraculous knowledge or deeds are not the signs of divinity rather they show Jesus' knowledge of human nature.

Apart from the divinity of Jesus the concept of revelation and salvation has been illustrated in detail by Bultmann, and they are the major issues in his theological interpretation as the concept of God is directly linked with them. As stated by him, 'the idea of God is therefore determined from the outset by the idea of revelation. To speak of God means: to speak of his revelation; and to speak of his revelation, means: to speak of God. And revelation is not here intended in any general sense; it is rather the saving will of God that can be experienced in the incarnate Revealer'.⁴⁹³

In his thought the concept of revelation can be understood through incarnation, 'the word became flesh' a major theme of John. But it was not clearly perceived by his disciples or by Jews because revelation must not be elaborated in worldly terminology, it is a hidden thing or a secret in a sense that it is not to be explained through demonstrative proofs but through daily events only.⁴⁹⁴ There is a practical aspect in it and that is the encounter with God through Jesus. It is obscure for unbelievers like Jews, or is not comprehensible as it is not elaborated in worldly terms therefore even

⁴⁹² See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 44-45.

⁴⁹³ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John A Commentary*, p. 35.

⁴⁹⁴ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 45.

the disciples erred. From the examples mentioned by Bultmann for misconception by Jews or disciples are like apprehension of Jews about the destruction and the rebuilding of the temple by Jesus,⁴⁹⁵ or the incomprehension of the disciples about the food of Jesus as his secret nourishment,⁴⁹⁶ or their inability to understand why Jesus do not wish to manifest himself to the world.⁴⁹⁷ Whatever the reasons of obscurity of revelation, but it must remain so unless man surrenders to its demands and takes the decision to follow it otherwise it is an offense, as stated by Bultmann, "In all these misunderstandings the offense of the assertion, 'the word became flesh' finds expression. This offense lies in the fact that the Revealer appears as a man whose claim to be the son of God is one which he cannot, indeed must not, prove to the world. For the Revelation is judgment upon the world and is necessarily felt as an attack upon it and an offense to it, so long as the world refuses to give up its norms". Here the expression of revelation in John is mythological but at the same it is not the real content of revelation and therefore it remains vague unless it is understood as a 'judgment upon the world', where man has to take the decision. This interpretation of revelation is further elaborated by Bultmann through crucifixion of Jesus on the cross which is culmination of his work or is his glorification. The revelation of Jesus or his call to man towards himself, or as termed by Bultmann his 'hard word' were taken in its outer meaning by Jews or even by his disciples. Some of such statements were blasphemous like where he made himself equal to God,⁴⁹⁸ or claimed that he was older than Abraham.⁴⁹⁹ The inner or the double meaning of the 'hard word' of Jesus, according to Bultmann, were perceived by John who presented it in the framework of ascending of Jesus or of his crucifixion. It is through the units of coming and departure of Jesus that the revelation is fully depicted. In synoptic gospels the outward aspect of

⁴⁹⁵ John 2:20.

⁴⁹⁶ John 4:33.

⁴⁹⁷ John 14:22.

⁴⁹⁸ John 5:17.

⁴⁹⁹ John 8:57.

ascending is taken whereas only John brings to light its inner aspect, which is the glorification of Jesus on the cross. The sayings of Jesus, 'what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?', and Jesus himself rejects it, 'No, for this purpose I have come to this hour',⁵⁰⁰ or 'Father, the hour has come; glorify thy son'.⁵⁰¹ For Bultmann the scene of the cross has existential meaning, the cross is the fulfillment of the mission of Jesus where he is glorified or exalted. For John Jesus is not some divine being but an exalted human being, and his revelation is not as event of the past but is a present reality.⁵⁰²

The paradoxical nature of revelation or its double meaning, which was only grasped by John and not Paul, is reflected in contradictory statements of Jesus. And for Bultmann it is the contradictory nature of revelation where God encounters man. On the one side Jesus has equal dignity and rights with God, therefore it comes that God gave 'all things' into his hands,⁵⁰³ gave him 'power over all flesh',⁵⁰⁴ and was given the authority to raise the dead,⁵⁰⁵ and on the other hand he acts or speaks not on his own will but on the will of God, 'I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me',⁵⁰⁶ he acts according to Father's instructions,⁵⁰⁷ and teaches or speaks not on his own authority but what Father has given him.⁵⁰⁸ This later aspect, which is according to Bultmann is the negative formulations are not to show humility of Jesus but to present his glorification. It is in the fulfillment of the task of God or Jesus' obedience to the authority of God that Jesus is exalted. Therefore the contradiction is apparent only and through it God encounters man.

⁵⁰⁰ John 12:27.

⁵⁰¹ John 17:1.

⁵⁰² See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 47-49.

⁵⁰³ John 3:35; 13:3.

⁵⁰⁴ John 17:2.

⁵⁰⁵ John 5:21.

⁵⁰⁶ John 6:38.

⁵⁰⁷ John 5:19, 30; 8:28.

⁵⁰⁸ John 7:17; 12:49; 14:10, 24; 17:8, 14.

As far the content of revelation is concerned, and here the crux of the idea appears in Bultmann's thought, firstly the work and words of Jesus are taken together, they are identical in Johannine understanding, the works of Jesus that is judging and making alive are accomplished through the words of Jesus,⁵⁰⁹ 'the words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me is doing his works'.⁵¹⁰ It seems that the identity of work and word of Jesus as claimed by Bultmann is that it is through works of Jesus a man believes on him, thus making them identical in their effect. Therefore even life or rather eternal life, knowledge and freedom are gained through his works, 'whoever believes the word of Jesus and Him whom sent him, has eternal life, has stepped over from death into life'.⁵¹¹ In this way the words of Jesus and their impact on the believer are made identical, but it remains to probe in the words of Jesus, or in other words to know the content of revelation. It is according to John is what Jesus saw or heard from the Father as it comes, 'No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known',⁵¹² or he speaks what the Father taught him to speak,⁵¹³ or commanded him to speak,⁵¹⁴ or he speaks the words Father gave him,⁵¹⁵ or does what the Father has shown him to do,⁵¹⁶ or he reveals the name of the Father.⁵¹⁷ But what exactly Jesus heard or saw from the Father or the content of revelation, here Bultmann takes a turn from the traditional Christian understanding of revelation to existential interpretation. For him Jesus never gave any specific teachings regarding the content of revelation which was later given to it. Revelation traditionally is taken as the theme of the metaphysical world where explanations about God is discussed but in the teachings of Jesus this is absent, he

⁵⁰⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 60.

⁵¹⁰ John 14:10.

⁵¹¹ John 5:24.

⁵¹² John 1:18; 6:46.

⁵¹³ John 8:28; 7:17.

⁵¹⁴ John 12:49.

⁵¹⁵ John 17:8.

⁵¹⁶ John 5:19.

⁵¹⁷ John 17:6, 26.

never talks about them, and what he talks about is his own self, which Bultman translated as 'I' statements, 'the bread of life—it is I, the light of the world—it is I, the resurrection and the life are I',⁵¹⁸ in the nutshell Jesus is presented as life, bread of life, eternal life, light or as the witness of truth and that he has 'come' and will 'go' from the world and man must believe on him. In this expansion John takes the mythological language to convey the idea but he has not taken it literally, he has only borrowed the terminology of the pre-existence divine being but leaves aside the mythological character of it.⁵¹⁹ The significance of mythological language is that it carries in it another worldly feature, which is important in Bultmann's understanding of John. As stated above world and God are two opposites for Bultmann, and Jesus called for a decision to choose between the world and God. It is a decision of life and death where John presented Jesus as life and truth through figurative expressions of 'the door, the way, the shepherd, the vine and the bread' and they 'all mean that which man must have and longs to have in order to be able truly to exist'.⁵²⁰ Thus, John borrowed the mythological language but its mythological character is nothing more than he came and is gone and man has to have faith on him, it is moment of decision.

Another important aspect of revelation, in Bultmann's thought, is its relation with the salvation, particularly in its traditional understanding with doctrines of incarnation, death, atonement of sins, resurrection, Pentecost and the paraousia. In John incarnation, death, sins and so forth does not play an important role, he took them from the church tradition but he differs in their meaning as compared to Paul or to synoptic gospels. For Paul or for the church death and the atonement of sins as compared to incarnation are central whereas for John incarnation and not the death is vital, but the two form a unit i.e. incarnation, his coming, and death, his going are taken together and with this unit the work of Jesus is completed. As with death Jesus'

⁵¹⁸ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 65.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

work is accomplished so it is not suffering for John, as it is for Paul, rather it is Jesus' elevation and glorification is important.

Concluding the above discussion it may be stated that al-Ghazālī and Bultmann being theologians so their basic task is the interpretation of the word of God. For al-Ghazālī John is narrating the words of Jesus so it is raised to the level of revelation. As generally accepted Muslim notion is that the revealed books are the various forms of revelation therefore he looked for common theological principles in John. For this reason he inferred from John attributes of God, of prophethood, or other commonalities present in the two religions. Further, his theological orientation of al-Ashā'ri thought particularly the distinction between the eternal word of God and the written one on the pages where the latter one is the word of God as well but the former precedes in eternity over it has led to duality in which the written word of God is the outer covering chiefly its language aspect and the real meaning is beneath it. Thus, the duality present in the text is not only from the side of language but is also from theological side. Here too the interpretation is to cross from the outer aspect to the inner meanings but that must be in accord with general theological frame. To highlight this frame al-Ghazālī outlined the commonalities of faith where God is transcendent, one, eternal and so on and the prophets are elected people. Remaining within these parameters humanity of Jesus was elaborated. On the other hand in Bultmann's interpretation theological frame is absent, what we find there is giving a new and different meaning to concepts. It is replacing of one meaning i.e. primitive or mythical worldview with another i.e. modern philosophy of existentialism without having any theological references. It is what al-Ghazālī called that late Christians borrowed Greek ideas to understand their text so now it is modern philosophy which has replaced the old one. Thus, the text was taken literally before and existentially now and in both cases the text has been relegated. To what extent philosophical principles replace theological ones require in-depth study but suffice here to say that philosophy relies on human reason particularly modern philosophy where unaided human reason is the sole

criteria to judge, so to take its principles and to read religious text accordingly would produce undesirable results. As in the case of existential interpretation where not only the text has been downgraded even traditional Christianity has been negated. Here the meaning of life, status of Jesus, revelation, salvation, sin and so forth has been given a new meaning of decision for the present life. Thus the text is what it stands for the modern man for his present life, its relation with God or the other world is no more there and this of course does not match with the spirit of Christian theology.

MYSTICAL INTERPRETATION BY AL-GHAZĀLĪ

The crux of al-Ghazālī's thought we find in his Sufistic interpretation. The features of language, reason and theology are important in interpretation but the religious text requires deep reflection. The duality of religious text as said above was explored by al-Ghazālī through language and theology that is he linked the outer aspect with the inner either through language rules or theological principles, both helped in arriving at appropriate meaning. Still religious text by its very nature has relation with higher or the other world therefore its interpretation must take this in its account. Al-Ghazālī through Sufi dimension provided a link between two worlds, divine and human in interpretation. Although the divine interacted with man in human terms but due to the difference in nature of the two worlds, as would be discussed in the following chapter, some problems are inherent in it which is evident in the nature of religious language. This ambiguity if resolved relying only on the rationally oriented linguistics or theological perceptions, would result in superficial interpretation and would lack the spiritual dimension which is the essence of the divine message. Integrating the spiritual dimension in his interpretation al-Ghazālī discussed the nature of religious language in Christianity which was misunderstood by them.

Further, for Sufis the distinction in the two worlds is not theoretical or imaginary but it is the reality or the truth therefore they derive their epistemology in the light of the two world theory, in other words they understood the cognitive aspect of religious

language through it. As already said, for them the other world is real and they understand this world in the light of the other,⁵²¹ establishing on these premises al-Ghazālī developed his mystical interpretation of John.

Apart from the nature of religious language another important aspect related to mystical aspect in interpretation is its methodology. In Qur'ānic exegesis Sufistic interpretation falls under *al-tafsīr al-ishārī*,⁵²² and for this kind of *tafsīr* there are certain conditions for interpretation which must be followed. Most important among them is that there must be conformity with the overall text in interpretation and it should not contradict reason.⁵²³ Coming to John and considering to what extent al-Ghazālī fulfilled these requirements would be discussed in what follows.

Jesus often used non-literal expressions and John too narrated these sayings of Jesus in figurative terms which caused confusion among the later age Christians due to their ignorance of the nature of such language. In fact such vocabulary is problematic unless understood and interpreted properly. From the problematic expressions in John are 'son', 'father', 'god', 'al-Rabb', 'al-kalimah', 'al-ittiḥād' and so forth. In order to remain within Christian understanding for these expressions al-Ghazālī looked for their meanings in Christian Biblical and historical scenario, as stated above, these expressions in their figurative rendering were in usage not only among early Christians but among Jews as well.

Secondly al-Ghazālī looked at these words from the theological perspective, as Jesus was prophet and was given certain commandants or *al-shar'iah* to him like other prophets who had their own laws. So presence of these terms meant that Jesus in his *al-shar'iah* was allowed to use figurative expressions. Moreover, important point to be noted here is that Jesus was not ambiguous in his statements. Metaphorical statements can be

⁵²¹ See Chapter Two.

⁵²² It is a Sufi interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān where some symbols or signs present in the text are interpreted in an effort to reconcile the apparent and the Sufis interpretation. See for detail Khālid 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr wa Qawā'iduh* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is 1986), 2nd ed., p. 205.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 208; Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zarqānī, *Manābil al-'Irfān fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* ed. Fawwāz Aḥmad Zamarlī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī 1995), vol. 2, p. 68.

confusing if they are not clarified, Jesus was careful in it. He clarified himself the metaphors or *majāz* present in them so that his followers are not misguided. Jesus was a prophet and his task was to guide people therefore he took care to clarify his statements. He pointed out *majāz* wherever present through indicators that the literal sense is not intended and it must be diverted from the outer towards inner meaning.⁵²⁴ By fulfilling these components for Sufistic interpretation al-Ghazālī had sound grounds for linking *al-ta'wīl* with mysticism. Theological, historical and linguistic aspects provided a setup of John for him, thus while remaining within this setup any mystical interpretation would remain within the overall picture of John and of Christianity. Therefore it can be said that his mystical interpretation is not an imposition of ideas from outside but emerged from the spirit and principles of their religion.

Apart from it there is another important characteristic of al-Ghazālī's interpretation, which must be mentioned and that is the comparison he made between the figurative language of Christianity and Islam. It is one of the commonalities present in these two religions that their sacred literature contains literal as well as figurative expressions. Figurative expressions are in particular heavily used in elaboration for attributes of God; these expressions need interpretation and cannot be taken as they are. In Islam the example mentioned by al-Ghazālī is the prophetic saying narrated by Abū Hurīrah, 'and My slave keeps on coming closer to Me through performing *Nawāfil* (praying or doing extra deeds besides what is obligatory) till I love him, so I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips, and his leg with which he walks'.⁵²⁵ According to al-Ghazālī literally the *ḥadīth* would mean that God is within human organs like eyes, hands, ears and so on which is a sheer impossibility therefore it is metaphorical language and must

⁵²⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 265.

⁵²⁵ al-Bukhari, *al-Jamī al-Sahīh*, Bab qawl Allahu ta'ala wa yuhadhhirukum Allahu nafsahu, hadith no. 6858.

be interpreted accordingly.⁵²⁶ Another example is related to creation of Jesus, al-Ghazālī compared it to the creation of Adam as it comes in the Holy Qur’ān, “Said He, Iblis, what prevented thee to bow thyself before that I created with My own hands?” (38:75) Here again literal sense is not intended as God has no body organs so it must be interpreted metaphorically and al-Ghazālī interpreted hands as power.⁵²⁷

Literal sense is impossible as it contradicts reason and also to keep it in conformity with the scripture on the whole and to reach the correct essence of the divine message figurative interpretation is needed.

Further al-Ghazālī compared it with mystical utterances of Sufis as the two share the common element of being ‘problematic’. These utterances are technically known as al-shaṭaḥāt (utterance of mystics in the state of intoxication)⁵²⁸ and they cannot be taken on their face value, it is only through their esoteric sense that the true meaning is unveiled. Example of it is when a mystic praises himself as god, subḥānī mā a‘ẓam shā’nī or ‘nothing is there in my garment except God’ such statements are problematic as their apparent meaning contradicts reason so their literal meaning must be crossed to the inner sense.⁵²⁹

Problematic or non-literal expressions in their various forms are used generally in John, from such expressions al-Ghazālī choose few and interpreted them mystically. One of the examples of it is al-itṭihād or ‘union’ which Christians thought to be the real union between God and Jesus because of their literal reading of the text. According to al-Ghazālī Christian terminology of al-itṭihād is similar to Sufi phrases of itṭihād and al-hulūl as both has symbolic nature. The words in both cases are pointing to some other reality and so their apparent meanings must be put aside for the inner ones, as it is the

⁵²⁶ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 245.

⁵²⁷ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 311.

