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PIM VALKENBERG

BEING FOUND WHILE SEEKING

In Search of a Basic Structure of Root Metaphors in Muslim Spirituality

Analyzing basic categories or root metaphors in lived spiritualities is one of the tasks of the systematic study of spirituality. While most traditional approaches in the study of spirituality have taken Christian forms of spirituality as their point of departure, new approaches may start with less traditional forms of lived spirituality or with a broader survey of religious traditions. This essay tries to find a new approach to root metaphors in spirituality by considering Muslim forms of spirituality as a point of departure for a comparative analysis. The basic hypothesis behind this approach is that different forms of spirituality within the three Abrahamic religions may have relied on analogous root metaphors that have been structured analogously. In the first part of this article, I propose to take ‘way’ and ‘participation’ as two basic root metaphors that have been structured in several patterns in systematic approaches to forms of Abrahamic spirituality. The second part of this article investigates the ways in which these root metaphors are used in surveys of Muslim spirituality by deconstructing the Christian points of view behind these surveys. Finally, the reconstructive part of such a comparative approach will focus on Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazālī’s *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* – one of the most authoritative and comprehensive systematic expositions of Muslim spirituality – as point of departure of a possible Muslim-Christian approach to the systematic study of spirituality.

1. IN SEARCH OF A BASIC STRUCTURE

My approach to the systematic study of spirituality starts with some fairly traditional notions. As a systematic theologian, I am interested in the way in which systematic theologians have tried to systematize the basic intuitions of Christian spirituality at a time when systematic theology and the study of spirituality were not separated yet. I am well aware that Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) is not a likely candidate for guiding a renewal of the study of spirituality. It is, however, not my aim to use less traditional forms of spirituality as subject matters of my research, but to broaden the study of traditional forms of spirituality by envisaging them in a comparative perspective.

In this respect, starting with Thomas Aquinas does not only have the advantage of placing oneself in a well-studied tradition of theology and spirituality, but of enabling a very interesting comparative study as well. As Hans Küng has noted in his recent book on Islam, Aquinas and al-Ghazālī may be seen as two theological masters who tried to incorporate basic elements of spirituality in their systematic works and who have become paradigmatic as masters of theology in their respective traditions.¹ While an analysis of the basic structure of Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazālī's main work *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* will be given in the latter part of this article, it starts with a few words about Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*.

As I indicated before, Aquinas did not write his summary of theology in a manner unrelated to the systematic study of spirituality. In the first place he does not write about theology in the modern sense of the word but envelops the idea of theology as a scientific discipline in the broader concept of *sacra doctrina*, which may be translated as 'instruction in faith' or as 'holy teaching'.² Since God instructs humankind through revelation recorded in the Scriptures, *sacra Scriptura* is used synonymously with *sacra doctrina* in the first pages of the *Summa Theologiae*. Scripture, however, is not restricted to a written book, but includes the transmission of this instruction by the Saints and the Doctors of the Church through the ages. In the second place, such a *doctrina* according to divine revelation is necessary as a separate discipline alongside the philosophical disciplines because of the salvation of humankind.³ Theology, therefore, is related to matters pertaining to the spiritual welfare of human beings: God is their origin and their final destination.⁴

Although there is some debate over the precise structure of the *Summa Theologiae*, many authors agree that Aquinas structures this book according to the neo-Platonic schema of *exitus* and *reditus*: all creatures have come forth from God as source of their being, and will go back to God as their final end.⁵ This basic metaphor determines Aquinas's idea of human beings as moral creatures on their final destination in the second part of his *Summa*: meeting God in eternal bliss.⁶

¹ Hans Küng, *Der Islam: Geschichte, Gegenwart, Zukunft*, München 2004, 436-448.

² Wilhelmus G.B.M. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and function of Holy Scripture in the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Leuven 2000, 9.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I 1.1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, prologue to q.2.

