

Al-Ghazali and the Christian-Muslim Controversy in the Middle Ages (Implications for Christian –Muslim Relations in Nigeria Today)

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Abstract

Islam was a ‘minority faith’ in a large Christian domain in the sixth century of its existence with the emergence of Prophet Muhammed محمد النبي in the Arabian Peninsula. It struggled to prove its authenticity through various Islamic scholars like Al-Ghazali (450/1058-505/1111). The success was tremendous for Muslims. Today, the reverse is the case in many countries of the world, especially the Middle-East. The few surviving Christians have to prove their “faith” and “belief” in one God and in Jesus Christ his Son, through authentic spirituality and strong faith. They are continuously challenged by Muslims to prove that their Christian faith is indigenous to them. On their own side, they have to show cyrstally through their committed ecumenical solidarity and collaboration that they are not divided in their common Christian belief العقيدة المسيحية, though, might bear different Christian names. For their survival in these communities of Muslims also, it is important for them to deepen and manifest their knowledge and understanding of other world religions, especially Islam, which is posing the greatest challenge to Christians today , as well as show a committed readiness to dialogue with them. With these vital tips in mind, one can consider one of the most famous Islamic scholars of the Middle Ages - and still relevant for Christian-Muslim dialogue الحوار المسيحي الإسلامي in the 21st Century - who endeavoured to establish the authenticity of Islam before their “conceived” Christian opponents, for as Charles A. Kimball (1995:202) describes the history of their relations vividly: “the history of Muslim-Christian interaction includes periods of great tension, hostility, and open war as well as times of uneasy toleration, peaceful co-existence, and cooperation to achieve shared goals”. Al-Ghazali based his own criticism on the Islamic understanding of the Unity of God and Divinity of Christ. It is in the context of these two major disagreements between Christian and Muslim scholars العلماء المسلمين that we shall discuss Al-Ghazali, especially as it relates to the present-day challenge of Christian minorities in large Muslim communities to prove authenticity of their faith and belief.

1. Introduction

The paper will concentrate on Al-Ghazali’s book, “Al-radd al-jamil li-ilahiyat ‘Isa bi-sarih al-Injil” (The Excellent Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus through the Text of the Gospel), translated into French as *Réfutation Excellente de la Divinité de Jésus-Christ d’après les Évangiles* by Robert Chidiac, a Jesuit Catholic Priest. In this paper, some of the major criticisms in the book will be assessed, concluding by recommending mutual dialogue and understanding in contrast to antagonism, as a model for living together - whether as a “minority group” or as a “majority group” in any human community. This is considered a veritable step in the resolution of uncertainties in relationships, especially in a multi-cultural and diverse religious setting like Nigeria, and elsewhere in the world. In relation to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, their common heritage as Abrahamic religions (monotheistic) should underline their basic relationship and understanding. Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1991) calls their required relationship for mutual co-existence ‘A Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths’. The paper also aims at encouraging the study of religions and promoting the formation of persons dedicated to dialogue and dialogical encounters, especially for the upliftment and development of Africa (cf. Isizoh, 2010:viii). Above all, the paper challenges the Academia and the African intellectuals particularly to make practical and honest contributions to the mutual co-existence of religions as a way of enhancing development in the continent and world at large (cf. Ekwunife, 2003:25).

2. Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) and the Golden Age of Islam

He was a brilliant twelfth-century Sufi whose contribution to Islamic theology has left its trademark on the minds of intellectuals and lay faithful alike. To understand Al-Ghazali’s confrontation of Christianity in the Middle Ages, it is necessary to be acquainted with his philosophical and theological background. He is known as Abu Hamid Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Ghazali and was well-educated in Islamic theology (Kalam) كلام in Baghdad, (What he studied was chiefly the Arabic Neoplatonism of al-Farabi (d.956) and Abu Ali al- Husayn Ibn Sina or Avicenna (d.1037), though his final aim was to show in what respects their doctrines were incompatible with Sunni Islam) as well as becoming a professor of religion and philosophy at Nizamiyah University in Baghdad. At Nishapur, he met al-Juwayni and learnt a lot from him. In 1095, he left teaching and started a life of asceticism, and was determined “to devote himself to the search of certainty in faith through mysticism” (cf. Gaudeul, 2000:123). He wrote many books and was known for his orthodoxy as an Ash’arite,

which earned him the name ‘the Proof of Islam’.