⁵²⁸ *Al-Shaṭḥ* literally is movement and in Sufism is defined as the utterances which a Sufi makes while in the state of mystical intoxication. See Abū Naṣr al-Ṭūsī, *al-Luma’* ed. ‘Abdul Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and ‘Abd al-Bāqī Sarūr (Cairo: Maṭba‘ah al-Sa‘ādah 1960), p. 453; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Badawī, *Shaṭaḥāt al-Ṣūfiyyah* (Kuwait: Wakālah al-Maṭbū‘āt n. d.), pp. 9-10.

⁵²⁹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, p. 282.

nature of symbolic language. The inner aspect is in fact 'the real' which is perceived only after crossing the outer side, explaining the symbolic nature of Sufi terminology al-Ghazālī in al-Mishkāt states,

'it is from this starting-point that Allah's Gnostics rise from metaphors to realities, as one climbs from the lowlands to the mountains; and at the end of their Ascent see, as with the direct sight of eye-witnesses, that there is nothing in existence save Allah alone, and that 'everything perisheth except His countenance, His Aspect; not that it perisheth at some particular moment, but rather it is sempiternally a perishing thing, since it cannot be conceived except as perishing. For each several thing other than Allah is, when considered in and by itself, pure not-being; and if considered from the 'aspect' (*wajh*) to which existence flows from the Prime Reality, it is viewed as existing, but not in itself, solely from the 'aspect' which accompanies Him Who gives it existence. Therefore the God-aspect is the sole thing in existence. For everything has two aspects, an aspect to itself and an aspect to its Lord: in respect to the first, it is Not-being; but in respect of the God-aspect, it is Being. These Gnostics, on their return from their Ascent into the heaven of Reality, confess with one voice that they saw nought existent there save the One Real. Some of them, however, arrived at this scientifically, and others experimentally and subjectively. From these last the plurality of things fell away in its entirety. They were drowned in the absolute Unitude, and their intelligences were lost in Its abyss. They became drunken with a drunkenness wherein the sway of their own intelligence disappeared; so that one exclaimed, 'I am The One Real!' and another, 'Glory be to Me! How great is My glory!' and another, 'Within this robe is nought but Allah!' Then when that drunkenness abated they knew that that had not been actual Identity, but only something resembling Identity; as in those words of the Lover at the height of his passion:- 'I am He whom I love and He whom I love is I; We are two spirits immanent in one body'. Now when this state prevails, it is called in relation to him who experiences it, Extinction, nay, Extinction of Extinction, for the soul has become extinct to itself, extinct to its own extinction; for it

becomes unconscious of itself and unconscious of its own unconsciousness, since, were it conscious of its own unconsciousness, it would be conscious of itself. In relation to the man immersed in this state, the state is called, in the language of metaphor, 'Identity'; in the language of reality, 'Unification'.⁵³⁰

Thus, what has been uttered by the mystic as 'identity' or in Christian terminology 'union' between man and God are metaphors or symbolic language. Reason for comparing mystical utterances and John's terminology, for al-Ghazālī perhaps is that both are using the language of love based on experience. The lover who is immersed in love loses the ability to convey his feelings besides even the simple and plain wordings are of no use for him. He uses certain words to convey some higher realities, so there is duality in language or there is al-zāhir and al-bāṭin where the inner aspect is grasped through the experience of the divine or 'union' in Sufi thought. Approaching text or its meaning through experience is a unique method, here epistemology relies on experience but the experience is not a common one rather it is of the other world. A connection is developed between this world and the other in which the things of this world are understood in the light of knowledge gained from the other. Consequently, the other world is 'the real' and this one is its reflection. As the source of the religious text is God so perhaps its interpretation through this experience is most suitable. Still verification of such an interpretation might be difficult due to its subjective nature. Undoubtedly, mystical experience is subjective but al-Ghazālī connected it with reason and overall spirit of the scripture, thus the interpretation must be in agreement with all these components. For this reason al-Ghazālī rejected Christian interpretation of John which elevates Jesus to divine status as it is not in harmony with John in general and contradicts reason. On the other side his own interpretation although it is mystical and thus is experiential and subjective still does not contradict reason nor does it go against the spirit of John generally.

⁵³⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, tr. & introduction by W.H. T. Gairdner, (Lahore: Ashraf Press 1952), pp. 103-108.

Coming back to nature of experience which man has in ittiḥād and its process we find Diana Lobel elaborated it as, 'the seeker divests himself more and more of his own human attributes, gradually taking on the qualities of the divine beloved until he or she becomes that beloved, perceiving an identity or unification (ittiḥād) of the two natures'.⁵³¹ So one of the features of al-ittiḥād is loosing of human qualities and replacing them with the divine attributes⁵³² till the lover and the beloved become one in a sense that the likes and dislikes of the lover and the beloved becomes one. The two come so close to each other that their 'will' and 'likes' merge in one another. Further looking in the process of ittiḥād from the psychological perspective that how it takes place and affects human psychology. According to Badawī in Sufis ascension it is al-shawūq (longing), and love which compels al-salik (traveler) to move towards God till he experiences al-kashf or the spiritual unveiling. The feeling of melting away on the part of traveler is so strong that his 'I' is dissolved and here he experiences ittiḥād or unification, as if the two become one. It is the strength of experience that the traveler loses his conscious and as a result of it what Sufi utters falls under shaṭaḥāt with the characteristic that this speech is mostly in first form as God is Himself speaking.⁵³³ It shows that here the experience of 'union' is so strong that man loses his individuality and speaks as if God is speaking himself.

Coming back to al-Ghazālī and his interpretation of John where Jesus and God are united and have become one. He rejected the literal meaning of it and union for him is not the union or identification of beings but is the identification of love and 'will'. In it there is no difference between man and God in their will, to the extent that man loves what God loves, and hates what He hates, dislikes what He dislikes, it is a complete harmony in man's acts and speech to what God wants from him.⁵³⁴ In fact it is the highest stage of 'ubūdiyyah, (servanthood) where man becomes so near to God that

⁵³¹ See Diana Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: State University Press 2000), p. 23.

⁵³² See Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, *Uṣūl al-Ṭarīq* (Cairo: n.p., 1988), pp. 4-28.

⁵³³ See 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Badawī, *Shataḥāt al-Ṣūfiyyah*, pp. 18-19.

⁵³⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamil*, pp. 246, 248, 250.

God becomes his hands, eyes and ears which he works, sees or hears, here it is the harmony between God and man in their will and action and it is not in their physical being.⁵³⁵ Comparing the interpretation of John for love between man and God with prophetic saying here al-Ghazālī again is putting side by side common concepts in two religions. Attainment of complete harmony between man and God in their will and action is what religion strives for but in reality it is not an easy task. Making it their goal Sufis put all their effort to attain unification of will.

Unification here is not the unification of beings but it is losing of one's self conscious in another which results in the feeling of oneness. Al-Ghazālī compared Sufi experience of *ittiḥād* with Christian *ittiḥād* in the person of Jesus, for him there are similarities present in the two. As it is commonly said that in Christianity Jesus was concerned more with spiritual aspect of religion therefore his teachings were focused on the relationship between man and God. And it seems that to highlight the spiritual relationship between man and God Jesus relied more on the metaphors and figurative expressions as they are best suited for it, and as al-Ghazālī mentioned that he was *ṣāhib al-shar'iah* with its own commandments therefore it can be said that he was allowed to use such expressions.

PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATION BY BULTMANN

Demythologizing is the major task of Bultmann where mythological worldview of the New Testament is critically interpreted. It is not the elimination of mythology as done by liberal theologians or to take it literally as in traditional thought rather it is the critical interpretation, as stated by Bultmann,

“whereas the older liberals used criticism to eliminate the mythology of the New Testament, our task to-day is to use criticism to interpret it. Of course it may still be necessary to eliminate mythology here and there. But the criterion adopted must be

⁵³⁵ Ibid., p. 245.

taken not from modern thought, but from the understanding of human existence which the New Testament itself enshrines".⁵³⁶

For Bultmann existential interpretation is the only adequate solution in the face of mythology present in the New Testament, it provides a means and method to deal with mythological language without its elimination or taking it literally therefore he termed it as the 'correct' way of interpretation.⁵³⁷

With this we come to John and its interpretation in the light of existential philosophy, here first the existential interpretation for the message of Jesus would be discussed and then the divinity or the pre-existence of Christ in *Jesus and the Word* and *Theology of the New Testament* by Bultmann.

The impending coming of the reign of God is the main concept of the New Testament, in which the present working of the world would be destroyed, Satan and evil forces would finish and new functioning of the world would come in existence which will bring salvation to people. This change would be miraculous that God will bring in without the help of man. The idea has the background of Jewish eschatological hopes but it is not in the Jewish understanding which permeates the message of Jesus. Nature of Jesus' message was not of nationalism or to establish power of Israel rather it proclaimed the soon emergence of the reign of God. And in the face of it, man must be ready, now is the time of decision and the message of Jesus is the call for decision. This call for decision is the call for repentance, people are attached to the world and indulged in daily life, joy or wealth or other preoccupations. Whereas call of Jesus demanded repentance in the manner of total rejection of the world, as no one serves two masters, i.e. God and the world. But at the same time it is not to be taken as asceticism, rather it is simple readiness for God's demand, fulfillment of God's will.⁵³⁸ It means total dedication or commitment to God therefore it can be said that Jesus demanded radical

⁵³⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row 1961), vol. 1, p. 12; *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 18.

⁵³⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 2, p. 187.

⁵³⁸ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 11.

or total obedience or reorientation of man. In presenting the message of Jesus, John stands apart from synoptic gospels. They focused on the historical Jesus whereas John presented the radical message of Jesus, which demanded from man a decision between God and his reign or the world, the decision which is either—or, is to be drastically made.

As for the kingdom of God, is it a futuristic event or not, in Bultmann's view, it is miraculous event brought by God alone which will put an end to all worldly affairs and whoever desires it must radically separate himself from the world, must take a decision of either-or. Jesus takes the Jewish hopes of the future but the kingdom of God for him is not the event of the future in the form of cosmic dramatic event, but it is a moment of decision in 'now' and in that the future is linked with the present.⁵³⁹ In addition to the eschatological aspect in the message of Jesus another component is the ethical demand that is the love of neighbor. It is the love of God and love of neighbor that forms the unity of his message. They are related to each other in the sense that both demands for the decision from man to choose between God or the world. Moreover, the call is individualistic and not for the nation, it brings salvation or judgment for the individual. The relationship of individual and God, Bultmann interprets it, in the paradox of 'de-historizing' and 'de-secularization' of God and individual. In Judaism, according to Bultmann, God was de-historized by being made far from man, He was high above in heaven and the world was governed by angels, on the other hand man was de-historized by being kept within the orbit of ritualism and legalism of the religion. Whereas the call of Jesus for decision de-secularized man, it breaks all hurdles or tears all veils between man and God and brings him in a direct relationship of individual decision. Message of Jesus also de-secularized God by making His dealings with man eschatological that is He takes out man from his worldly or historical ties and have an encounter with him individually. Hence it is a paradox of de-historization

⁵³⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, tr. Louise Pettibone Smith & Erimine Huntress Lantero (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1934), pp. 38-39.

or de-secularization of both man and God, where God encounters man individually and is above the normal concept of history of nation, and man too encounters God individually away from the historical settings which bounds or provides him security.⁵⁴⁰ The main theme as stated above in the message of Jesus is about the kingdom of God, and the relationship of man with God and neighbor. These ideas Jesus proclaimed in the language and the conceptual framework of his times. He was a Jew and so were his addresses therefore his thoughts remained within Judaism. Still Jesus stood radically opposed to Jewish religion or his contemporary Jewish thought as he appears in the New Testament. The message of Jesus, later on was proclaimed by the early church with the added component of messiah ship, where Jesus became the messiah and with that church not only proclaimed the message but proclaimed Jesus himself. Messiah or the son of man reflected the Jewish eschatological expectations but, according to Bultmann, this mythical concept was historized by fitting in it the figure of Jesus who was crucified on the cross and was resurrected and will appear on the clouds of heaven to hold judgment and bring salvation. The dying and rising Christ was taken by Paul and John, in the meaning of savior of the world which comes more from the Hellenistic church⁵⁴¹ John's usage of messiah and Christ reflects both the Jewish and the early church meaning of son of man and more so the Hellenistic understanding from the Gnostic myth of pre-existent being who became man and must be exalted again.⁵⁴²

Coming to the divinity of Jesus in John, which is explicitly stated here more than in any other place, in Bultmann's existential reading Jesus for John is not a divine or the pre-existence being he was simple human being.

John takes the Gnostic mythology in presenting the picture of Jesus and whether it is the prologue or the gospel and the epistles on the whole, the portrayal of Jesus is as the

⁵⁴⁰ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 4-25.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-36, 79.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 36-37.

'only begotten son'⁵⁴³ of God, he was the 'word' in the beginning who became flesh,⁵⁴⁴ he was the light through him everything was created,⁵⁴⁵ he came to bear witness to the truth,⁵⁴⁶ through him came the grace and truth,⁵⁴⁷ whoever has seen him has seen the Father,⁵⁴⁸ in him the Father is and works,⁵⁴⁹ he is 'the life',⁵⁵⁰ he was the savior of the world,⁵⁵¹ and so forth. In these and various other expressions of John Jesus appears to be divine or pre-existent being but for Bultmann as John took over the Gnostic mythology therefore it is the apparent picture of Jesus only, beneath it John presents a different picture of Jesus who calls for a decision for the present 'moment'.

In Johannine thought apart from divinity of Jesus various other concepts like man, world, God and creation are presented through Gnostic mythology or dualism. To understand John it is important to probe in its Gnostic dualism where he presents his idea through a disparity of units. Taking the example of God and world which are two opposites for John, here world is everything other than God. It is in the opposition of these two entities that John further explains other concepts related to them. Explaining the nature of the world, it comes in John, 'it (the light) was in the world, and the world came into being through it, yet the world did not recognize it (the Logos)',⁵⁵² also it comes, 'the light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not grasped it',⁵⁵³ here 'light' and 'darkness' are opposites in which darkness symbolizes world and light God or other than world. Similarly where Jesus is termed as 'truth', or came to bear witness to truth or he himself was grace and truth, all these statements stand in opposition to 'falsehood', which is the characteristic of the world. Darkness and falsehood being the

⁵⁴³ John 3:16; 1 John 4:9, 14.

⁵⁴⁴ John 1:1, 14.

⁵⁴⁵ John 1:10.

⁵⁴⁶ John 18:37.

⁵⁴⁷ John 1:17.

⁵⁴⁸ John 14:9.

⁵⁴⁹ John 14:10.

⁵⁵⁰ John 14:6.

⁵⁵¹ 1 John 4:14.

⁵⁵² John 1:10.

⁵⁵³ John 1:5.

state of the world or its fallenness, this constitute the bondage which is the essence of the world or in other words it is the concept of sin. Man in bondage is in the state of evil, of darkness, of sin, or is dead and therefore cannot perceive truth, or light. In fact world is dead and only who believes in Jesus has overcome death and attained life. It is in dualism of Gnosticism that Jesus is pictured as 'water of life' or 'the bread of life',⁵⁵⁴ 'light of life',⁵⁵⁵ the resurrection, and life itself.⁵⁵⁶ Another interpretation of the pair light and darkness in John is that light due to its quality of illumination lights up or opens the way for man for guidance and for self understanding. Darkness just the opposite of it would mean not to have this opportunity, instead of understanding himself, he would be kept away from God or in his arrogance would consider himself to be at par with God. Thus as light is illumination of one's existence, darkness is turning away from one's existence and understanding, and it is the revolt against God, against truth. Truth, as understood by John, is the reality of God and this knowledge is not gained through rational understanding but by faith. It is through Jesus, as he is the revelation, that the reality is known therefore the unity in the verses, 'whosoever has seen him has seen the Father',⁵⁵⁷ or 'in him the Father is and works',⁵⁵⁸ is the unity through which reality is known. And for this reason Jesus is called the life, the truth, grace, or the word of God which manifests the reality of God. To know God or the reality or not to be away from Him, to be in darkness is expressed in a variety of ways, for example 'to be from above' or 'to be from below', 'to be from', 'to be born from God', 'to be born from the Spirit', and 'to be from the world', 'to be born from the flesh', in all of them either the man knows God and is with Him or is away from Him, and is in darkness, in the world, in bondage, or in sin. John through these Gnostic dualism wants to convey the fact that man, every man knows the reality or is in the

⁵⁵⁴ John 4:10, 6:27.

⁵⁵⁵ John 8:12.

⁵⁵⁶ John 11:25, 14:6; see Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁵⁷ John 14:9.

⁵⁵⁸ John 14:10.

state of darkness, it is through reality that he can attain knowledge of self understanding or self existence and can attain freedom otherwise will remain in bondage. Everyone is confronted with the decision to be with God or with the world or to be with Jesus the revelation of God or not to be, accordingly for Bultmann, the dualism of Gnosticism has turned in the dualism of decision in John.⁵⁵⁹

The divinity of Jesus which apparently seems to be the dominant theme of John is in fact not the inner content of his message, in Bultmann's view Jesus was a simple human and not a divine being in Johannine thought. Presentation of Jesus as a divine being is not more than Gnostic mythological picture and John's true understanding can be discerned only in the light of existential interpretation of it.