⁵ A recent survey of the debate has been given by Brian V. Johnstone, 'The debate on the structure of the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas: from Chenu (1939) to Metz (1998)', in: Paul van Geest, Harm Goris, & Carlo Leget (Eds.), *Aquinas as authority*, Leuven 2002, 187-200.

⁶ For a comparison between Aquinas and al-Ghazālī on this point, see Marianne Farina c.s.c., 'God's Presence and the moral life: Shared resources from the writings of Thomas Aquinas and Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazālī', in: *Jaarboek 2004 Thomas Instituut te Utrecht*, Utrecht 2005, 33-65.

As Johnstone demonstrates, in the prologue to the third part Aquinas connects the metaphor of the way to God with the person of Christ who – being the Saviour of human beings – has demonstrated the way of Truth in his person and his life and especially in his resurrection.⁷ This is how Aquinas specifies the general metaphor of life as a way to God in Christian terms, using some basic affirmations from the New Testament: Matthew 1:21 (‘You are to name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins’) and John 14:6 (‘Jesus said to him: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”’).⁸

It may be argued that the metaphor of the way is important in all world religions since they seem to have a similar soteriological structure expressing a basic tension between the life of human beings in the world here and now and a better situation toward which world religions show the way – at least, this is how John Hick rephrases Karl Jaspers’s concept of the ‘Axial Age’.⁹ But the metaphor seems especially pertinent to the Abrahamic religions because the importance of the way to a better form of existence is constitutive from the very beginning according to the Hebrew bible: ‘Now the LORD said to Abraham: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing”’ (Gen 12:1-2).

For Abraham himself, going on the way was not a metaphor but part of nomadic existence: going to other places was an important element of preserving one’s existence and of providing a future for one’s family. Therefore, the basic stories in the lay spirituality are told as genealogies and itineraries.¹⁰ But for the schools of spirituality that have been developed since the axial age, the notion of ‘way’ served first and foremost as a root metaphor.¹¹ It is interesting to note that the religions that refer to Abraham as one of the forefathers contain traditions about both his physical and his spiritual heritage. Some of them consider themselves children of Abraham through Isaac or Ishmael, but others prefer to be seen as the spiritual children of Abraham. The question as to who may be seen

⁷ Johnstone, ‘The debate on the structure of the *Summa Theologiae*’, 196.

⁸ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, prologue to book III: *Quia Salvator noster Dominus Iesus Christus, teste angelo, populum suum salvum faciens a peccatis eorum, viam veritatis nobis in seipso demonstravit, per quam ad beatitudinem immortalis vitae resurgendo pervenire possimus necesse est ut, ad consummationem totius theologicis negotii, post considerationem ultimi finis humanae vitae et virtutum ac vitiorum, de ipso omnium Salvatore ac beneficiis eius humano generi praestitis nostra consideration subsequatur*. Cf. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God*, 42.

⁹ John Hick, *An interpretation of religion: Human responses to the transcendent*, Basingstoke-London 1989, 32f.

¹⁰ Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, foundations, methods*, Leuven etc. 2002, 103.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 123ff. See, for instance, Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*.

as the real children of Abraham is one of the major bones of contention between Judaism, Christianity and Islam.¹² In these religions, the concept of ‘the way’ is important at two levels. First of all, the physical experience of a journey, for instance on the occasion of a pilgrimage, may structure the ritual life; next, the spiritual experience of the journey of the soul may structure the spiritual life.¹³ In Judaism and Islam, the basic notion of the Law connects both levels – it is no coincidence that the Hebrew notion of *halakhab* (‘walking’ according to the Law) and the Arabic notion of *shari’ah* (the way to the water well) are closely connected to the metaphor of the ‘Way to salvation’.