3. Al-Ghazali as an Asharite

The two major schools of theology (Kalam or كلام) in Sunni Tradition are the Mutazilites and the Asharites. They were prevalent from the eighth to the thirteenth century CE, popularly known as the Golden Age of Islam. Both schools tried to prove that Islam could be thought as well as lived (Zepp. 1992:148), that Islam could be intellectually profound and ethically relevant to the society. Whereas the Mutazilites were founded by Wasil ibn Ata (d.749), the latter was founded by Al-Ashari (d.935). However, Al-Ashari gained the support of the majority of Sunnis, having Al-Ghazali as one of its greatest advocates and promoters. The influence of the Asharite school was such that it lasted to the twentieth-century.

For the Asharites, God also sees and hears without an implication of either temporality, anthropomorphism, or injustice to God. They also held that the Qur’an as God’s speech is eternal. We shall see how far these arguments against the Mutazilites المعتزلة, and which al-Ghazali imbibed would affect his criticism of the Christian notion of the divinity of Christ.

In fact, for the Asharites, revelation was the final authority; orthodoxy was the bedrock of Islamic theology; defended predestination as a central belief in Islam; the Qur’an is eternal and the words we have were with God from the beginning. Above all, its theology is dominant today in the Islamic West.

4. Al-Ghazali as a Sufi-Sunni

Sufis root their piety on Prophet Muhammad whom they regard as a deeply pious person. They regard the mystical qualities of Muhammad as the driving force behind their religiosity and deep spiritual affinity to Allah. This is perhaps, why, Sufis are regarded as the ‘inner dimension’ of Islam, the personal, esoteric, inward path (Tariqa) as compared with the esoteric, public, outward Sharia (Zepp, p.160). Whereas the former refers to “God and the person”, as the inner essence, the latter describes the relationship between God and society, as exterior clothing. But both are necessary for the complete expression of a Muslim’s understanding of his religion.

With this distinction and clarification, one realizes why Sufis cannot be rightly describes as a sect of Islam, as is often misrepresented by some western orientalis. It is a dimension found in Islam – whether Sunni or Shiite. As a mystical dimension in Islam, it is highly ascetic – self-renouncing, simplicity of life-style and strong manifestation of poverty. But they do not turn their backs on the world – the Sufi wants to be with God in the world. In other words, they might live in communities with their spiritual teachers, but they do not enclose themselves in monasteries. Sufis emphasise love as the most profound way of attaining their end – union with God. Added to the principle of love as a way of reaching union with God, is the practice of ‘*Dhikr*’ or Remembrance, which helps them to detach themselves from this world and from their own ego. In all, Sufis do not neglect action, which they consider a completion of action. This is why a Sufi does not consider any mediation necessary to reach God. In this sense, they see themselves as fulfilled Muslims.

5. Al-Ghazali: the balanced Sufi

He is still known as one of the greatest minds Islam has ever produced, intellectually and spiritually. Al-Ghazali is said to be comparable in his imitation of the Prophet the same way St. Francis had done with regard to Jesus. Having left his professorial chair in search of vigorous self-examination, he finally discovered the Sufi way. In the process of attaining this goal, he dismissed sense perception as very deceptive, theology as limited rational discourse about God, as well as maintaining that philosophy was a vain speculation apart from Revelation. Even, he regarded authoritative answers to religious questions as being non-critical. In fact, all these roads were for him, dead ends. Thus, his spiritual anxiety which eventually culminated in the discovery of a new path – the Sufi Way. According to Montgomery Watt, Al-Ghazali summarized his appreciation of the Sufi path, thus: “It became clear to me, however, that what is most distinctive of mysticism is something which cannot be apprehended by study, but only by immediate experience (dhawq or ‘tasting’), by ecstasy and by a moral change” (Watt, 1982:55).