Jesus in John is presented as the 'word' who in the beginning was with God and became flesh,⁵⁶⁰ or who was from the beginning,⁵⁶¹ or was before the creation of the world,⁵⁶² and so forth. To understand the pre-existent character of Jesus here and in other expressions of John it is essential to consider the nucleus of Jesus' mission as offered by John in his Gnostic dualism. Firstly the mission of Jesus is presented through the opposing unit of 'coming' and 'going' of Jesus, where they are taken as two distinct acts but as completing the act on the whole. It means his mission is completed by his coming and going, which makes him an outsider who came to fulfill certain plan. John uses different dualistic terms for coming and going of Jesus, for example the sending means to believe him,⁵⁶³ to acknowledge him as eternal life, 'to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent',⁵⁶⁴ its counterpart coming is expressed alone or coming and sending taken together as, 'for I went forth from God and have come. For I am not here of my own accord, but he sent me',⁵⁶⁵ or 'came from

⁵⁵⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 18-21.

⁵⁶⁰ John 1:1, 14.

⁵⁶¹ 1 John 2:13.

⁵⁶² John 17:5, 24.

⁵⁶³ John 6:29; 11:42; 17:8.

⁵⁶⁴ John 17:3.

⁵⁶⁵ John 8:42; 7:28; 17:8.

the Father',⁵⁶⁶ or 'came down from the heaven',⁵⁶⁷ or came 'in the flesh',⁵⁶⁸ or will be elevated again to skies where he was,⁵⁶⁹ or will be glorified as a pre-existence with the Father,⁵⁷⁰ sending of Jesus also comes as sign of God's love, 'in this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him',⁵⁷¹ or 'for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son',⁵⁷² John also uses the terms of messiah or Christ in the sense of pre-existence one who became and will be exalted again.⁵⁷³

The message conveyed by John through all these expressions and titles is that Jesus is the eschatological salvation bringer, and the judge of the world, 'and this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light'.⁵⁷⁴ It is the idea of judgment⁵⁷⁵ which is the main theme of John; here Jesus being the judge of the world is presented as the divine or pre-existence being. In addition, the concept of judgment itself is not the dramatic cosmic event where Jesus will appear on the clouds of heaven to hold judgment and salvation. Historizing of this idea was done by Paul whereas John understood it radically in Bultmann's opinion. Judgment for John means division or distinction between faithful and unfaithful, between sighted and blind through the hard word of Jesus which Bultmann termed as 'sundering', it is separation of disciples between the true or the false ones.⁵⁷⁶ Judgment and the eschatological event has been interpreted by Bultmann existentially here, the whole idea is that through different Gnostic dualistic expressions Jesus is presented as a messenger of God, who brought light, eternal life and truth and demanded faith from

⁵⁶⁶ John 8:42; 13:3; 16:27, 30; 17:8.

⁵⁶⁷ John 3:13; 6:33, 38, 41.

⁵⁶⁸ 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7.

⁵⁶⁹ John 3:14; 12:32, 34; 8:28.

⁵⁷⁰ John 17:5, 24.

⁵⁷¹ 1 John 4:9.

⁵⁷² John 3:16.

⁵⁷³ John 1:51; 3:13; 12:23, 34; 13:31.

⁵⁷⁴ John 3:19.

⁵⁷⁵ John 3:1-21, 31-36; 4:43-46; 7:15-24; 8:13-20.

⁵⁷⁶ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 33-39.

people, but he himself is not from this world rather came from outside and will go again. Faith in him will differentiate between believer and non believer. But the crux of the matter is that the eschatological event is not the dramatic cosmic event, rather it is the encounter of each individual with God. In this encounter everyone has to take the decision whether to accept the message of God or the world. Therefore divinity of Jesus in John is not the main theme although it appears to be so, rather Jesus is a simple human being and the core of the gospel is the acceptance of God's message. Connected to the divinity of Jesus are the miraculous acts of Jesus,⁵⁷⁷ these occurrences are termed as 'signs' by Bultmann and as miracles only in secondary sense. As signs they are pointing towards something else, they are pointers only or are pictures and symbols for example revealing glory of Jesus,⁵⁷⁸ healing of the blind man is symbolizing Jesus as light⁵⁷⁹ and raising the dead is presenting Jesus as life.⁵⁸⁰ But for Bultmann they are not only ambiguous but are also misunderstood. The misunderstanding arises when they are looked in worldly categories. Their content can only be understood if taken in relation to the concept of revelation. Jesus who appeared in John as the son of God incarnate is in reality revealer of God's message. And these signs are signifying his glory and status as revealer. The content of revelation for Bultmann is not the metaphysical theories, doctrines or dogmas, there is nothing about the other world, it is about Jesus that he is life and light. It is the unity of coming and going which forms the content of revelation, his departure or exaltation and glorification are revelation. This inner theme of John as interpreted by Bultmann in existential terms means that it is an encounter of man with God, to accept Him or the world, and here it is the moment of decision which takes place in the present and not in future.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁷ John 2:23; 3:2; 4:45; 2:1-12; 4:46-54; 5:1-9.

⁵⁷⁸ John 2:11; 9:3; 11:4.

⁵⁷⁹ John 9:1-7.

⁵⁸⁰ John 1:1-44.

⁵⁸¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 44-49.

In conclusion it may be noted that Bultmann in his existential interpretation has given a very different and new version to Christianity, to the extent that it has almost turned basic concepts of Christianity into mere idea which are in themselves have no worth or reality. Whether a Christian dogma were fact or not is another question but from the traditional Christian point of view, can Christianity survive without these concepts in reality Bultmann needs to consider them again. Moreover, to what extent existential interpretation is a solution for the modern man, has in fact been given a serious thought by modern theologians and as a result of it a debate was raised on his interpretation.

Moreover in existential interpretation, the emphasis is on each individual and his decision in his present moment to choose between faith or unfaith, in this encounter place and importance of Jesus is that it is through him that reality or truth can be known. As far as it is an encounter with God where man has to take decision between the world or God, this gives it an experiential color. As said above man is in darkness and has to choose life, light or the eternal life, here Bultmann is referring to knowledge of this world, of self-understanding and the truth. At the same time getting this knowledge is through experience. It is comparable to al-Ghazālī's mystical dimension in interpretation which is also experiential. Still the two differs in the nature of their experience. In mystical experience man encounters with the divine realm and gains the knowledge from there whereas in existential experience man remain within the boundaries of this world, his experiences is of his own self. Man understands his self through the knowledge of his own self. It seems to be a circle in which man moves around his own self. Another problem in this type of self understanding is that man himself is the criterion for himself. To know truth or the guidance is from he himself, this reflects well that existentialism is the outcome of the modern age where man has full authority.

Coming back to the question of place of traditional concepts in Bultmann's interpretation it is clear that not only the historical figure of Jesus recedes in the

background and becomes unimportant to the believer but also Jesus is turned into a myth itself, mere idea therefore loses his traditional significance. And same is the case with God and all other concepts that their concrete reality becomes doubtful.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it is evident that how diverging approaches in reading the text can divert its meaning to very different directions. Same text can mean two different things when read from different perspectives so the validity of interpretation lies in the correctness of the methodology applied. Regarding the interpretation of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann of John as seen above they gave two entirely different meanings to John, one made him a mystic who is elaborating the divine realities and opening the path which leads to God. Explaining the secrets of the other world and the way towards it, revealing about the true relationship between God and man and how that is attained. The highest level of this relation is attained with full submission of man to God, when his 'will' and desires are merged in the 'will' and desires of God which is expressed as 'union' in Christian terminology. On the other hand same text when read in the light of existentialism meant that the text is not elaborating about the realities of other world rather is related to this world and more precisely to man himself. It is telling man about his own existence and what it means to have an authentic life. John conveyed the meaning of life in radical terms for the present moment and this meaning is not connected with his past or future but it is his present life. As a result of it the Gospel of John is not a message from divine being to man but a philosophy of man for his self understanding. Both these readings make John and his gospel something very different, which one is valid or more near to the spirit of John is in reality depends on the appropriateness of the methodology applied in interpretation as would be discussed in the coming chapter.

Apart from Sufism and philosophy there are some other ways as well used by al-Ghazālī and Bultmann in their interpretation from them are reason, language and

theology. Here too the results of their interpretation vary a lot despite the similarity of the tools. Reason for al-Ghazālī complements revelation and does not negate it and helps in resolving any apparent inconsistency present in them whereas for Bultmann it is the evaluator to know the truths of revelation and whatever does not fall within the domain of reason is simply denied. As for language al-Ghazālī was confined within the text and through language rules he tried to discern the meaning of the text whereas Bultmann had no such plans, for him it is language of the past conveying thoughts of the primitive people therefore it must be put aside and in its place the message of John or the existential philosophy must be converted in modern man's language. Same is the case with theology that for al-Ghazālī it provided a link between man and God whereas for Bultmann it is telling about human existence. All these differences in fact go back to variation of thought, background and methodology of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann which they are representing. Leaving aside the cultural and intellectual differences we would concentrate in what follows, on the methodological ones only as the truth and validity of interpretation depends on that.

CHAPTER FOUR

SACRED TEXT AND INTERPRETATION

Interpretation gives meaning to the sacred text and makes it understandable. At the same time it has wide range of dimensions within which an interpreter can easily move and interpret the text in a variety of ways. Important feature in this regard is the stance of the interpreter towards the text whether it is divinely inspired and in that case the author must speak and his meaning must be uncovered or it is written by man and the reader imposes his own perception on the text. Besides it there are various tools or methods like historical or literary method, theological, mystical or philosophical aspects all these factors influence interpretation and results in a greatly divergent meanings of the text. Apart from it, inclinations of the interpreter, religious or non-religious, is also reflected in interpretation. Thus, interpretation which clarifies the text in turn relies on number of factors so it does not emerge in vacuum; in particular the methodology followed plays a vital role. Soundness of interpretation directly depends on tools and methodologies employed. In this chapter we will try to probe in and assess the tools and methodologies of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann in their interpretation of John.

Before going in the details of methodology, few words may be said about the sacred text. From the foregoing discussion it can be said that al-Ghazālī and Bultmann in their understandings of the 'sacred text' and its interpretation stand in a different sphere of thought, or stand at the opposite side of the text and look at it from a different angle. In other words the text is a veil between them, and they are representing the two divergent worldviews, a traditional Islamic one on the one side and the modern western on the other. Being on the opposing sides of the text, both have a diverse vision of the whole structure of text and its interpretation. Still with the differences present in them there are also striking similarities in some of the results they arrived at in their interpretation. In presence of these similarities a superficial reading of their interpretation might lead to the conclusion that both, al-Ghazālī and Bultmann, stand in the same paradigm therefore have arrived at comparable results. Whereas the fact is pretty unlike, al-ta'wīl and demythologizing stand pole apart and cannot be equated. It

cannot be denied that similar results do have their worth, as it may help to bridge the gap between the western and the eastern thought but the thought patterns behind them are so divergent that bringing the two near might be an unrewarding effort. Very briefly, from the previous discussion related to text, it may be recalled that the meaning of sacred text varies in the thought of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann. For al-Ghazālī it is 'sacred', in the sense that it is given to man, so man is at the receiving end and needs to interpret it, while remaining within the boundaries of author's intention. Consequently text has sanctity and authority and this status of text plays a vital role in its understanding and interpretation. On the other hand for Bultmann Biblical text is an historical document, which developed and took its final shape after a long period of time. Therefore it must be studied like any other historical document and must be treated in the same manner. As a result of it the text will not be authoritative or have sanctity as the 'word of God'. Further, its interpretation is not tied up with the text or author's intention rather it is reader's response which determine the meaning of the text. Requirements and the perception of the modern man are the standard for the interpretation of the text. These differences in the thought of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann are clearly reflected in their interpretation of the text.

Although meaning and the status of the text is directly related to interpretation but as it is out of our scope therefore without going in more detail of the text we will concentrate here on its interpretation only.

Correct interpretation is highly ranked by al-Ghazālī and Bultmann as it makes the text meaningful. For that al-ta'wīl and demythologizing are the options taken by them respectively.

According to al-Ghazālī Christians of latter age adhered to the outer aspect of the text and refused al-ta'wīl consequently giving rise to confused readings otherwise its legitimacy and importance can be recognized from the fact that the text itself demands it and refuses the literal meaning. Moreover, *ṣāhib al-sharī'ah* (owner of the *sharī'ah*) i.e. Jesus himself interpreted the text to show that the literal meaning is not intended.

Similarly for Bultmann apparently the biblical language is mythical and to reach the inner message of the gospel the mythical terminology must be demythologized.

Another similarity in al-ta'wil and demythologizing is that there are two levels in interpretation and for each level a different methodology is being used by al-Ghazālī and Bultmann. On the primary level interpretation is carried on through linguistic, contextual and historical methods and here the results of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann converge to some extent. But it may be noted that being an initial level it is not the crux of their interpretation. It is on the higher level which is the real spirit of interpretation in form of al-ta'wil and demythologization where the results diverge significantly. Taking first the primary level of interpretation let us see what role historical and literary studies played in their interpretation.

It cannot be denied that historical, contextual and literary studies are indispensable in the interpretation of any ancient text as the ideas and their presentation are bound and structured within their original context. Due to the inherent importance these tools were used by both, despite the fact that their interpretation is basically not historic or literary oriented. The difference in the two is that al-Ghazālī relied more on literary interpretation as compared to historic whereas Bultmann gave little more space to historic aspect as compared to the literary one.

HISTORICAL METHOD

The historical method in interpretation, as mentioned, cannot be ignored as it places the ancient document in its proper context. One of the vital components in historical method is the information related to author and the book as the authenticity of the book relies on it, and it also paves the way for further studies therefore it cannot be ignored. Undoubtedly the modern age excelled in historical criticism and has provided far advanced information on the Gospel of John or other books of the New Testament as compared to the age of al-Ghazālī where we find preliminary research only regarding the authorship or the historical reliability of the gospels.

Coming to al-Ghazālī and Bultmann let us see to what extent historical study played its part in their interpretation of John. About the authorship of John, and who he was, when, how and where did he write the book are the basic and essential issues. But these questions have been discussed briefly by al-Ghazālī and Bultmann. As for al-Ghazālī it seems that he relied on Christian information instead of investigating the historical aspect of the book. He affirms the traditional Christian stance that John the beloved disciple of Jesus was the author of the Gospel, apart from it when and where was it written, these questions were not raised by him, and only the issue of translations is being mentioned. Undoubtedly these questions have significance from the historical perspective but for al-Ghazālī John or other apostles were narrating the sayings of Jesus and the church sanctified them so the historical issues were meaningless, for this reason he concentrated on the meaning of the text.

Position of Bultmann is much similar to al-Ghazālī he too, gave less space to historical critical inquiry, still Bultmann was a twentieth century theologian who witnessed the climax of modern historical critical method therefore it was impossible for him to ignore it totally and its influence is evident in his interpretation. Regarding the basic historic information about John and his books, it is not much detailed. It seems that Bultmann too relied on the results of the modern historical criticism of his age. For him the author was unknown, and it was written somewhere in the first century in Greek. So for questions of historical criticism and for the relationship of John with other gospels he relied on the results of the modern critical studies.

It can be said instead of exploring historical questions al-Ghazālī and Bultmann both investigated the historical background. They concentrated on the study of historical context of John in which it appeared and how other apostles responded to this gospel, though it is an historical study but from a different dimension. Besides, Bultmann examined the historical development of the gospel through the study of its forms or units. For him bible is an historical document and must be interpreted accordingly. Some other salient features of their historical study are as follows.

As already noted that although there is lack of interest in historical method but at the same time contextual aspect of historical study has been emphasized significantly. In it instead of fundamental questions related to history, general historical scenario is focused more and due to its thematic nature it is more relevant to al-ta'wil or demythologizing. Contextual study in the thought of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann has two aspects; one is narrower context of the Old and New Testaments writings and to evaluate John in that perspective. The other is the broader context of social and intellectual setup and in it to trace the changes which appeared in the message of Jesus. Both these aspects are present in their thought with the difference that al-Ghazālī emphasized more on the narrower perspective of context as compared to Bultmann who was inclined more towards the broader context.

Al-Ghazālī gave more importance to the biblical context for the simple reason that the other writings are the best prism to arrive at the correct meaning of John in particular the sayings of other apostles like St. Paul or St. Matthew and so forth. Same is the case with the problematic terms like 'Son of God' or 'Father' but here al-Ghazālī widened the context to include the broader aspect as well to clarify these terms as the scenario of the age provides their true meaning.

Whereas the major thesis of al-Ghazālī that is the change in the message of Jesus over the period of time is not expanded on in detail historically. He only mentioned that the change appeared due to incorrect handling of the text by late generations but how and when it came about is not elaborated well. In his study he takes the distorted interpretation of the later generations and compares it with the other books without going in detail of how the change took place historically.

