

A COMPARISON OF ST. AUGUSTINE AND AL-GHĀZĀLĪ ON DIVINE ILLUMINATION*

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An analysis of al-Ghāzālī's doctrines and theories on divine illumination finds them to be similar to those of St. Augustine. However, there are differences in the basic premises of the philosophical and theological teachings of these two great thinkers. The link between classical Western thought (St. Augustine) and Islamic thought (al-Ghāzālī) is a fact of history. Studies which have been made to show the relationship between these two fields of thought, fall short of revealing the true influence of Islamic philosophy and Christian philosophy upon each other in general, and upon St. Augustine and al-Ghāzālī in particular.

In his book *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*.¹⁾ (*Deliverance from Error*), al-Ghāzālī tells us the story of the inner conflict he experienced and the intellectual crisis he suffered. To resolve his conflict and to remove his doubts, which he described as a sickness, al-Ghāzālī studied all sciences including philosophy. He realized that neither reason (al-aqal) nor senses, could remove the darkness of ignorance, uncertainty, doubt and contradiction, and replace them with the light of knowledge, certainty and truth, which were the main object of his researches.

St. Augustine devoted his life to searching for ultimate truth or certain knowledge. This search after a true understanding of human knowledge and ultimate truth led St. Augustine, as it had al-Ghāzālī, into a series of doubts and inner conflicts. Both St. Augustine and al-Ghāzālī looked in some way to God for a guarantee of the truth of human knowledge.

* This is the paper that was handed in the International Symposium on "the Middle East and International Relations" without his reading.

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1) al-Ghāzālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* [*Deliverance from Error*] (Cairo: Dar al-Katab al-Hadeth, 1966), p. 73.

al-Ghāzālī says that knowledge is attained when the thing known becomes clear in such a way that there remains no doubt or any possibility of error. According to him, knowledge which does not bring certainty with it is not certain knowledge and cannot be relied upon. al-Ghāzālī concludes that there is something beyond reason, i.e., intuitive perception, mystical intuition or divine knowledge. St. Augustine had earlier held that divine knowledge is the most certain knowledge attainable by the human intellect by the help of God's grace.

al-Ghāzālī rejected his senses as a source of certain knowledge and in a similar way reason itself. He claimed that reason itself has shown that senses deceive us, and that therefore there might be another source of knowledge that could prove reason also to be doubtful. This source must be higher than human reason and beyond it; a source which he called "a light from God."

The era in which al-Ghāzālī lived was very similar to the times in which St. Augustine had lived. It was a period rampant with conflicting schools of thought and theories. Each of these schools of thought tended to claim self-sufficiency.

al-Ghāzālī rejected the procedures employed by the main schools of his day. He argued that by their methods certainty could not be reached, and since his main object was to reach certainty, he had to search for a way that would lead to certain knowledge, leaving no room for doubt or any possibility of error. al-Ghāzālī rejected his former beliefs which were based on tradition and custom. He wrote,

The thirst for knowledge was innate in me from an early age; it was like a second nature implanted by God, without any will on my part. No sooner had I emerged from boyhood than I had already broken the fetters of tradition and freed myself from past beliefs.²⁾

His doubt with regard to sense perception also made al-Ghāzālī

2) al-Ghāzālī, *The Confessions*, translated into English by Claud Field (London: John Murray, Albermarle Street, W., 1909), p. 13.