Al-Ghazali believed that his love for mysticism was rooted in its ability to circumvent theology and sense perception and experience God directly. Sufism helped him to ‘taste’ God directly and immediately. He is however regarded as a balanced Sufi because his sense of immediacy with God did not force him to abandon theology. In fact, he integrated the rational and the intuitive, the intellectual and the practical, the mystical and the theological. He formally this sense of theological and mystical balance in a book called *The Just Balance*. Unlike some Sufis would claim, Al-Ghazali never dared to call himself ‘God’ – a quality which made him virtually unassailable by mainstream Muslims. It is a known fact that Al-Ghazali made Muslims take Sufism seriously.

6. Background to Al-Ghazali’s attack on the Divinity of Jesus

Perhaps, one could say that the areas that mainly influenced Al-Ghazali’s attack on Christianity are connected

with the Sufi position that there is no possibility of experiencing the noumenal God, that is, God as he is in himself. They like to make us understand that God in this sense is purely an ontological entity, a reality-truth (al-haqq) الحق, not a personal God. God in this sense is quite different from his manifestation of himself to persons. One could already imagine why al-Ghazali attacked the biblical presentation of Jesus as equal with God. For any Christian minority today, this could be a challenge to their spirituality الروحانية and basic theology اللاهوت. Would they be ready to withstand it through concrete lives? Just as Al-Ghazali used the content of the Bible to attack the Christian faith in the Middle Ages, any dedicated Christian group, especially the minority ones, should also use the rare examples of God's intervention in human history (as contained in the Christian Bible) to prove the sustainability of their faith. Such biblical verses as: Gen. 6; Num. 13; Judges 7, etc would be very important tools in deepening their Christian spirituality.

7. The Teaching of Al-Ghazali: ON THE REFUTATION OF THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

Al-Ghazali expressed his viewpoint in his famous book (its authorship is disputed): "The Excellent Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus through the Text of the Gospel". Although this book is ascribed to al-Ghazali, its authorship remains very controversial and subject of disputation. It has been argued by many critics that the book was written by a former Copt-Christian convert to Islam (Gaudeul, p.124) who wanted to portray Christianity in bad light, and possibly express his disappointment about certain issues in the Christian faith. The author must have also known the Christian scriptures very well, judging from the manner he manipulated its passages to suit his polemics and present an original Islamic refutation of the authenticity of Christian belief, especially relating to the divinity of Jesus Christ. For Al-Ghazali, Christian scriptures are authentic, but Islam is the Basic Religious Truth. It is in fact, 'The Truth'. Based on this assertion, he argued that the Islamic Truth الحق الإسلامي must provide the basis for the explanation of Christian faith العقيدة المسيحية. (It is also argued by some scholars like Massignon and Chidiac that Ghazali was the author of the book, suggesting that its contents were given orally to students in Egypt, one of whom took notes which form the present text. Others like H.Lazarus-Yafeh are said to be convinced that the real author is a former Copt converted to Islam, already cited above).