On the other hand Bultmann had a different approach to study the historical context, for him the writings of the Old and the New Testaments were less important although he compares John with Paul's thought frequently but the development of historical setup and the change in Jesus' message had more value for him. In his *Theology of the*

New Testament he divided the history of Christian theology in different phases,¹ starting from the times of Jesus when the message first appeared he traced the development of the message in the early church. Then he differentiated between the historical development of the Hellenistic church, of St. Paul and of St. John with that of the later church. In all these periods he traced the changes in the message of Jesus, their interpretation by St. Paul and St. John, and in what way various external or internal factors worked in the growth of Christian thought. It means that the gospels developed with time and the final form was not produced by Jesus or his apostles but this all passed a long process of change. This automatically reduces the historical worth of gospels. As said for Bultmann primitive Christianity in its various phases was different from the message of Jesus, and John borrowed many ideas from his contemporary Hellenistic surroundings and incorporated them in his gospel. Thus, development of thought and the changes were more important as compared to comparison of John with other books. And wherever he compared John with Paul he highlighted the variation in their thought.

In the nutshell it can be said that al-Ghazālī was confined within the text of the sacred books to understand and interpret John therefore the historical information was not much useful but the context was important. Whereas for Bultmann not the historical context of sacred books rather historical development of Christian thought which gave birth to Christian theology and to the books of the New Testament was important. Thus, although historical context was important for both the theologians but it was approached from a different dimension.

Here it must be mentioned that Bible for Bultmann is an historical document and not a sacred book so it must be treated in the same manner. Therefore he concentrated on the study of forms or the units of biblical narrations which indicate the stages of biblical development and the way it enlarged in the hands of Christian generations.

¹ A similar historical study by Bultmann is also found in *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Settings*.

Looking into the reasons that why historical method has been given meager space by al-Ghazālī and Bultmann despite its importance. It might be that the historic information helps more in literal interpretation of the text; it scrutinizes the historical events and brings to light the facts as they are. Whereas al-ta'wīl or demythologization were not concerned with literal interpretation therefore historical investigation had secondary importance. Another reason which might have diverted their attention from it is the issue of authenticity or soundness of historical information in case of gospels. Even in modern studies where historical critical method with scientific methodology at its disposal has made great advancement and has assembled vast information about bible still its results are based on assumptions and suppositions which cannot be verified due to scarcity and unreliability of historical data. And if the historical critical method is questionable, how could its information be relied on. Furthermore, al-Ghazālī avoided the historical questions because he considered the text to be authentic and in that case historical questions were not much important. As for Bultmann he criticized modern historical critical method because of its unsound results, as it leads nowhere or to a dead end. Therefore he showed no interest in the results of historical Jesus or the gospels, even if the picture of historical Jesus was burnt by critics, he was least concerned because for him it is the kerygma, essence of Christianity or the Christ of faith which was more important.

From above it becomes clear that historical questions does not play a very significant role in al-ta'wīl and demythologizing due to limited scope of this method which is confined to basic information related to the historical background and is more or less helpful in the clarification of the apparent meaning of the text. On the other hand main concern of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann was not the apparent meaning of the text but the deeper or inner meanings which lay behind the literal wordings therefore the historical method had less importance in their interpretation. With this it may be noted that both view the historical worth of the gospel from an opposite end. For al-Ghazālī its worth as a sacred book was not denied, whereas for Bultmann the gospel

developed from small units or forms to an elaborate message and this minimizes its sacredness. The Gospel of John like other gospels was a creation of late community so it is not conveying apparently the message or the sayings of Jesus rather it is covered beneath the stories developed by the later generations. Despite the differences present in al-Ghazālī and Bultmann's thought they both agreed that late generation was responsible for change and corruption in the message of Jesus. With this we now turn to linguistic interpretation by al-Ghazālī and Bultmann.

LINGUISTIC INTERPRETATION

It is through the medium of language that we think, converse and communicate to others, in other words we understand everything through language without it we would be locked up within ourselves. Its position and importance in human life can be imagined from the fact that Allah chose this medium to interact with man and to reveal Himself. It is through language that Adam was taught the knowledge of names, God revealed His books, and spoke through it to man. Thus communication and perception whether it is between God and man or between human beings takes place through language. For this reason proper understanding of what is conveyed through it is very important and must be recognized well. Further, language is made up of various components of grammatical and linguistic tools and they all play crucial role in making the communication meaningful. Still these components are not like a tool box to be used in isolation; rather they are structured or fixed within social, cultural and historical background in which a particular language emerges. Therefore in interpretation or translation all these tools and devices must play their due role, their value is enhanced in case of a long gap present between its first emergence and the late hearers. In case of religious language, which is our concern here, the situation is more problematic, on the one side is the long time difference as for Gospel of John, and on the other side is the problematic nature of religious language itself. Interpretation of religious language has always been a cumbersome exercise since ages due to the various

factors involved in it. Religious ideas and concepts are multifaceted and complex therefore requires a well trained endeavor to reach its correct interpretation. Apart from it religious language is obscure at times therefore in what way is it to be interpreted whether literally, analogically, symbolically or metaphorically as these are some of the directions chosen by theologians, jurists, philosophers and mystics in their interpretation. Both these problems are present in the Gospel of John. Coming to al-Ghazālī and Bultmann let us look into the theory of linguistic interpretation as followed by them.

Indeed one of the distinguishing features of the Gospel of John is its language; its poetic prologue with other likewise statements gave it a unique status. This might have caught the eye of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann thus giving it a deeper thought in interpretation with *al-ta'wīl* and demythologizing respectively. Again they agree in their interpretation on certain issues but disagree on many others. Both agreed that the language of John needs interpretation, but word to word meaning or only language rules were not their prime concern rather overall meaning of the text was significant. With a difference that in *al-ta'wīl* language rules played a central role in arriving at meaning of the text which is not so in demythologizing. Further, for Bultmann gospels were literary documents and he studied them in the light of form criticism, a method which is an outcome of modern thought and therefore not shared by al-Ghazālī. Coming back to the common issue shared by al-Ghazālī and Bultmann that the text of John must be interpreted, according to them language of John compels the reader to put aside the apparent meaning. For al-Ghazālī the linguistic indicators perform this function whereas for Bultmann mythical character of its language indicates that the text has some other meaning. Therefore it can be said that for both there are levels in text, or the language is dual with an outward and inward aspect. These levels or grades are not conveying one level of meaning. For al-Ghazālī these levels are again pointed by the linguistic indicators present within the text therefore each level must be interpreted accordingly. The mistake committed by later age Christians in his view is their lack of

comprehension about the nature of the text. As a result of it they treated the whole text in the same manner, considering it to be conveying one level or the apparent meaning only and ignoring the various linguistic indicators present within it. Whereas the text conveys the simple or literal meaning in absence of linguistic indicators otherwise they hinder the literal meaning and point to another level of meaning to be deduced from the text. This inner meaning is arrived at due to linguistic indicators and such expressions are termed as *majāz* or metaphorical expressions. These levels of meanings do not oppose but complete each other and give a proper meaning to the text. They also help in resolving the apparent contradictions present in the text, which was neglected by later age Christians and resulted in wrong interpretations. Third level is most important in al-Ghazālī's thought as it helps in understanding the true spirit of the text by resolving the duality of the text in the light of Sufism. Again this level does not contradict the other two; in fact there is a hierarchy of thought in understanding of the text. In this hierarchy the foundational ground is provided by the literal meaning of the text, only in case of metaphorical indicators the second or the third levels is to be sought with a condition that its meaning does not contradict the apparent sense of the text.

On the other side for Bultmann biblical language is the key theme in interpretation, whole enterprise is aimed at understanding and translating the meaning of biblical language in the modern categories but in spite of this significance for biblical language we do not find an adequate theory of language in interpretation. He only points that the biblical language is mythical, like the three storied cosmos with heaven above and hell below, Jesus as son of God or the word of God, made flesh and died on the cross and was resurrected on the third day and so forth cannot be taken literally true by the modern man therefore this language must be interpreted and this is demythologizing. The process of interpretation is carried on in the light of existential philosophy. Bultmann shares with al-Ghazālī that the language of John is dualistic, it has two faces. For Bultmann John borrowed the dualistic terminology from Gnosticism for example

light and darkness, truth and falsehood, freedom and bondage, life and death are coming from Gnosticism but John gave them radical meaning. It is in terms of existence or decision that these words have double meaning. Thus, al-Ghazālī and Bultmann agree that the language of John has double meanings but they disagree on the source and the concept of duality. For Bultmann the source is the Hellenistic philosophy whereas for al-Ghazālī it is divine revelation as it is narrating the sayings of Jesus. For Bultmann it is pointing towards relation of man with this world and with one's own self and for al-Ghazālī it is pointing towards the relation of man with God. Still they do agree on duality in John's language and this leads to another commonly shared issue between them and that is problematic nature of religious language.² The double meanings at times has apparent contradictions or the language itself is ambiguous thus there are certain problems in it. In resolving the apparent contradiction or the ambiguity in language al-Ghazālī and Bultmann both take a different course.

EVALUATION OF HISTORICAL AND LITERARY INTERPRETATION

From above it is clear that the historical and literary approaches were given limited space in interpretation by al-Ghazālī and Bultmann with a difference that former relied more on the literary aspect whereas the latter on the historic side. The reason is that historical questions are undoubtedly essential but they only help in grasping the literal interpretation. And as al-Ghazālī and Bulmann were least concerned with the literal interpretation therefore historical interpretation was not dealt in with detail. Coming to literary approach, in case of simple language tools the situation is similar like historical studies it deals with the text apparently. Simple language rules helps in elaborating the meaning of the text, which though needed but does not cross the literal sense. And al-Ghazālī and Bultmann were not much concerned with explanation of the simple meanings thus they were not much elaborated. As noted above that both share

²The 'Problem of religious language' here is not used as connoted by modern philosophy of religion, rather, I have used it in its simple understanding that religious language at times is obscure and points to a deeper meaning behind the apparent wordings.

that language of John is not simple and there is some type of duality and ambiguity present in it. Although they disagreed on the source and the method of resolving it but obviously share that historical critical investigation is not the solution. In reality it is useful in providing primary information regarding the historical worth of a document which in turn is helpful in gaining the outward sense but it does not clarify the ambiguities present in the text. Neither it is able to penetrate deep in the text; it can lead to the shell but in no way is able to uncover the pearl. On the other hand literary method, in particular the one used by al-Ghazālī, moves a step further than historical method. It examines the words, style and nature of expressions of the text therefore it is not limited in its scope like the historical method. It differentiates between the various levels of meanings present in the text and helps in approaching the inner dimensions. Thus, it is an advanced method as compared to the historical study but does it alone can explore the core or the heart of the esoteric teachings or not needs to be answered. The distinction in various levels of the text is made with the help of linguistic indicators; these indicators at times hinder the literal meaning and at times prohibit the diversion of the text to metaphorical expressions so the guide is within the text. Function of these indicators is to differentiate in the levels of text but they are not giving meaning to the text. It can be said that it can explore and inform about the presence of a pearl within shell but stops after that. One of the reasons might be that in literary method the pivotal point is the rules of language whereas the ambiguities present in the religious text are not only of literary nature therefore this method is unable to answer all its problems. Moreover, as this method is confined within the text so whatever meaning is given to the text is of worldly category or according to human perception. Whereas status of religious text is higher, it is linked with the other world therefore literary method cannot do full justice to it, it is helpful in understanding the text but cannot give appropriate meaning to it. On the other side form criticism, which has relationship with literary method also has limitations. In the study of forms different layers can be discerned through literary techniques. So again it is language

rules which help in differentiating these layers. Further, it does not provide meaning to the problematic phrases or to its ambiguities of the text. Unlike literary method of al-Ghazālī, it is not able to distinguish between the levels of meanings present in the text nor does it indicate the presence of a pearl covered within the shell. Besides, form criticism reflects modern age rationality and is based on unreliable assumptions. Therefore its irrelevance is clear, this might have led Bultmann not to rely on it much. From the above discussion it may be noted that historical and literary methods do have some worth and validity therefore al-Ghazālī and Bultmann relied on them to some extent but as their scope is limited so after taking preliminary help their attention was diverted to another direction. The limitation as already stated lies in their inability to clarify the ambiguities present in the text due to their confinement within worldly categories. Language of religious text is not simple therefore only historical and literary methods cannot fulfill the requirements of its interpretation. With this we move to theological perspective and see how far it is appropriate in understanding and interpreting religious language.

THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION AND ITS EVALUATION

Al-Ghazālī and Bultmann were renowned theologians and interpretation of the religious text was their main project. But it may be noted at the outset that theological frame is very different among the two, theological setup with al-Ghazālī varies greatly from that of Bultmann. Former represents Muslim paradigm where revelation and correct human reason complement and do not contradict each other. Therefore religious text i.e. revelation would not oppose reason nor it would go against the overall spirit of the text. For this reason we find him mentioning these theological principles before entering in interpretation of John. According to these principles there is apparent contradiction in John as there are verses telling about divinity of Jesus and on the other side verses showing his humanity. These contradictions are pointing to inconsistencies in John, besides verses narrating divinity of Jesus are opposing reason.

So, theological interpretation demands that these contradictions must be resolved and to arrive at interpretation which is in accord with reason and with text in general. To resolve these contradictions al-Ghazālī took the help of literary rules in differentiating between literal and non-literal expressions. After this come the role of theology where revelation does not contradict reason as a result of it simple or the literal statements became the criterion to judge and interpret the non-literal verses. According to the literal expressions Jesus was a mere man with all the limitations of man i.e. hunger and sufferings. Taking these verses as standard and to interpret others accordingly meant that metaphors in them must be interpreted in a way that they agree with the former. Thus, theology provides parameters to interpret religious text and its problematic language. It outlines what is possible to attribute to God and what is not; similarly for man what are his qualities and what are not. Remaining within this paradigm it is easy to interpret John that the verses which narrate humanity of Jesus are the standard and problematic expressions in others are to be interpreted accordingly. Thus, Jesus was a man and a prophet whereas 'son' or 'god' terminology was to state his elevated status only. From above it is clear that theological interpretation moved a step forward than literary interpretation. It is able to provide some meaning to problematic expressions consequently it can be said that it is able enter the shell. Still it remains to be known that whether with all the tools available to it, is it able to interpret the true sense of the problematic expressions. In other words is theology able to go deep and grasp and interpret the religious language or not, is it able to arrive at and know well the pearl. As mentioned already that theology provides principles to approach text and these principles no doubt are helpful in understanding the text. Still dominantly these principles are rational, thus they read the text in a rational way only. There is no harm in using rational principles but religious language is richer and there is variety of features in it which cannot be grasped by simple reason oriented ways. Theology can understand only what is acceptable to reason, anything above that would be rejected by it. Besides, as theology uses the glasses of reason to see through it as expressed in, *qiyās*

al-shāhid 'alā al-ghā'ib so theology tries to understand the realities of the other world in terms of this world. In other words it brings down God to earth, in itself this method has been taken from the Holy Qur'ān that God narrates about His self in a language and terminology of this world and this way is easy for man to understand. Still there are some problems in this method. It may be noted that due to over emphasis of theology on reason, it is more literalist in understanding religious language. Theology follows certain rules and principles in understanding text and if the text demands any deviation from rationality to some other principles, theology simply rejects such a demand out rightly. For this reason Sufistic interpretation which is supra rational is not acceptable to theology. Moreover, to bring down God or other realities of that world into this are helpful to some extent particularly for common understanding but do those realities can be made to fit in worldly terms. In fact it is a way of expression and not more than that. In a nutshell it can be said that theological interpretation when it approaches the religious text with reason and this worldly parameters it has a limited scope to grasp religious language. With this limited vision it is bound to skip what does not fit in this parameter. Religious language do has some problematic phrases which do not always accept rational interpretation and here theology stops due to its inadequate tools. Besides, understanding the other world in terms of this world has another problem that it keeps the man confined within world and does not help in elevating himself to the higher realms for this reason theological interpretation for other realities would have this color in it. In few words it can be said that theology can enter the shell but is unable to comprehend fully the pearl.

Coming to Bultmann, being a modern age theologian he followed the modern suppositions where unaided human reason stands in opposition to revelation and is the sole criterion of verifying the truth of any concept. Therefore the conceptual world of John is mythical in his view as it contradicts reason so he simply puts the mythical ideas on one side and translates the message in philosophical terms. For this reason it is

not theological but is philosophical reading of the text so we will not enter in its details here but would discuss it in the following section.

Concluding the above discussion it may be noted that in interpretation theology, in particular of al-Ghazālī, is a step forward to literary approach and is able to give principle on which interpretation is possible. Still as there are some problems in religious language and theology lack proper tools to interpret them. Realizing the insufficiency of theology al-Ghazālī aided it with component.

So now we move to mystical and philosophical interpretation of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann respectively to see whether these are the proper tools for interpreting the ambiguities present in religious language or not. In order to understand the rationale of Sufistic and philosophic interpretation in al-ta'wīl and demythologizing it would be appropriate to say few words on the distinctive nature of the religious language. Religious language is not like a common language, its distinguishing feature is not only in its vocabulary and expressions but also in the richness of its ideas. Besides, it conveys the truths of other world in the terminology of this world therefore some ambiguities are present in it. For this reason its translation or interpretation is not easy and it requires adequate tools for interpretation. These ambiguities if resolved relying only on the rationally oriented historic, linguistic or theological perceptions, will result in superficial interpretation and will lack the spiritual dimension which is the essence of the divine message.

RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

The nature of religious language, and precisely of John, is problematic in the sense that it is full of imagery and poetical expressions. Its figurative or metaphorical statements comprising of simile, story, parable, poem, myth and so forth, does not fall in the category of common language. General feature of all these expressions is that they stand opposite to literal mode of expressions. Moreover, figurative expressions also share the characteristic of symbolism. The word 'symbol' is defined as something that 'stands

for, represents or denotes something else (the resemblance in the two words or things is not exact but vague or conventional); especially when the material object represents an immaterial or abstract, as a being, idea, quality or condition'.³ Accordingly it is an expression where something is represented by something else and the two are linked with some type of connection in them. The idea of connecting the two things becomes clear when we see the etymology of 'symbol', it is derived from the Greek word *symbolon* which is the combination of the *syn* meaning 'together with' and *ballien* 'to throw' taking together it conveys the meaning of 'to throw or bring, or join together'.⁴ So through symbols or symbolic language two things or ideas are linked together in a sense that one represents the other. Consequently, symbolism in religious language by its nature plays very distinctive and a dual role, it conveys the ideas and concepts related to the metaphysical world in the language and the conceptual categories of this world and works as a bridge between the two different conceptual worlds. While conveying the ideas of one realm in the categories of another, it leads to certain problems, which are unavoidable at times. The reason behind it is that it borrows the wordings of this world to convey the ideas of another world, and at the same time is connected with the two worlds therefore the expressions occasionally are vague. This dual role of symbolic reference can only be played by the metaphorical language; literal language with its limited scope cannot perform such a function. Undoubtedly literal statements are one of the basic components of religious language particularly when the issues elaborated are related to this world literal language is the best option. For this reason religious commandments related to this world i.e. dealings and other social injunctions are mostly stated in clear and explicit wordings. Still literal expressions cannot fulfill all the requirements of the religious discourse therefore symbolic expressions are indispensable. It is only through them that the gap between the known

³ See *Dictionary.com* 'symbol' <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Symbol> (accessed on 20/5/10); Yusra Qureshi, 'Religious Symbolism A Comparative Study' (M Phil Thesis), Islamabad: International Islamic University, 2006/2007, pp. 10-12.

⁴ See *Dictionary.com*; 'symbol'.

and the unknown can be bridged. In it symbols convey the abstract or imaginative ideas through familiar and concrete categories. It can be said that it takes the reader from one state to another, from one world to another, thus there is a movement in it or it is a process of imagination which helps in visualizing unknown ideas in known terms. With this process the language at times turns to be ambiguous and for this reason it needs interpretation.

For al-Ghazālī and Bultmann the language of John is full of imagery and symbolism therefore it must be interpreted. The term specifically used by al-Ghazālī is al-majāz and by Bultmann myth to convey the symbolism present in John. In both these terms the central idea is that the literal meaning of the text is not intended rather the apparent language is pointing to something else.

The word al-majāz is from the root *ja wa za* which means to cross or to move from one form to another; other terms used by al-Ghazālī are al-mathal or al-shabih. The former means likeness, metaphor, simile, parable and the latter too gives the same meaning like, similar to, resembling, parallel to, comparable with or identical with.⁵ All these terms are equivalent to symbolic and metaphoric expressions as discussed above. On the other hand myth has been used in a wide range of meanings in the modern understanding as for Bultmann he takes them as symbolic narrations which narrate the other worldly in terms of this worldly, 'myths give to the transcendent this-worldly objectivity. Myths give worldly objectivity to that which is unworldly'.⁶ Mythology for him is taking the concepts of this world to convey something about the other. From what has been said above it becomes clear that al-Ghazālī and Bultmann both share that the religious language generally and that of John particularly is dominantly non-literal. And its language is vague and not clear therefore it needs interpretation. With these similarities al-Ghazālī and Bultmann differ in their perceptions of religious language in some other aspects and also in their methodology of its interpretation.

⁵ See Rohi Baalbaki, *al-Mawrid* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm lil-malā'iyya 1990), pp. 661, 973.

⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1958), p. 19.

From the differences we find in al-Ghazālī and Bultmann's thought are like the status of religious language, whether it has any significance or not, is it cognitive or non-cognitive and is it conveying truth and reality or mere ideas. These differences in them are in fact representing two very different intellectual scenarios. In al-Ghazālī's age the significance and the cognitive aspect of religious language were the accepted facts. There were no doubts raised as to its truth and validity. Thus, religious literature and its language enjoyed a high or revelatory status and they were the source of knowledge. Particularly for Sufis who gave more value to the other world and derived their epistemology in the light of the two world theory, for them the other world is real and they understand this world in the light of the other. As religious literature and its language is a bridge between the two worlds so they paid more attention to it. And as already stated that symbols work as pointers for something else so symbolic language is in fact conveying about the other world for this reason it was given a special consideration. By penetrating in it and decoding its inner aspect they could arrive at knowledge of the other world. Thus, problematic side of religious language was not in reality vague expressions but helped in bridging the two worlds. In order to achieve it they developed a methodology suitable to its nature. In which rationally oriented methods are given their due place but after attaining knowledge through them they moved forward and explored the path of al-kashf. With this background al-Ghazālī's Sufistic method of understanding symbolic language of John becomes clear as it was a means to uncover the truth so symbolic language had central place for him.

Coming to Bultmann nature and discussion of religious language in the modern period has significantly changed from the age of al-Ghazālī. In modern period secular and modern rationality were forceful factors in bringing a change in religious studies. With the passage of time they pushed back traditional religious way of thinking and the gap was filled by secular and anti-religious ways. Traditionally existence of God, revelation and the other world were realities but in changed situation they all became just man made ideas. Religion, with its components of sacred literature and rituals and so forth

became a creation of man or a social phenomenon.⁷ These ideas were further enhanced due to lack of authentic information regarding Christianity. There were no valid historical proofs for the existence of Jesus or for the authorship of Bible. This led to the idea that Jesus or the Bible were created by people, in this way Bible lost its revelatory status and was taken to be a book of history. Its compilation took a long process and different authors played their part in it. Later with the emergence of modern philosophy of religion, new investigation of religious language started where its cognitive aspect was negated.⁸ This language, in particular its symbolic terminology was labeled meaningless for the sole reason that its verification rationally is impossible.⁹ Bultmann being a representative of modern age considered Bible, and book of John within it, a book of history authored by anonymous writer and is a collection of myths. Its symbolic language was mythology which was the language of the ancient culture and the author borrowed it to shape his ideas. Thus, symbolism of John had no connection with other world or its realities but was the ideas of this world of old times. For this reason putting aside its old meaning and giving them new meaning which is most apt for the modern man is the correct way to interpret them. Coming to the mystical and philosophical interpretations to know how symbolism in religious text can be so diverse interpreted.

AL-TA'WĪL AND THE MYSTICAL INTERPRETATION BY AL-GHAZĀLĪ

Al-Ghazālī was one of the eminent Sufi masters of the Muslim world whose influence was greatly felt in the intellectual life of later generations, particularly his contribution

⁷ See the details of the shift which has taken place and the difference between modern western and the Muslim understanding on religious language, Muḥammad al-Ghazali, *The Problem of Religious Language: From a Muslim point of view, Hawliyyat al-Jāmi'ah al-Islāmiyyah al-'Ālamiyyah*, 13 & 14 ed. (2005-6/1426-7), pp. 35-52.

⁸ See John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India 1988), 5th printing of 3rd ed., pp. 83-93.

⁹ See Raphael Demos, *The Meaningfulness of Religious Language, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 18, No. 1(Sep. 1957), pp. 96-106; Franklin Gamwell, "Speaking of God after Aquinas" in *Journal of Religion* 81, issue 2 (April 2001), pp. 1-18; R. H. Holland, "Religious Discourse and Theological Discourse" in *The Australian Journal of Philosophy* 34, No. 3 (December, 1956), pp. 147-163.

in bringing Sufism to the forefront in scholarship of his age. Only Sufi path for him can lead to al-'ilm al-yaqīn, knowledge which is above doubt and is placed higher than the knowledge gained through senses or reason. For this reason interpretation or al-ta'wīl for him is connected with Sufism. In religious text, as already mentioned, a variety of non-literal or symbolic language is present, which needs interpretation. And historic questioning is limited to initial issues of text or author similarly linguistic or theological interpretation has its own restrictions. Although the scope of these interpretations is limited but their usefulness and validity is never denied by al-Ghazālī rather he establishes the foundation of al-ta'wīl on them. Still they lack the quality of reaching the essence or core of the text therefore they cannot fulfill the purpose. It is the Sufi option only which can unveil the reality of symbolism in the religious text and it is the only appropriate way to grasp the true meaning of the text. As figurative or symbolic expressions are pointing to something else so the need is to cross from the apparent side to the inner aspect. And mystical dimension gives a method to approach the inner aspect or to reach and know the pearl, its details is what follows.

Symbolic expressions have duality; its one side can be termed as known and other unknown, or familiar and unfamiliar, or manifest and not manifest these various words are denoted by al-Ghazālī as al-zāhir and al-bāṭin. In it al-zāhir or the outward is the manifestation of the inward or al-bāṭin so the inward is the reality or essence of the outward. Consequently, the movement from al-zāhir to al-bāṭin is the movement towards the reality or its origin which al-Ghazālī aims to arrive at in his interpretation. As literally al-ta'wīl means to go to the origin, thus mainly the Sufi interpretation is the movement towards the inner side and the true sense of the esoteric cannot be gained except through its exoteric meaning.

Al-Ghazālī's distinction between the inward and the outward meaning must be understood from two sides; from the aspect of revelation and secondly from the cosmological perspective. Taking first revelation, as elaborated in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* and *al-Qiṣṣas al-mustaqīm*, it is spiritual entity in itself and the material side of it is

conveyed in the form of words and sounds and is written down on the pages. Thus, revelation has two sides, inner and outer. Taking the example of the Holy Qur'an al-Ghazali counted Arabic language with grammatical rules, *ilm al-qirā'āt*, *'ulūm al-Qur'an* and *al-tafsīr* as the knowledge of outward aspect, they are helping tools in proper understanding of the revelation. On the other side the inward aspect of revelation he graded them in categories, basic level in it is knowledge of the practical side of life and the highest is the knowledge of God, His being, attributes deeds and the way towards Him. Within inner aspect the gradation points a movement towards al-bāṭin or the highest knowledge.¹⁰

Coming to John almost same structure can be discerned in al-Ghazali's thought. The teachings of Jesus related to God, His attributes are the inward or the central part of John whereas what helped in grasping and understanding the inward aspect like language or grammatical rules are the outward sciences. In order to reach the real or central concept of God as depicted in John al-Ghazali took the help of linguistic interpretation and from this al-zāhir aspect he penetrated in al-bāṭin of John's teachings. The outward meaning is important but they are the door to enter the inward side, in fact the inner is never grasped except through the outer aspect.

As for the second distinction of al-zāhir and al-bāṭin which is related to cosmology, here according to al-Ghazali revelation of God, whether it is the Holy Qur'an or other revelatory books, must be viewed in the light of the division of the world in the categories of 'ālam al-mulk wa 'ālam al-shahādah or the world of senses and the one above it. The source of revelation being God himself so it is coming from the higher world. In that upper world everything is being imprinted on the divine tablet and the real existence of everything is there. Whatever is present here in this lower world is a reflection of real existence. Further, these two realms are not isolated rather they are

¹⁰ See al-Ghazali, *Jawābir al-Qur'an* ed. Revival of Arabic culture committee (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah 1401/1981), pp. 18-23; al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm, in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghazālī* (Beirut: Dār al-kutūb al-'ilmiyyah n. d.), p. 9.

connected with each other. It is a mercy of God that through relation the higher world is connected with the lower one and man through elevation can be linked with the higher world. In both these movements the connecting point for the two realms is the purified heart of man. When the heart is cleansed from the impurities the veils from it are removed and the heart can capture the flash of light or knowledge from the higher world.¹¹ In this communication between the two worlds symbolism of language plays its part, as the facts of this world can easily be stated in simple and literal vocabulary whereas what is unfamiliar or about the other world needs non-literal expressions. This shows the importance and necessity of non-literal expressions in religious discourse. As the figurative expressions are linked with 'ālam al-malakūt their interpretation must be ingrained within it. Moreover, 'ālam al-malakūt is the real world and this world is the reflection of the other, and the relationship between the two is like the relationship of the outer shell with its inner essence, or that of shade of a man with his own being, or that of the cause with its effect.¹² In this case again al-ta'wīl must be rooted in the understanding of the other world.

As mentioned above heart is the locus where the two worlds meet, it is open towards the world of senses and after purification opens towards the other world as well. With this opening the heart gains knowledge from both the worlds. In explaining the knowledge gained from the other world al-Ghazālī exemplified it with the reflection in mirror or of sun in the water or dreams. In all these examples the viewer considers them to be the reality whereas the fact is that what appears is not the real, reality is hidden behind the appearance therefore it needs to be extracted. It is the process of al-ta'wīl that is moving from exoteric to esoteric the true meaning is understood. Taking the example of dream, which according to al-Ghazālī is similar to al-ta'wīl, interpretation of closing the mouths of women and the secrets of men with a ring

¹¹ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr 1411/1991), vol. 3, pp. 22-24; "Mishkāt al-Anwār" in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 8.

¹² See al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, p. 28; "Mishkāt al-Anwār" in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 9.

means an early call for the Morning Prayer in the month of Ramadan. Here, according to al-Ghazālī, the quality of the ring that is to seal is taken into consideration and not the shape or form of it, and the explanation 'closing of mouths or the secrets' help in understanding the meaning. Thus in interpretation it is the quality of the thing or its inner aspect which must be given importance and not the shape or its outer side. In similar fashion fingers, hands, face or the pen of God is to be interpreted. About the fingers of God it comes that the heart of a man is within the two fingers of God. The fingers here are to be interpreted in the same manner as that of ring in the dream that the spirit or the quality of the fingers and not its outer form is to be taken into consideration. The fingers are used for turning things, and the heart of a believer is between guidance from God and deceiving from Satan. These two forces are represented by two fingers of God with its spirit to turn the things quickly.¹³ Therefore inner meaning or al-bāṭin is important and it gives proper sense otherwise the apparent words can lead to anthropomorphism.

With this distinction of al-zāhir and al-bāṭin let us come to the Gospel of John which is full of symbolic and non-literal expressions, al-Ghazālī in similar fashion as above interpreted them, where the outer shell is crossed towards the inner essence in order to know the hidden, inner meaning or the spirit of the thing. Outer wordings are not to be taken literally as their literal meaning might be misleading. In fact al-Ghazālī charged later age Christians of holding fast to the literal meanings for the non-literal statements which caused distortion in their religion.¹⁴ In his interpretation of John, al-Ghazālī concentrated on few verses and certain important terms related to God and to Jesus, and showed that the inner or deeper meaning of these verses or terms are far different from the apparent meanings.

¹³ See al-Ghazālī, *Jawābir al-Qur'an*, p. 29; "Mishkāt al-Anwār" in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 20.

¹⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-Jamīl lil-Imām al-Ghazālī* ed. 'Abd al-'Aziz 'Abd al-Haqq Ḥilmī (Cairo: al-Maṭābi' al-Amīriyyah 1393/1973), p. 235.

From the verses, which according to Christians, portray divinity of Jesus are like, 'who has seen me has seen the father', 'the father is in me and I in the father', with the terms like 'father' and 'son' or the 'word of God'. These and many other such verses present in John are considered to be the proofs of divinity of Jesus whereas for al-Ghazālī the case is quite the opposite, they do not prove divinity of Jesus rather when interpreted properly prove that he was a human being.

The above and other such verses of John with the terms of 'father' and 'son', when taken literally, imply union of Jesus with God, and the mistake of Christians is holding fast to the apparent meaning. These expressions are non-literal therefore they must be interpreted.

In interpretation, as mentioned above, it is the inner or hidden meaning or the spirit of the outer words which is important and is to be extracted by moving from the outer covering to its origin or the interior. Leaving aside the outer form of the relation of father and son, which is biological and such a relation between God and man is impossible. On the other hand the inner aspect of this relationship refers to feelings and emotions between the father and son, and is of psychological nature which is intended here. Similarly in case of verses where the literal meaning points towards union between God and Jesus, the union here is not the physical union as understood by Christians. Related to this union of God and Jesus and their relationship Christians had a long history of theological disputes which is well depicted in their councils and resulted in schism of the Christian world and excommunication of those who refused to adhere to the main stream opinion. Literally union means physical merging or absorption of one entity into another. Such assimilation of man and God is impossible rationally as the two entities are of different natures. Therefore the literal interpretation is not the correct one and the union here is the metaphorical. It is not the physical union of God and Jesus as stated in these verses but it points to emotional and psychological relation between man and God.