In Chapter One (Chidiac, 1939: 1-7) of the book under consideration, Al-Ghazali argues that Christian faith has suffered a drastic corruption, especially by pagan philosophy and analogy (qiyas) قياس, which has led the faith to anthropomorphism (tashbih) تشبيه. Therefore, the need to doubt its authenticity. We notice once again the Sufi influence on his theological and philosophical orientation. As a result of this purported distortion of the Christian text, Al-Ghazali argues that "Islam is the Truth" (Gaudeul, p.124). It is also a common experience today that Muslims use these arguments to intimidate Christian minorities in their midst, and they succeed often to turn their minds against their Christian faith. But we find this robust exclusivist Islamic position by some fundamentalist Muslims, especially in multicultural societies as the basis of constant conflicts and crises, which also pose a great threat to global peace. One could imagine the type of danger a similar statement could pose to world peace if any of the world military giants should propagate such an ideology politically and economically in the 21st century. Pushing the interpretation further, Al-Ghazali would certainly not be comfortable with the generalization: "Muslims are Terrorists" bearing in mind the various occasions when a few disgruntled Muslim fundamentalists have wrecked havoc on world peace by blowing up planes conveying both Muslims and Christians alike or holding some hostage for several months.

In Chapter Two (cf. Chidiac, pp.9-25) he concentrates his polemics on the Gospel Text: the Divinity texts النصوص الإلهية and the Humanity texts النصوص الإنسانية. For Al-Ghazali, the affirmation of the textual passages referring to the Divinity of Christ must be approached metaphorically or allegorically while the texts which imply his humanity are taken literally. Like Abu-l-Hasan al-Ashari (873-935) who influenced his teaching greatly, Al-Ghazali seemed to tell us that any attempt to associate the divine and the human was undertaking a tedious task, inappropriate to be pursued (Kragg, 1992:84). He mentions such divinity texts as: Jn 10, 30-36: "The Father and I are one"; Jn 17: 17-22 "Sanctify them by the truth... that they may be one *as we are one*". Al-Ghazali argued that the passages mentioned are not particularly different from Sufi expressions in which they feel completely at one with God. For him, therefore, this is a typical figure of speech as used by the Sufi mystics. But the current spirit of dialogue and understanding propagated by most rational Christian and Muslim intellectuals and theologians all over the world would caution such a reductionist interpretation of each other's religion.

Again, he criticised the so-called Humanity texts, which affirm the humanity of Christ. For him, they must be read literally. Such texts include: Mk 13: 28-31 (Learn from the Fig Tree). For Al-Ghazali, this text shows Christ's ignorance and hunger; Mk 13: 32 (The Day and Hour Unknown). However, such a literal interpretation of Christian texts and biblical passages would be unacceptable to Christian theologians and exegetes. Al-Ghazali's interpretation of I Tim 2,5 (there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men - the testimony given in its proper time) as an indication that Jesus affirms by himself that he is not God, but only man smacks of ignorance of what a people's fundamental truth about their valued religion is all about. I wonder what Muslims in Kano, Nigeria, would do if they should wake up one morning to read in one of the Church Bulletins in a Christian Church in the city challenging the

century-old tradition that ‘Muhammad is the Prophet’. Let us assume that Al-Ghazali’s criticism and derogation of the humanity of Christ as contained in its teaching and scriptures occurred when Islamic scholars felt themselves marginalized and struggled to prove the authenticity of their religion. Today, the way forward would be the objective attempt to share constructive opinions about the teachings of their religions.

In Chapter Three (Chidiac, pp.26-36), Al-Ghazali treats what he called the ‘Contradictory Christian theories’, citing instances with the Jacobites (Monophysites) who believed that Christ had a unique nature in which the divine almost prevailed over the human, the Nestorians (who separated the humanity from the Divinity of Christ, and taught that Christ had a human nature until his baptism in the River Jordan, thus refusing the attribute of Mary as the “Mother of God” or *Theotokos* and only accepting her attribute as the “Mother of Christ”), the Melkites (who upheld the personal union without mixture of natures). For him, these diversities showed that Christians were not sure of their faith. For any Christian scholar to be able to counteract this criticism, he must be well-acquainted with Islam as a religion, especially its beginnings, and even use a deep knowledge of the first four ecumenical councils to defend his faith against modern al-Ghazalis. The first four ecumenical councils include: Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.): the definition of the Creed (Symbolum) of Nicaea, defining against Arius the true Divinity of the Son of God (homoousios). It was there that the famous Nicene Creed still recited in Christian churches of different denominations were formulated; Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.): It was directed against the followers of Macedonius, who impugned the Divinity of the Holy Ghost. To the above-mentioned Nicene Creed it added the clauses referring to the Holy Ghost (*qui simul adoratur*) and all that follows to the end; Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.): It was presided over by St. Cyril of Alexandria representing Pope Celestine I. The Council defined the true personal unity of Christ, and declared Mary the Mother of God (*theotokos*) against Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, and renewed the condemnation of Pelagius; and Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), which was a very historic council under Pope Leo the Great, defining the two natures (Divine and Human) in Christ against Eutyches, who was excommunicated. It was also at the Council of Chalcedon that the Church of Alexandria was divided into two branches. Those who accepted the terms of the council became known as Chalcedonians or Melkites (that is, those who believed that Christ incorporates two natures, the divine and the human, and consequently Mary can be considered the “Mother of God”). On the other hand, the Monothelites believed that Christ had only one will, which is the Divine Will. Those who did not abide by the Council’s terms were considered non-Chalcedonians or Monophysites (and later Jacobites after Jacob Baradaeus). The non-Chalcedonians rejected the term, Monophysites, as erroneous and insisted on being called Miaphysites. Later, a majority of Egyptian Christians belonged to the Miaphysite group, an action that led to their persecution by the Byzantines in Egypt.

It is no longer a secret that within Islam itself different sects have emerged which do not even believe the same things and tenets about their revered religion. One needs only to look closely to find out what is happening within the Sunni and the Shiite groups of Muslims. Even in his own life-time, the Mutazilites and the Asharites who were Sunnis could not agree completely. But these divergences could not be seen as a derogation of Islam. Today, they are simply considered varieties of Islamic religion. Could the so-called ‘contradictory Christian theories’ propagated by Al-Ghazali in the 12th century, and still used by some ill-formed fundamentalists today to foment misunderstanding not be considered as varieties experienced in the historical development of the Christian religion as well?

In Chapter Four (Chidiac, pp.38-40), Al-Ghazali argued that Jesus is given ambiguous names in the Gospel. For instance, he is called God, the Lord, Father, Son, thus establishing a Father-Son relationship for God, something Al-Ghazali considered an abomination. It is important to correct certain expressions, especially when used by one who is not properly informed in the ambience of their usage. A well-informed Christian would tell Al-Ghazali and other contemporary Al-Ghazalis that Jesus was not just given such names. Rather, the Christian theology holds firmly that He is God and Lord of all creation; that he is equal in substance with the Father, etc. His Sonship is also corroborated by the direct testimony of His Father at his Baptism (Mtt 3:17) and Transfiguration (Lk 9:35) respectively.

In Chapter Five (Chidiac, pp.43-55), Al-Ghazali presented three specific arguments:

Regarding the Prologue of John (Jn1:1), he argued that the ‘Word’ is an attribute to God, that of “knowing”. He did not identify God with the Word or Christ (Jesus) with the Word of God. In referring to the Johannic verse, Jn1:14, “the Word was made flesh” (*Et Verbum caro factum est*) (cf. Chidiac, p.57), he stated that it meant that he was created man. This is a serious deviation from authentic Christian theology of Incarnation. In the text, “Before Abraham was, I am” (Jn 8, 56)...Al-Ghazali argues that the reality of that statement was debatable. For him, it was a statement of “God’s intention” (Gaudeul, p.125), and not a reality. We can observe how far Al-Ghazali went in his apologetically-oriented criticism of Christianity and the effort he made to destroy its scriptural foundations. It is either he decided to play down on the divinity of Jesus, which he himself defended or that he was ignorant of the weight of that biblical verse. I am reluctant to accept the latter because Al-Ghazali was a bright scholar who could have also interpreted the afore-mentioned verse otherwise. But he refused to do

so because his aim was to destroy Christian dogma and faith simultaneously.