Psychologically in the relation between father and son, the father is most caring for his son; he does not want anything bad to happen to his son, he tries to protect him from harm, he guides him towards the right path and wants his safety and well being. From the side of son is that he is respectful towards the father, obeys him and feels shy to refuse his orders. In few words emotionally it is the love and nearness between the two on which father son relationship is established. According to al-Ghazālī God is much more caring and loving than any earthly father and the prophets are more submissive and obedient to the commandments of God than any earthly son is to his father. In fact Jesus meant love and nearness present in the terms of father and son and not the physical union. This is further enhanced by Christian practice as according to al-Ghazālī they commonly call their priests father out of respect and love. Similarly, 'union' between two beings denotes nearness and love. It is in love that two beings come so close to each other that all separation and individuality disappears; they are two bodies with one soul. To the extent that their likes, dislikes, will or action all becomes one, as if they are not two beings but one. Prophets in their love with God are much near to God than anyone else. In this love they are so close to God that their own separate identity dissolves and only God remains, but again this union is not the union of bodies rather it is union of will and action. This is highest level of servanthood where man loves what God loves, hates what He hates, wants what God wants, wills what God wills; in short his likes and dislikes exactly become one with God. This union is what Jesus referred to when he said, 'I and father are one', or 'who saw me saw the father'. Whatever he says or does is the will of God, nothing comes from his own self but all his actions and speech are from God.

Al-Ghazālī being a mystic considered divine love as the heart of religion, which he illustrated in various writings, as it is the ultimate goal of religion, it is graded highest of all *maqāmāt* (stations). Rest of the stations are either preliminary or preparatory levels like repentance, *al-ṣabar*, *al-zuhd* or they are the outcome of love like *al-shawq*, *al-*

uns, al-riḍā. Thus religious teachings revolve around love for God in one way or the other.

For him love for God is not only possible but is an obligation as against those who deny its possibility. Its obligatory status stems from the fact that love is obedience and obedience is itself a result and outcome of love, as a man is always submissive to whom he loves so love is an essential ingredient in the submission to God. In addition love is linked with knowledge, it is impossible to love someone unknown therefore knowledge of God and love are interlinked. And the prophets came with this responsibility to reveal to people the knowledge of God and the path which leads to it. Elaborating the way to gain knowledge of God, al-Ghazālī mentions that its place is heart, and it is with purification of heart from evil qualities and replacing them with the divine qualities of knowledge, *al-bir, al-ihsān, al-lutf*, mercy and guidance of creation or in a nutshell it is said *al-takballuq bi akblāq Allāb* that is try to adopt or follow the qualities of God and this in turn leads to nearness to God, similarity in qualities and not in being. Thus more purified a heart is by removing evil qualities and replacing them with the divine attributes more open it will be to receive knowledge from above like a polished mirror which gets the reflection from the divine tablet. Consequently, knowledge leads man near to God and with that he experiences divine love. As the knowledge is an ocean with no shore, man will limitlessly move towards God. In this feeling of nearness to God man loses his sense of identity or in other words the distinction between 'I and thou' dissolves and he feels as if he is one with God. In mysticism this experience is nucleus or the spirit of religion, in it man experiences the loss of his self conscious or his 'I' and feels bewildered in the divine presence.

This oneness is not the oneness of beings as pronounced by Christians but it is union of like and dislike or will and action of man and God. Comparing this union al-Ghazālī mentions the ḥadīth which says,

None comes close to me from among those who draw close in a way better than through that which I have made obligatory on him. Then the servant keeps drawing

nearer to Me through the supererogatory practices until I love him. When I love him, I become his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his tongue with which he speaks and his hand with which he grips.¹⁵

This ḥadīth has a central place in the concept of nearness or union. Here God is not incarnated in human organs like ears, eyes or hand but points to the union of will and action of God and man.

Thus, symbolism in the religious text has two faces, while talking about God and metaphysics it is connecting two worlds. And its interpretation too requires that a link must be developed between these two worlds. To achieve it the prerequisite is the purification of the heart. The purified heart receives knowledge or divine mercy or reflection from above which guides him towards truth and reveals the hidden realities. A corollary of the above discussion is that it is possible to talk about God in terms of human language. In al-Ghazālī's view it is legitimate to use human terminology for God as compared to literalists who consider it incorrect and took the text literally and denied its interpretation, and to rationalists as for them God is so transcendent that there is no comparison between the two therefore God cannot be compared with human beings in any way, although they allowed interpretation but stressed on the difference between them.

In conclusion it may be stated that in mystical approach in al-ta'wīl he dives in the words of the text to extract or dig out the pearl hidden in the shell. To reach the inner levels of meaning al-Ghazālī moves step by step in a hierarchy starting from literal interpretation to linguistic or majāz than taking in theological perspective and then moving through it to mystical interpretation which is the crux of al-ta'wīl. Now we come to Bultmann and his philosophical interpretation of myth.

¹⁵ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Bāb al-tawādu', ḥadīth no. 6021.

DEMYTHOLOGIZING AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATION BY BULTMANN

Rudolf Bultmann was one of the renowned theologians of the modern west who witnessed the age of changing trends in Biblical theology. There were pressing voices in the protestant circles that the message of the Bible needs to be rediscovered, the charge was leveled against the literal interpretation of the Bible by fundamentalists or against the distorted and fragmented unity of the Bible at the hands of Biblical critics. As a result of it there was a fresh interest in Biblical theology, which concentrated on the Biblical message or its proclamation as a unity of the 'gospel' without ignoring the rightful results of the historical criticism.¹⁶ Bultmann was one among those who felt the demand of the changing times and proposed demythologizing as a solution for it. For him the task in front of a theologian is to make the message or the proclamation of the Bible comprehensible for the contemporary man, to make it clear in terms of conceptual understanding and language which would be logical for the modern times. Furthermore, in his view the theologian has to make plain, in the present age terms, the implicit understanding of human existence which is present in the New Testament. This means that Christian message is mainly about the human existence or about man's understanding of his own being as a person, as he says, 'revelation...addresses the individual as an existing self. That he thereby learns to understand himself means that he learns to understand his now, the moment, as a now, that is qualified by the proclamation. For existence in the moment is his authentic being'.¹⁷ Thus, for Bultmann the message of the Christian faith is about the human existence or in other words it is the existential understanding of God, the man and the world. The most appropriate framework to understand human existence is existential philosophy as, according to Bultmann it is the 'right' philosophy in a sense that it most adequately perceives 'human existence' and it is here that the human existence 'is directly the

¹⁶ See for details on theological crisis of Bible, Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press n.d.).

¹⁷ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Existence and Faith: Shorter writings of Rudolf Bultmann* selected, tr. & introduced by Schubert M. Ogden (London: Collins 1960), pp. 101, 120.

object of attention'.¹⁸ In this philosophy the meaning of existence is shown or, 'what existence means. It tells us that human Being, as distinct from all other Being, means existing, a form of Being which assumes complete responsibility for itself. It tells us that our authentic existence is realizable only in existence, which means existing always in the concrete here and now'.¹⁹

Another aspect of Christian faith as illustrated in the New Testament or elaborated by the traditional theology is that it is expressed in mythological language, which is unintelligible and irrelevant for the present age. According to Bultmann myth is a kind of language which is ungraspable for the modern man. It is a language of imagery and symbolism, as it expresses, 'the other worldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side'.²⁰ This means that it is not the literal language and needs interpretation. The nature of non-literalness or the symbolism of the New Testament is such that it is unintelligible for the modern man therefore requires interpretation, as Bultmann says, 'why could we not substitute an intelligible language for an unintelligible imagery?'²¹

Unintelligible imagery of the New Testament is the mode of expression it uses to present its ideas, a mode of expression which was intelligible and graspable for the community in which it was produced but is not so in the modern age. Thus it is faulty mode of expression for the world of today, although it carries in itself a meaning but the meaning cannot be discerned rather it is hidden. Therefore there is a need to translate or interpret the meaning in a language which is intelligible today. Its example is when someone tries to read a book in a foreign and unknown language, he will not understand the meaning unless it is translated or interpreted in a known and familiar language while keeping the meaning as it is. This is what Bultmann means by calling

¹⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's sons 1958), p. 55.

¹⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth A Theological Debate* ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row 1961), vol. 1, p. 193; *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, pp. 57-58.

²⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, p. 10, n. 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

the language of the New Testament as unintelligible imagery which needs to be translated in an intelligible language.

The intelligible language for Bultmann is the existential philosophy which is an adequate mode of expression for the modern age. In the process of translation in this intelligible language the 'outer clothing' or the descriptions are not important therefore it must be discarded whereas the meaning which is expressed within these descriptions or clothing is to be restated or interpreted in the terms and language of existential philosophy. Taking the example of unessential covering, Bultmann points that the New Testament presents the cross of Jesus Christ in the sense of bearing the sin of the world on behalf of all so that they be freed from death. This presentation has 'mythical character' which 'have ceased to be tenable for us to-day'. Moreover, 'in any case they fail to do justice to what the New Testament is trying to say'.²² But for Bultmann, fortunately, the mythical aspect is only the language, an imagery, unintelligible and symbolic in nature therefore it can be put aside, 'we are compelled to ask whether all this mythological language is not simply an attempt to express the meaning of the historical figure of Jesus and the events of his life; in other words, significance of these as a figure and event of salvation. If that be so, we can dispense with the objective form in which they are cast'.²³

Although it is only the mythical language but the real content or the true meaning of the New Testament is hidden under it, and unless the mythical language is demythologized in the language of existential philosophy its true intention cannot be brought to light. As stated by Bultmann, 'I am bound to say that to speak of faith in the living God and in the presence of Christ...is pure myth unless these things are given an existential interpretation... True, freedom, in the New Testament sense of the word means, freedom from condemnation, freedom from the bondage of the law, etc. But all this requires interpretation; these things must be shown to be real experiences in

²² Ibid., pp. 35-36.

²³ Ibid., p. 35.

human life. Otherwise all this is simply unintelligible mythology. I am seeking to elucidate this freedom by interpreting it as the freedom of man from himself and from his past for himself and his future...Apart from such an interpretation the New Testament message of freedom remains utterly unintelligible'.²⁴

As already said that what Bultmann means by mythical, unintelligible language or inadequate mode of expression is that it is way to say something, and that 'way' is not the real meaning therefore to make it intelligible the 'way is to be changed from inadequate to adequate. To clarify it let us consider the Biblical statement 'Jesus died for our sins'. Such a statement is only a 'way' to say something and this 'way' is not the real meaning, it is not telling anything about Jesus, rather it is inadequate mode of expressing that the man has been freed from every worldly attachment. In these two expressions as the meaning is same but the former that is 'Jesus died for our sins' is mythical so inadequate whereas 'that the man is freed from every worldly attachment' is intelligible expression. Therefore to demythologize is to shift from inadequate modes of expressions to intelligible and adequate expressions while keeping the real content. This shift from mythical to intelligible mode of expression is possible only, as in case of above example, when it is done in the light of existential philosophy. Elaborating the above example further in order to understand Bultmann's demythologizing the mythical language of the New Testament, the statement that Jesus died for the sins of all or other such assertions about him like he was a savior, a son of God, who died on the cross and was resurrected and so forth, demand faith from man. But the truth of the matter is that the Biblical statements are mythical and unintelligible therefore there is a gap between faith and understanding, in other words mythical mode of expression are hindrance or veil between man and understanding and so the demand of faith cannot be fulfilled. Man is called to have faith but he cannot understand for what he is called for, this might be termed as the hermeneutical problem. This problem can be

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 105-106.

solved by bringing the faith and understanding on the parallel level and by removing the veil from them so that man can understand and have faith. To remove the veil is possible only when the mythical language of such assertions is interpreted in a way that their real meaning is stated in an intelligible or existential language. Jesus died for the sins or the event of the Christ on the whole in existential interpretation means that 'it make the man free from himself and free to be himself, free to live a life of self commitment in faith and love',²⁵ such a language is not mythical and is intelligible for the modern man. It gives the real meaning or the content in a language which brings the faith on the understandable level. With this understanding man is confronted with a decision for or against faith to follow.

Another important aspect of existential interpretation is that for Bultmann dependence on any worldly reference in terms of past or future is not essential, his focus is on the present that is the decision for faith is the decision or act of now. The New Testament presents its message in reference to past, therefore binds history with faith whereas Bultmann differentiates between the two, for him the past is the referential and symbolic language in which the faith is expressed otherwise it is not essential and can be separated. It is with this separation that the faith can be understood as a demand for decision for the present. In an article 'The meaning of the Christian faith in creation' Bultmann explains it in reference to the doctrine of creation as, 'Faith in creation...is not the theory about the past. It does not have its meaning by relating what took place at some earlier time and no longer concerns man in the present, but rather speaks precisely about man's present situation. It tells him how he is to understand himself now; and the reference to the past is only for the purpose of teaching him to understand his situation in the present...'²⁶ Here, in the article, or the creation mythology generally in the Bible where it comes, 'in the beginning' Bultmann differentiates between mythological or primitive story about creation expressed in the

²⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

²⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, p. 246.

referential language of the past which is metaphorical and an inadequate mode of expression, and its existential meaning for the man of today which is enshrined within the covering of mythological language. For him, the existential meaning is the real content, and is directly related to the modern man. Mythical formulation of the creation story in different world religions, including Christianity, is 'that the source of the world and man lies beyond them in a higher power or creator deity...in the frequently childish stories', where the creator deities are referred to as 'gods of origination'.²⁷ These mythologies are expressions of primitive man, though an inadequate way, of his anxiety in this world. For man the world is a riddle, 'uncanny' and he feels not at home rather feels anxiety and to overcome it, he located his source in a higher power or gods. Existential meaning which is hidden and implicit in Christian message is the self-understanding of man about his existence. Christian message affirms that man is in a state of illusion about his life and his security in this world. The feelings of uncanniness, riddle, and anxiety are not the foolish imaginations rather belong to man essentially. Man is always threatened, faced with death, has to take decisions and is responsible towards others. It is this self understanding which is present in the Christian faith in creation and the recognition of it amounts to have faith in God the creator.²⁸ Hence for Bultmann creation stories narrated in the terms of past are metaphors whereas the real meaning is the self-understanding of man for his present.

The zenith of Bultmann's interpretation of symbolism in terms of existential philosophy is best seen in his elucidation of the Gospel of John. Here, in Bultmann's view, the Christian message is presented under a thick cloak of metaphorical language which John borrowed from the dualistic language of Gnosticism but he does not take the mythical language literally true rather interprets the metaphors in a radical way in terms of human existence. Neither the reference to past events is emphasized for faith,

²⁷ Ibid., p. 244.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 255.

like the death nor cross of Jesus are not central ideas of John rather it is the concept of salvation brought by Jesus which is important in his thought.

In John there are various pairs borrowed from Gnostic dualism, which are used metaphorically to expose the human existence. These pairs convey the opposing meanings, and John uses them in specific meanings; in relation to the idea of creation and to relate them to the human attitude in their choice thus showing the nature of human existence. From these pairs are the phrases 'of the God' and 'of the world' which are most significant to understand John's concept of God and man in existential terms. On the one side it means that God is the creator and the world is the real material world, but on the other side in Gnostic understanding 'of the world' also means to be away from God, to be in state of human sufferings due to disorientation. It is a condition where human status as 'creatures' is denied, it is an orientation away from God and truth towards their own selfish desires and whims. Whereas of the God means to have a genuine self-understanding of himself as God's creatures.²⁹ Similarly there is another dualistic metaphor used by John 'in the light' or 'in the darkness'. This does not only indicate to be free from the bodily or worldly imprisonment, rather it also denotes the orientation of human being either towards God, light and truth or towards devil, darkness or lies.³⁰ Thus the phrases 'of the God', 'of the truth' and on the other hand 'of the world', 'of the devil' refers to human attitude or his destination, it is the condition of human existence. From above it also becomes clear that for John the world is characterized by darkness, and so those who are oriented towards it are in a state of 'blindness'.³¹ This again is a symbolic expression used as an opposite for the metaphor of 'light', and it denotes the human condition of being away from truth or God. Darkness is the symbol of not knowing or accepting the reality whereas light signifies the good, the truth and it guides or shows man his true state of being a

²⁹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, tr. Kendrick Grobel (USA: Charles Scribner's Sons 1955), vol. 2, p. 18.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p. 15.

creature. Thus light is synonymous for truth, God or Christ. From what has been said above it becomes clear that when John claims the world is characterized by darkness and falsehood and man due to ignorance has turned away from his true self as creatures, he in fact tries to secure his existence by turning towards the world. Due to these powers of darkness and falsehood that the world has fallen into bondage, thus it is another characteristic of the world that its existence is in bondage.³² This condition of man, for John, is to live in darkness and lie or to turn away from truth and light. Not to understand his fallen state or not to know the truth is represented by another metaphor by John that is 'blindness'. Further the fallen state is also symbolized by 'sin'.³³ To be in state of sin means to be away from any 'real' future, as real future is attained through free choice and there is no free choice in 'bondage' or in 'sin' so there is no real future. Consequently, to have no real future means death. So for John the terms 'life' and 'death' are not only natural biological processes but are also metaphors explaining the human condition. Death as a metaphor means a human situation where real life is impossible. It is a situation where man is oriented towards the world, and the world for John in a metaphorical sense is a state of death. So whoever is directed towards the world is in a state of death, is unable to realize the truth, the life, or the message of Jesus, the bringer of truth and grace.³⁴ In this situation man hates to be reminded of his real, true or existential condition, and when reminded he revolts and even crucifies the messenger.