Al-Ghazali polemicalises another Johannic verse where Jesus says, “Who sees me, sees the Father” (Jn 14, 8-12). In this passage, which was an answer to Philip’s inquiry about the Father from Jesus when he said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us”, Jesus re-emphasized his equality and oneness with the Father. Jesus was astonished at Philip’s seeming ignorance of this fact, even after a long association with him. Going further, Jesus declared, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?. Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?...” (v.9-10). For Ghazali, Jesus was simply telling the listeners and the disciples that he is not important. In fact, he argued that Jesus urged them to forget about him and think of God (Gaudeul, p.125). Other related verses are: Jn 14:15 “If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth” and Jn 14: 31 “but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me”.

For Al-Ghazali, these passages confirm as in vv8-12, the fact that Jesus acknowledged his humanity and inferiority to God. In fact, for him, Jesus simply urges us to forget about him; forget thinking about him; and that God is more important than he is. But I do not think that this is a very accurate interpretation of the concerned texts, even literally considered. The use of the phrase “my Father”; “I am in the Father”... etc are very strong statements of closeness and deep relationship. Ordinarily also, any son of a man who uses the same phrase, ‘my father’ does not tell the listener to ‘forget him’ (the speaker). Rather, he intends to express the close relationship between him and his father. Again, it is important to note that without a deep knowledge of one’s Christian faith and theology, one would not be able to answer to this criticism.

Al-Ghazali uses chapter Six (Chidiac, pp.58-63) of his book of excellent refutation to show that the term, ‘a word of God’ to designate Jesus is also a normal occurrence in the Qur’an (Surah 4;17), meaning that Jesus was created like any other human being by God. But as I mentioned already, there is every indication that Al-Ghazali was determined *ab initio* to deny the divinity of Jesus, even when Jesus himself declared otherwise. One can state that his arguments were full of prejudices heightened by whatever disagreement that must have led to his abandoning the Christian faith.

8. Critique of Al-Ghazali and implication for Christian Minority Groups in Muslim Communities Today.

From the foregoing remarks and assessment of Al-Ghazali, it is possible to argue that the probability that the author was a Christian convert to Islam is very high. For instance, the book seems directed to Muslims, although the questions posed are typical of a disgruntled convert because in it, we observe someone who endeavoured strongly to justify his choice against his former faith, Christianity. This could be discouraging for a weak Christian minority. But it is important for him to know the content of this book and its arguments very well. We observe primarily that Al-Ghazali did exactly what ‘Ali b. Rabban al-Tabari did in his own Refutation.

For the author of the book, whether it was a pseudonym or al-Ghazali himself, he admits and argues that Christian Scriptures are really at the centre of the debate. This is in contrast to Ibn Hazm and Al-Juwayni, who based their refutation of Christianity on the fact that they considered the Scriptures as being falsified. Taking a different stance as Ibn Hazm and Al-Juwayni, Al-Ghazali takes the Scriptures as they are. That is, he considered them as being correct with the purpose of using them against Christians themselves. It is like telling Christians that he would use the correct material they had provided him to prove them wrong. This is why it is generally argued that the position of Al-Ghazali is like that of ‘Ali b. Rabban al-Tabari in his ‘Refutation’ (Gaudeul, p.125). But this does not mean that he believes in Christian Scriptures.

Whether it was Al-Ghazali or not who wrote this book, it is important to admit the fact that the author showed more respect for Christian Scriptures than all other Muslim polemicists. This position is based on the depth of his criticisms and remarks, indicating that he is highly qualified in the area of exegesis and philosophy, just as Al-Ghazali was. The only occasion of doubt about the authenticity of the claim of its authorship by Al-Ghazali is based on the ability of the author to use foreign languages such as Hebrew and Coptic, which many claim cannot be attributed to Al-Ghazali. What strengthens this doubt is the fact that in his ‘*Ihya’ ‘ulum al-Din*’ (The revival of the religious sciences), Al-Ghazali presented a pure Qur’anic picture of Jesus without any hint to the Christian Scriptures. The *Ihya’* is a complete guide for the devout Muslim to every aspect of the religious – worship and devotional practices, conduct in daily life, the purification of the heart, and advance along the mystic way.