In summary the division in life and death or in truth and deceit, God represent the life and truth and devil represent the death and deceit. The only reality is the reality of God, then life is the openness to God or one who reveals about God: 'and this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has

³² Ibid., p. 16.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

sent',³⁵ for John 'life' and 'eternal life' are equivalents. To turn away from 'truth' is to turn away from 'life' which is death or nothing.³⁶ In John the phrases 'to be from', and 'to be born from' are not the cosmological assertions rather they are representing man's essence and condition in his speaking and actions. So the phrases 'to be of (from) God', 'to be born of (from) God' 'from above', or 'from spirit' and on the other side 'to be of (from) the world', 'to be born of (from) the world', 'from below', or 'from flesh', represents man's conduct and choice in each moment that is the choice between the alternatives: either to exit from God (reality) or from the world (unreality), in other words between 'life and freedom' or 'death and bondage'.³⁷ So all these phrases and the ones mentioned above like life, truth, freedom and falsehood, death, bondage are explaining the human situation that man has the double possibility to exist either from God or from man himself. And to have knowledge of himself as creature can man achieve true self-understanding, which is 'light and illumines his way', and through it he can attain freedom and life. Each man, in Bultmann's opinion, 'is confronted with deciding for or against God' thus the cosmological dualism of Gnosticism has turned to be dualism of decision in John.³⁸

After having a brief discussion on interpretation of symbolic language of the Gospel of John in the light of mysticism and existential philosophy it remains to say a few words on the validity of these paradigms in the interpretation of the religious text.

EVALUATION OF MYSTICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PARADIGMS IN INTERPRETATION

Imagery and symbolic language in the Gospel of John has undoubtedly been a riddle in the Christian world since centuries, various approaches has been taken to tackle the problem which resulted in a wide range of interpretations. Therefore it can be said that the meaning of the text varies according to the approach in interpretation. And it goes

³⁵ John 17:3.

³⁶ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 19.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

without saying that the appropriateness of the approach taken is a vital step to arrive at the correct understanding of the text. The way to tackle the text not only influences the meaning but can divert the direction of the text to a very different angle. The above two examples, Sufi approach of al-Ghazālī and the existential dimension of Bultmann are the examples of how a same text can be read and interpreted in a very different way. These two approaches are divergent to the extent that they stand pole apart although both claim to interpret the metaphorical language of John so it remains to see the validity and worth of these approaches in order to evaluate the appropriateness of their interpretation of symbolism in John.

In other words it can be said that one of the important feature for any approach is its aptness with the sphere of investigation. The aptness means here like taking a correct and direct route in reaching a particular destination otherwise an incorrect route will end up in futile and wasted efforts. But exactly what is aptness or relevance of approach? It is vague at times and unless defined properly. If the aptness means to remain near and true, as far as possible, to the meaning and content of the text in interpretation in that case interpretation would mean to understand the words of the text, but it raises another problem. The words in any text do not stand in isolation; rather they always stand in relation with something or someone as they telling about. This relation is either with author and in that case the meaning of the text will be directed towards the author, or the relation is determined in isolation from the author. Generally it is possible to take any one of these dimensions as both do fulfill the requirement of having relation with the text but in case of religious text the situation is different. In fact it is the nature of the text which plays a decisive role in determining whether author's intention can be ignored or not. These are some of the issues which will be discussed in what follows to evaluate the interpretation of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann.

The sphere of investigation over here is the religious text in form of Gospel of John, whether we consider it from the Islamic point of view or from the traditional Christian

point of view therefore the approach to interpret it must have, at least, some relevance to religious paradigm. And from that perspective religious text or revelation has sanctity, and one of its implications is that the relation between the meaning of the text and intention of the author must remain intact. Needless to point it here that the gospels are not exactly 'revelation' from the Islamic point of view but it does fall under the category of the sacred literature.³⁹ As from the modern perspective although the gospels are not considered to be sacred document but are historical and literary documents, as discussed above, and for Bultmann too it is historical and not a sacred book. Despite its non-sacredness for Bultmann, it may be noted that it contains the message of Jesus. And any text which falls under the category of message has a different characteristic from any common text, which must be taken care of while interpreting the message. Its example is when during a war time a nation passes on a signal or a coded message to the other nation; this message needs interpretation or decoding in a known language. While the interpreter decodes the message he tries to reach or read the intention of the author by remaining as near as possible to the text. Thus message, sacred or non-sacred, has to be interpreted in accordance with author's intention and gospel is the message of Christ in Christian thought even for Bultmann. From what has been said it becomes clear that the interpretation of the sacred text or the message both require an approach which helps in making clear author's intention. Now it remains to see to what extent al-Ghazālī's mysticism or Bultmann's existentialism are likely to expose the author's intention in interpretation.

Taking fitness or competency of Sufism first in reading the author's intention we need to recall al-Ghazālī's perception of revelation as elaborated in his various writings.⁴⁰ In Sufism the concept of revelation is one of the major themes and in its general meaning it is not restricted to the prophets only but includes the categories of *al-kashf* and *al-*

³⁹ Gospels are the record of life and sayings of Jesus therefore from the Islamic perspective they are not the book which was revealed to Jesus but they do contain the sayings of Jesus.

⁴⁰ See al-Ghazālī, "Mishtāk al-Anwār" in *Majmu'ah Rasā'il*, pp. 17-19; *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, p. 13; *Ihyā'*, vol. 3, pp.22-23.

ilhām for the friends of Allah, connected with it is the division of the world in *‘ālam al-ghaib* wa *‘ālam al-shahadah* with various designations but all mean the division of the world in spiritual and the physical.

In revelation knowledge is gained from the spiritual world or *‘alam al-ghayb* through purification of heart. It is the heart which is the seat of knowledge, and heart for al-Ghazālī and in Sufism generally, is not the physical organ but is the spiritual element in man.⁴¹ With the purification of the heart it becomes clean like a mirror and it can perceive knowledge from the spiritual world, more refine the heart is more ability it has to gain knowledge. Thus, heart is the meeting place of the two worlds, although in Sufism the movement is termed as elevation but it is not physical movement rather a spiritual one. This journey is not only possible but is a highest level which a Sufi tries to attain.

Coming to our point as to how far is the Sufi able to reach the intention of the author, it may be recalled that the text or the revelation is to convey the meaning from the above realm in the language of this realm therefore it can be said that the text descends and the Sufi in his effort to understand it ascends and meets the meaning of the text in his journey thus bridging the two worlds. The Sufi or his heart is the connecting point between the two worlds and with this he is able to understand the meaning of the text as intended by the author.

On the hand existential philosophy never claims or tries to read the intention of the author in the given text. Its concern is the meaning of the text for the modern man; therefore the focus is on the reader and not on the author. This approach cuts the relationship between the author and the text. Gospels traditionally are religious documents, therefore the relation of the author and the text cannot be ignored and any interpretation which denies this relationship is bound to produce false results. Even when the gospels are taken as historical documents in that case too, the message of

⁴¹ See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’*, vol.3, p. 13.

Christ is not given importance and in its place understanding and priorities of modern man are taken into consideration. In this situation the text remains closed in one sphere and the interpreters stands in another sphere. The two cannot come close to each other neither they can know each other; they speak a different language and do not share the same intellectual background. This simply means that text is something and the interpretation is something else. In other words the gospels reflect a religious context whereas the modern age context is a secular context, both presents a totally different world views. In the absence of any connection or link between the two worlds it is impossible to translate or interpret one in the context of another. Therefore Bultmann's interpretation remains confined within the modern world and does not try to read the author's intention.

Apart from reading the author's intention another important factor to be considered is the relevance of the approach in interpretation with the sphere of investigation. As the key theme of the gospel is God and Jesus as son of God so the gospel is narrating about the metaphysical world therefore the way to study must be in accord with it. In other words metaphysics is a particular context and each context has its conceptual and linguistic terminology. Interpretation or meaning of any context must take into consideration its contextual and conceptual paradigm; any interpretation out of context would be meaningless.⁴² For example study of science has its own context as compared to ethics or linguistics, in determining the meaning in each of these areas the context of each area must play a decisive role otherwise it would lead to misinterpretation. The term context over here is near to 'category' in the traditional sense as mentioned by Anders Nygren or as 'language-game' as mentioned by Wittgenstein.⁴³ What is meant by language-game is that every game has its own rules and the rules of one game cannot

⁴² For a detail study on meaning and context see Anders Nygren, *Meaning and Method Prolegomena to a Scientific Philosophy of Religion and a Scientific Theology*, tr. Philips S. Watson (London: Epworth Press 1972).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 253-254; Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/> (accessed on 10/9/09).

be applied to another, and one must abide by the rules of the particular game which he wants to play. Taking the rules of one game and applying it in another is similar to what is called as mixing of contexts or categories which leads to confusion and misunderstanding.⁴⁴ Therefore in interpretation the rules of the game or the context have an important role which cannot be ignored.

Coming to our issue that is to see the context or category of Sufism and the existential philosophy and their relevance with the category of metaphysics of John.

Sufism is not only a religious approach rather it is the height of spirituality, its main subject is God; to know Him and to be near to Him, is a desire which is beautifully articulated in a *duā'* of Ibn 'Arabī (1165/1240), one of the most influential Sufi masters of the Muslim Spain: 'Enter me, O Lord, into the deep of the ocean of Thine Infinite Oneness'.⁴⁵ Or as commented on the definition by Martin Lings on Sufism as *al-zawq* (taste) that '...its aims and its end could be summed up as direct knowledge of transcendent truths, such knowledge being, insofar as its directness is concerned, more comparable to the experiences of the senses than to mental knowledge'.⁴⁶ Thus, Sufism is the path towards God in which to gain the knowledge of God and to be near to Him is the highest aim of a Sufi. Al-Ghazālī placed it on the highest level in his gradation of types of *al-ma'rifah* in the Holy Qur'ān, he called it 'red brimstone' that, 'this knowledge comprises knowledge of the essence of the True One, knowledge of His attributes, and knowledge of His works and these three are to be called corundum, since these are the most special of the benefits derived from the red brimstone'.⁴⁷ Further, he graded corundum as red, bluish-grey and yellow according to their levels of knowledge of God, the red the most precious one, is about the knowledge of His essence next to it is the knowledge of His attributes is bluish-grey corundum and lower

⁴⁴ See Anders Nygren, *Meaning and Method*, pp. 254, 269.

⁴⁵ Quoted from Martin Lings *What is Sufism?* (Lahore: Suhail Academy 1999), p. 11.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Muhammad Abul Quasem, *The Jewels of the Qur'ān al-Ghazālī's Theory* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press 1977), p. 23.

to it is the knowledge of His works and that is yellow corundum.⁴⁸ It is evident from what has been said that Sufism coincides with the category or context of the Gospel of John as the domain of both is same. Both share the same foundation and principles therefore interpretation of one in the categories of another is not only possible but is justifiable.

On the other hand Existential philosophy is concerned with human existence and not about metaphysics or God. It is man's existence which is area of study, more precisely it is man's anxiety due to the feeling of insecurity and as a result of it his estrangement and alienation which causes restlessness is the subject matter of existentialism.

Moreover, it is particular type of understanding of man and his being with which existentialism is concerned; it is not the generally accepted trend in philosophy and other problems of human life apart from man's anxiety are discussed in it. Therefore it can be said that it is restricted to one type of existence that is human existence which is the only real existence and with that it is concerned only with one aspect of his life. For that reason existential philosophy has no relation with metaphysics, it does not talk about God rather talks about man. The context and the conceptual frame of the two are totally different from each other. In this situation when metaphysics is interpreted in the context or category of existentialism it is bound to lead to misinterpretation or confused results. Existentialism will talk about man whereas the Gospel of John is telling about God, the two stand at opposing ends. Due to this irrelevance of the two there would be category mixing when the Gospel of John is interpreted in terms of existentialism.

From above it can be concluded that the Sufi approach is relevant as compared to philosophy of existentialism as the former has the potential and capability of understanding the author's intention and belongs to the same context of the text. Whereas the latter does not have the means to come close to the context of metaphysics

⁴⁸ Ibid.

neither it is able to read the author's intention or to penetrate in the real content of the message.

Another important factor regarding symbolism is its status in the thought of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann. Is symbolic language in Sufism and in existentialism considered a reality, a concrete fact or not. Generally, symbols in al-Ghazālī's opinion are linked with the cosmic division in physical and spiritual world, as everything in the physical world is an example of other world, not representing it in shape but in its meaning. They have reality as through them the real can be known.⁴⁹ As for the symbolic nature of language, as mentioned above, al-Ghazālī used the term *majāz* more often in the Gospel of John, which means to cross or to go beyond, from the outer to the inner shell. This shows that the symbol is the first step in the movement of crossing from outer to inner hidden meaning. It is the door to enter inside which means that the symbols has a meaning and a reality of its own. Although it is not the intended meaning but even than it is not the useless word. It is through it the inner or intended meaning is reached, not without it. For this reason the literal sense of the text is not negated in Sufism. As al-Ghazālī mentions it that the words have two faces; one points towards the outer, physical aspect of a thing and the other towards the inner or non-physical aspect through symbolic nature of language.⁵⁰ Thus, symbols have dual meaning. This means that symbols are not meaningless but have some meaning or reality although that meaning is not the intended one. On the other hand Bultmann denotes symbols by myth. As already stated mythical language is the borrowed language to convey the concepts of Christianity. Consequently, the concepts have meaning, or are real but the language in which they are clothed does not have reality. The literal sense of the symbols in non-factual, to believe in the mythological terminology, according to Bultman for a modern man, would be both 'senseless and impossible'. Phrases like 'descended into hell' or 'ascended into heaven' are not true

⁴⁹ See al-Ghazālī, *Jawābir al-Qur'ān*, p. 28.

⁵⁰ See al-Ghazālī, "Mi'rāj al-Sālikīn" in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, p. 59.

statements. If there is any reality in these phrases then it is enshrined within myth but they in themselves do not carry any truth.⁵¹ Considering symbols untrue or unreal raises a problem in Bultmann's understanding. The nature of symbols or the mythical language is that it points to something else. In referring or pointing there must be some relationship between the thing pointed and the symbol. It is like a triad in which there is a symbol, the thing pointed and the meaning joining the two, if any of these components have no reality or no meaning attached to them in that case relationship between them cannot be established and the symbol, being an unreal, cannot be used as a pointer. Thus there is a gap between the mythical language of the New Testament on the whole and the Gospel of John in particular and the meaning given to this language. Due to the presence of a gap between them it simply means that the two are representing two different ideas or concepts and there is no relation between them. The function of the relation whether it is linguistic or conceptual is to provide a guiding principles for interpretation. In the situation where relationship is missing then there would be no principles to be followed in interpretation. Whatever meaning is being given to the symbols would reflect the choice of the interpreter irrespective of its relevance with symbols. This is what we find in Bultmann's existential interpretation of the Gospel of John; there is a gap between the mythical or symbolic language and his existential interpretation. This inconsistency present in his thought raises the question of validity and worth of his interpretation. Existential interpretation is a choice of Bultmann irrespective of the fact that the mythology of the New Testament can accept it or not.

In summary it can be said that the role of the symbolic language is to point to the thing symbolized but at the same time it has its own standing and place as well. It is the reality or meaning present within the symbol which helps in establishing a relation with the thing symbolized. Consequently, it helps in formulating the principles and

⁵¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, p. 4.

the guide lines for interpretation. Interpretation which takes into consideration these aspects would be text oriented interpretation otherwise it would be away from the text. As seen above al-Ghazālī took the direction where Sufistic interpretation moves from literal words to higher or hidden meanings therefore it is more near to the meaning of the text. On the other hand Bultmann's existentialism ignores the meaning present in the symbols and his interpretation represents the world of the modern man and not what the text wants to say.

Before concluding this section let us consider the methodology of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann in mystical and existential interpretation of symbolism respectively. Methodologically there are two aspects important in al-Ghazālī's mysticism, first is the perception of symbolism and second is the way to interpret it. As stated before, symbols are symbolizing the realities of the higher world in their meaning and spirit not in its form and shape but the outer form is important for man as he can understand the reality of the thing only through its outer shape. Even in case of revelation the meanings or its inner invisible reality is coming from God which takes the outer form of words and sounds.⁵² So the truth of the outer words is not negated and it is through them only that the real meanings and their understanding is achieved. With this background we come to the Sufi methodology of al-Ghazālī in his interpretation. As there is similarity or correspondence present between the symbol and the symbolized object so al-Ghazālī, following the general Sufi approach here, takes the path of identification of similarity in the two in their meaning or *ma'nā* and not in its shape or *qālib*. Due to the similarity present in fingers and turning of things that the one is symbolizing the other and same is the case in pen and the its quality of imprinting. Allah *subhānahu wa ta'ālā* himself uses this method to explain and make it possible for human beings to understand the realities of the other world, as it comes in the Holy Qur'ān: "He sends down out of heaven water, and the wadis flow each in its measure,

⁵² See al-Ghazālī, *Jawābir al-Qur'ān*, p. 19.

and the torrent carries a swelling scum; and out of that over which they kindle fire, being derious of ornament or ware, out of that rises a scum the like of it. So God strikes both the true and the false. As for the scum, it vanishes as jetsam, and what profits men abides in the earth. Even so God strikes His similitudes.” (13:17).

In this verse, according to al-Ghazālī, Allah *subhānahu wa ta‘ālā* after comparing knowledge with water, hearts with spring, and falsehood with foam, in the end it comes that Allah brings forth *al-amthāl*. It is from al-mathal and means to exemplify, to compare, to liken to and so forth. It is through examples that the things are likened to each other and in their comparison of the similarities present in them the meanings, inner or hidden truths, are uncovered for those who have the ability to perceive it. In fact comparing two dissimilar things and highlighting the similarity present in them, gives quick and prompt understanding. Therefore mystics took this way to understand the symbolism in the word of God as it is easier to understand and also has the potential to unfold the deeper meanings. According to Sufis this method is particularly more useful in knowing God and His attributes; in it an imaginative resemblance is developed and God comes down to the level of man, He discloses or reveals about Himself in human language. In other words there are expressions pointing to *al-tashbīh* or similarity where imaginative resemblance is depicted between God and man to make it easier for him to understand. But the requirement to perceive or to ‘see’ this similarity is through purified heart, through dhawq or tasting that the correct understanding is gained otherwise it would lead to anthropomorphism. Secondly in *al-tashbīh* or similarity nearness between God and man is highlighted, it is when God discloses about Himself and talks to man in human terminology and language this develops a feeling of nearness to God but again this is imaginative nearness and not the actual nearness if taken in actual sense it would result in personification of God. In contrast to it is *al-tanzīh* dissimilarity or incomparability which helps to keep the imaginative similarity between God and man within its limits. It means that God is infinitely beyond man, there is no resemblance whatsoever between God and His

creation. Dissimilarity between God and man is not understood through 'seeing' or *dhawq* or heart but it is known through mind or reasoning therefore theologians and philosophers mostly prefer this path.

Coming back to the interpretation of symbols particularly in the Gospel of John, as seen above, that the phrases used by Jesus like 'father', 'son', or which give a picture of union between God and man. In all these phrases an imaginative relationship of nearness and love between God and man is present therefore Sufi paradigm of 'similarity' is more appropriate to interpret such figurative expressions. But in order to avoid anthropomorphism of God, the dissimilarity between the two must play its role. Christians, according to al-Ghazālī, committed the mistake of unbalancing the similarity and dissimilarity and as a result of it confusion in the status of God and Jesus appeared. For this reason al-Ghazālī through mystical interpretation elaborated the verses giving the impression of similarity between God and man and thereafter supported these verses with rational and theological proofs; thus maintaining balance between them.

With this we now move on to examine the suitability of existential interpretation of Bultmann for symbolic language. As stated above, there is a gap between existential interpretation as presented by Bultmann of mythological language and the symbols or mythology itself therefore the question arises that to extent his interpretation is an satisfactory solution and is it in accordance with the spirit of Christian faith or not. As said above, myth in religious text is a kind of language, an inadequate expression therefore it needs translation or interpretation. And obviously to interpret an inadequate expression to an adequate one, the meaning or the essence of the message must be retained and only the wordings are changed from one language to another or from one conceptual frame to another. In existential philosophy mythological conceptions or its meaning are not linked with mythological understanding rather they

are interpreted to show what these myths and symbols express 'for now'.⁵³ The point of reference or the center of discussion in his interpretation is the present moment or 'now', a moment of decision, moreover it is related to man and his self-understanding in the present moment. It is through this reference that Bultman probes in the mythology of John and interprets it for the modern man. Self-understanding in his view is best expressed in terms of existential philosophy for this reason this philosophy is the right philosophy for him.

Taken from the perspective of existential philosophy traditional language of the religion where actions or speech of God is expressed in terms of cosmic events or the concepts of 'son of God', cross, resurrection and so forth, related to Jesus as cosmic events are illegitimate.⁵⁴ According to Bultmann these concepts cannot be perceived unless they are related to man here and now, or with his personal existence and are encountered by man within the limitations of his time and space. In this situation man is the center of reference for interpretation. Elaborating it Bultmann brings in the concept of analogy,⁵⁵ the talk about God as acting or speaking to man is to be taken as an analogue of communication taking place between man and man. Therefore, the relation and emotions in His love and care for man, His demands and His wrath or promise and grace is analogically expressed in the term of 'father' for Him. To talk about God as father is analogous to the relation of earthly father with his children. So to refer to God in these terms is to refer to the personal relation between God and man, in his here and now in existential terms while discarding the mythological language.⁵⁶ Thus, it is the self-understanding of man conveyed in the mythological terms otherwise, in Bultmann's opinion, the talk about God's acting or speaking are not the cosmic events. By negation of cosmic events from God's action or speech, Bultmann means, that they

⁵³ See Rodulf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 68.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵⁵ Bultmann followed St. Thomas Aquinas of Christian traditional thought in his concept of 'analogy', but gave it an existential interpretation. See for 'analogy' as presented by Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Question 13, Art. 5.

⁵⁶ See Rodulf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, pp. 68-69.

are not the happenings which took place once for all rather they are happenings which is encountered by man in his personal experience of here and now. This is well illustrated in his concept of God as creator, faith in God as creator 'is not a theory about the past. It does not have its meaning by relating what took place at some earlier time and no longer concerns man in the present, but rather speaks precisely about man's present situation. It tells him how he is to understand himself now; and the reference to the past is only for the purpose of teaching him to understand his situation in the present...'.⁵⁷

Considering God's action and speech as cosmic events illegitimate and the past reference only as teaching man about his present has far reaching consequences for the Christian faith. Christian faith is embedded in certain cosmic and historic events, negating them would definitely ruin faith. As faith or the creeds are statements which are expressed in relation to cosmic or historic events without these statements the creeds would loosen their essential content therefore such an existential translation or interpretation in fact would be a restatement of Christian faith into something very different. And when the essential content or message is changed to something different then it is not interpretation rather it is to give a different meaning to a thing. Simply it can be said that it is not interpretation, as in interpretation the essential content must be retained and only the formulation of the content is reformulated or expressed in a different way. And with the change in content, change in meaning appears and this is not interpretation. To cite an example where Bultmann's interpretation changes the meaning of the content is clearly seen in his comments on Luther's understanding of God as a creator. Bultmann first mentioned Luther's statement which says, 'this is without doubt the supreme article of faith of which we speak: I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And whoever honestly believes this is already helped and is once again brought back to the place whence Adam fell. But few

⁵⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, p. 246.

are they who go so far as to believe fully that he is the God who makes and creates all things. For such a man must be dead to everything, to good and bad, to death and life, to hell and to heaven, and must confess in his heart that he is able to do nothing by his own power.' Commenting on it Bultmann says, 'this kind of faith in creation is not a theory about some past occurrence such as might be depicted in mythological tales or cosmological speculation and natural scientific research; rather it is faith in man's present determination by God'.⁵⁸ Faith in God in these two statements is obviously different from each other. For Luther it is articulated in wording which are connected with cosmic and historic events as it says 'maker of heaven and earth' and about Adam's fall, the faith in God must transform the life of man. On the other hand for Bultmann the sentence, 'I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth' has a different import. Its significance is for the individual's present and as a result of it, it is not related to past as in that case it would be mythological tale or cosmological speculation or natural science. To relate it to the individual's present means that it is about man's self-understanding and thus not about the faith in creation where God is the creator and of heaven and earth and sustains them. Such believe is related to the past therefore it is unauthentic and worldly. From what has been said it is evident that Bultmann's existential interpretation is very much different from the faith as expressed by Luther or from the traditional Christian understanding.

According to Bultmann mythology is the inadequate mode of expression therefore it must be interpreted in adequate mode or language which means that the language must be changed and in place of old mythological terminology there must be new terms conveying the meaning of old terms. But what we find in the above example is that he is not changing the language but the content. He is giving a new and different meaning to the faith in God while keeping the traditional terms like 'faith', 'God' and so forth as it is. Thus it is not an interpretation from language to language but a change in

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 261.

meaning of the content. And as long as the traditional terms are kept as they are interpretation of mythological language in an adequate mode expression has not taken place. Myth has been retained as it was while giving it a different meaning, thus the myth or symbolism has not been interpreted in existentialism as it was claimed by Bultmann. It may be noted that there is difference between to interpret something and to give meaning to something. In interpretation expressions or language is changed, in other words the idea is given a new covering, whereas in giving a new meaning to something it is not important to change the wordings of it. Interpretation as mentioned by Bultmann is, '...the mythological sayings as a whole contain a still deeper meaning which is concealed under the covering of mythology. If that is so, let us abandon the mythological conceptions precisely because we want retain their deeper meaning. This method of interpretation of the New Testament which tries to recover the deeper meaning behind the mythological conceptions I call it de-mythologizing-an unsatisfactory word, to be sure'.⁵⁹ From this it becomes clear that the major task for Bultmann is interpretation and through it he wants to retrieve the deeper meaning while leaving aside the mythology. But in fact as seen in the above example of faith in God as creator it is the exact opposite of it is being done. Bultmann has given a different meaning to the concept while he kept the terminology as it is; consequently it cannot be called interpretation rather it is new meaning given to the old concept. This inconsistency or confusion in Bultmann's thought between 'interpretation' and 'new meaning' is not restricted to few concepts but it is the general method followed by him. Whether it is the symbols of faith like cross, resurrection,⁶⁰ or of sacraments or the picture of Jesus in John as 'son of God', 'light', 'life'⁶¹ and so forth are given a new meaning. In all these cases mythology or the symbols are not interpreted but are given a new covering. Furthermore, this new covering is the one borrowed from existential

⁵⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 18.

⁶⁰ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, vol. 1, pp. 35-43.

⁶¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 33-49.

philosophy; just as earlier John borrowed the terminology from Gnosticism. So it is the replacement of one philosophy with another.

Coming to the initial question that is the appropriateness of existential philosophy in interpretation of symbolism, as already said that it is new covering or new meaning given to the symbols and is not interpreting them therefore the question of appropriateness does not arise.

Moreover, existentialism is a modern philosophy whereas the book of John is a traditional religious text with main themes of God and Jesus therefore their nature, thought and the sphere is different from each other. Although there are some common areas between existential philosophy and religion, for example man is the concern of both and his well being and understanding are the major areas of discussion. But still they differ widely in their perception, status and concerns of man. They look at him from a very different perspective and as a result of it provide a very different kind of solutions to his problems. Religion links man to God, and the other world whereas existentialism considers man as the 'being' of this world only and is concerned about his authentic self-understanding. In summary it can be said that there are certain common areas shared by religion and philosophy but the domain and context of the two widely differ. In this situation looking for the solutions of one context in the light of the other would undoubtedly lead to context or category mixing, which as mentioned above is not correct methodologically.

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

Interpretation of the sacred text is important but is not an easy task. It gives meaning to the text and clarifies the ambiguities present in it, but at the same time if correct methodology is not followed it can end up in misunderstanding. The most important thing in this regard is that there should be conformity between the methodology and the nature of the text. If the method to read the text and the text itself do not correspond that may add more confusions instead of making the text clear.

Furthermore, sacred text resembles a message as mentioned above, and any message by its nature requires that the meaning as intended by the giver must be communicated, without changing the spirit of the message, to the receiver. In a message a link among the three i.e. 'giver', content of the message and the 'receiver' is essential. If the link is broken from any aspect the message would not be delivered. Proper method in interpretation is the one which can keep the link in the three components intact and can clarify the ambiguities of the text as well. It reminds the earlier understanding of Hermeneutics where Hermes is a link between the divine realm and the people and delivers the message of God in a way that the three are connected in understanding the message. This connection is also important as it completes the process of understanding otherwise the message would not be conveyed. The side of the giver and the side of the receiver are equally important, as the intention of the giver is the basic thing and the receiver is as important as the giver because he must understand what is being conveyed. Similarly the methodology is the link between the two and plays the role of clarification. Confining it to any one side would result in limiting its meaning either on the side of the giver thus ignoring the receiver or vice versa and in both cases the process would be hampered. Coming to the interpretation of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann, it can be concluded from the preceding discussion that the methodology followed by former corresponds to the nature of religious text as compared to the

methodology of the latter. For this reason interpretation of al-Ghazālī conveys the message of the gospel or the divine message in suitable human terms. Major components of his methodology include the rational aspect, language or the textual side, theology and above all Sufistic dimension. The first three cover the horizontal understanding and after having a sound grasp of these aspects the last one elevates man to a higher world thus evolving a connection in the two realms. Therefore there is a link between the two worlds in his interpretation where intentions of the 'giver' and the requirements of the receiver are taken in consideration and as a result of it has ended up in a correct interpretation. On the other hand Bultmann's interpretation is restricted to the worldly level, it ignores the divine element. Even taking it as a human message, its interpretation requires a connection between the past and the present. Whereas existential philosophy is a modern age philosophy and is concerned with the understanding of modern man only so it has no link with the man of the past. Therefore it is not conveying thoughts of John but is conveying thoughts of modern man which are imposed on John. It means existentialism or any other philosophy can be put in the mouth of the author. There are no rules to link the interpretation with the author or with the text; it is only concerned with the receiver and that also of the modern age. Consequently as the requirements of the receiver changes with the passage of time so the interpretation will change without giving due importance to the text or to the giver. So the interpreter has a free hand to turn the meaning of the text any way he wants. An example of it is that Bultmann reads other gospels through John and for him John and Paul differ in their thoughts. Historically St. Paul is earlier which means Paul was near to Jesus. So Bultmann is reversing the order and making John a standard for others. Unlike al-Ghazālī who supports John through Paul so it is a supportive motif and not the corrective one. In summary it can be said that al-Ghazālī provided a methodology in interpretation comprising of various elements, most importantly are reason, language and theology and these three are further helped by Sufism. With this hierarchy a connection is developed between the 'giver' and the 'receiver' and with the

worldly tools the intention or the message of the other world is grasped. Coming to Bultmann as discussed in the previous chapters he has not provided an apt methodology for interpretation, in demythologizing he replaces an old philosophy with a new one, which is not a methodology of interpretation. His main concern is interpretation of Christian theology but theological principles are absent in demythologizing, similarly mythical language is a stumbling block in knowing the true message but no concrete theory for its interpretation is presented by him. His main problem was the difference between the two worlds, modern scientific and the primitive. In interpretation he was supposed to link these two worlds so that the message of one world is conveyed in the language of the other. Instead of developing a link between them and giving a method to read the text Bultmann gave a new meaning to the text and in that too without giving due importance to relevance of text with its new meaning. With this when we come to the Gospel of John a marked difference is present in al-ta'wil and demythologizing. Former applied a suitable methodology in its interpretation therefore is able to clarify the ambiguities present in the gospel and with that gave it a meaning which is in conformity with the overall text. On the other hand in demythologizing problematic terminology and concepts of the Gospel of John are put aside without clarifications due to lack of correct methodology, instead a new meaning is given to the old terms. The problematic language remains as it was inspite of the claim by Bultmann that the mythical language is the stumbling block for the modern reader. Thus in interpretation of Bultmann the Gospel of John talks about the concerns of modern man in terms of existentialism, which is a modern man's perspective and is not in accordance with the spirit of John or of other gospels. Further it may be mentioned that although al-Ghazālī remained within Islamic paradigm and evaluated Christianity accordingly but his discussion revolves around methodology of interpretation. By highlighting the faults in Christian interpretation he provided a substitute for them in form of a method. And method is a technique or tool which has nothing to do with religion whether Islam or Christianity. Regarding

verification of mystical approach it may be recalled that it is linked with other tools such as of language, reason and theology to prepare the ground.

Coming back to the interpretation of al-Ghazālī and Bultmann for the Christian sacred text which in fact is a vast area and cannot be encompassed from all aspects in this limited work therefore following aspects may be explored in future research.

Reconstructing early phase Christianity from the writings of St. Paul and the gospels while resolving the problematic terminology in the light of early understanding; this may help in evaluating al-Ghazālī's view of change in interpretation with time.

Picture of St. Paul in the modern western studies differs widely from al-Ghazālī.

Former view burdens him with all the responsibility of diverting Christianity to a new direction which was unknown to Jesus whereas al-Ghazālī considers him a true representative of Jesus' message. Thus, a comparison in these diverging views might bring new insights in early Christianity.

Interpretative methods of middle ages in Christianity can be compared with that of al-Ghazālī which may be of interest due to similarity of their methods and the intellectual scenario.

Reader response theory is a dominant shift in the modern times in the field of interpretation and has great impact on modern interpretation of the sacred text in Christianity and in Islam as well. This interpretation has turned the meaning of the text in an opposing direction from the traditional thought and at the same time has opened new horizons for the human intellectual activity. As a result of it various theologies like Black or the Feminism and so forth emerged in the west and had an influence on the modern Muslim thought as well. It might be an area of interest to study appropriateness of their methodologies and interpretation in the writings of selected personalities.

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