It is argued that the book of “Excellent Refutation of the Divinity of Christ” has attracted little or no attention from Muslims and Muslim scholars because of its soft consideration of Christians. In fact, until recently, it looked like a forgotten piece of material. The renewed interest in the content of the book is, however, a very positive indication of the rising interest in the area of theology and the effort by scholars from both ends to open up to intellectual discussion about the content of their various faiths through interreligious dialogue.

9. Recommendations

In a fast changing world like ours, particularly, in the 21st Century, it has become obvious that what counts is

mutual understanding and honest interaction at all levels. The age-long dichotomy brought about by religious dissension and divisions can no longer sustain world development and progress. There is urgent need for a focused re-orientation towards building up a new world and a friendly horizon. But this is an ideal that can only be attained through the creation and maintenance of an atmosphere of religious liberty and freedom, especially between Christians and Muslims (cf. The PCID, Rome, 2006; *Nostra Aetate* 1965, no.3). Moreover, it is important to realize that dichotomies based on religious affiliations are becoming grossly outmoded considering the rapid growth of the world into a global village where every effort is made to live in harmony with one another. The language of ‘majority’ vis-à-vis ‘minority’ is presently a violation of the battle against gender and sex discrimination. Recognised identities shift towards the upliftment of each individual as an indivisible entity, human person, and creature of God, demanding respect and dignity at all times and at all levels of interaction. In other words, any language insinuating discrimination, either on the basis of colour, culture, or religion is sternly frowned at in all its ramification. Since the language of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ is an indirect evocation of fanaticism and fundamentalism, it has become necessary to develop a positive attitude of relating with, and describing others, irrespective of their religions and religious backgrounds.

10. Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is true that the early Christian communities were besieged by controversies and disagreements based on their different understandings of the Christian faith. For me, they were indeed arguing and fighting about the meaning of some religious terminologies which differed according to each group’s language. But these differences would not have been enough for the type of devastating criticism meted on the authenticity of the Christian faith by the Muslim theologian and philosopher, Al-Ghazali, whom I would describe as simply trying to ‘Islamize the words of Jesus’. For instance, the distortion imposed on the PROLOGUE OF JOHN (Jn1:14) raises a serious question regarding his own intention.

Today, we know that there might even be more divisions in the Islamic communities than in the Christian domain. In other words, differences of terminology are not sufficient reasons for the denial of the substance of a people’s faith since it cannot help any effort to dialogue together. I hope that present and contemporary effort by Islamic and Christian theologians to understand themselves and the basics of their different faiths/beliefs would go a long way towards overcoming the prejudices of the early centuries of both religions, to which Al-Ghazali actually belonged.

Above all, it is recommended for Christian communities today, especially those who found themselves as minorities in overwhelming Muslim communities to avoid the mistakes of the past - pitfalls (internal divisions and acrimonies) that led to the gross misunderstanding of their faith by Muslim scholars, like Al-Ghazali. Christians are advised to deepen the knowledge of their faith; to manifest a strong Christian spirituality; collaborate ecumenically and remain open to sincere dialogue since it has become clear that Christianity and Islam must live together as monotheistic religions.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE PAPER

AD	Anno Domini
ed.	Edited
p.	Page
pp.	Pages
Jn	Gospel of John
Mk.	Gospel of Mark
op. cit.,	Opus Citato
Ibid.,	Ibidem
Gen.	Book of Genesis
Num.	Book of Numbers
v.	Verse

vv. Verses
Pisai Pontifical Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies
transl. translated

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