Yet this basic metaphor is also problematic since it seems to imply that human beings may move from a situation of distance from God to a situation of closeness. The feeling of distance may be truly experienced as the beginning of a spiritual journey at the level of lived spirituality, but at the same time human beings are never totally separated from God if they consider themselves creatures of a God who gave them their existence. Therefore, the metaphor of the way has to be supplemented by another metaphor that expresses the continuity of the relation between God and human beings. It may be true that the stress on monotheism and transcendence has caused the metaphor of the way to be overemphasized in systematic studies of the spirituality of Abrahamic religions, as Raimon Panikkar suggests in his ground-breaking *Christophany*.¹⁴ Being immersed in Christian and Hindu and Buddhist traditions, Panikkar does not hesitate to blame the Mediterranean cultures for obfuscating the intimate connections between God, humankind and the cosmos.¹⁵ Not only does he remind us that whereas history and historical progress may be important at one level, the non-dual (*advaitic*) unity of cosmotheandric existence is important at a deeper level, but he shows this deeper connection to be an integral part of Christian tradition as well. Beginning in the New Testament and the patristic tradition, Christ is seen as a symbol that connects God and humankind instead of separating them. Therefore, the metaphor of participation in God’s being should be supplemented to the metaphor of the way, suggesting that, while being on the way towards God, we participate in God’s being at the same time.

¹² See Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Streit um Abraham: Was Juden, Christen und Muslime trennt – und was sie eint*, München 1994; Pim Valkenberg, ‘Hat das Konzept der “abrahamitischen Religionen” Zukunft?’, in: *Concilium* 41 (2005), 553-561.

¹³ For both aspects, see Reinhard Kirste, Paul Schwarzenau, & Udo Tworuschka (Hg.), *Wegmarken zur Transzendenz*, Balve 2004 (Religionen im Gespräch, 8). Also, Arnulf Camps, ‘The theology of religions as pilgrim theology’, in: *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 7 (1997), 129-139.

¹⁴ Raimon Panikkar, *Christophany: The fullness of man* (trans. A. DiLascia), Maryknoll (NY) 2004, 7 (orig. publ. 1999).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

While the metaphor of the way may be suitable to express the stress on progress that is so typical for modernity, post-modern voices may remind us of the pre-modern truth that human beings cannot exist independently from God. It is in this vein that the initiators of the Radical Orthodoxy movement adopted the notion of ‘participation’ as their central theological framework.¹⁶ A philosophical analysis of the notion of creation as used in Abrahamic religions reveals a similar tension: on the one hand, creation implies separation to the effect that there is a fundamental distinction between God as creator and the whole of creation. This distinction is classically expressed in the notion of creation *ex nihilo* that suggests that all creatures can only exist because their existence is given to them by their Creator. On the other hand, creation implies connection either because creatures are willed by God or because they receive their being from God. The tension between both implications is expressed by two metaphors that correct each other: the biblical metaphor of the potter that suggests a difference in being between the artist and his artefacts, and the neo-Platonic metaphor of the sun that suggests how creatures participate in the light and the goodness of their Creator.¹⁷ We can now formulate the basic hypothesis in this article as follows: the basic structure of root metaphors described in systematic studies of spirituality in the Abrahamic religions reflects the tension between the experience of a spiritual motion towards God at a surface level and the awareness of an enduring participation in God at a deeper level.

The second hypothesis, which will be tested in the next sections, is that this basic structure is elaborated in the systematic study of Muslim spirituality by a pattern of temporary abodes on the way to God. Different conceptions of the relations between the dynamic process of ‘going along the way to God’ and the underlying connectedness of ‘abiding with God’ may result in different orderings of stopping places along the way to God. In the second part of this contribution we will see how four basic surveys of Muslim spirituality structure the order and numbers of ‘states’ and ‘stations’ described by Sufi authors differently. In the final section we will consider the basic approach of Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazālī to this matter.

¹⁶ John Milbank, Graham Ward & Catherine Pickstock, ‘Introduction: Suspending the material – the turn of radical orthodoxy’, in: John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, & Graham Ward (Eds.), *Radical orthodoxy: A new theology*, London-New York 1999, 1-20, esp. 3.

¹⁷ See David B. Burrell, *Knowing the unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas*, Notre Dame 1986; idem, *Freedom and creation in three traditions*, Notre Dame 1993, and, most recently from the same author, *Faith and freedom: An interfaith perspective*, Malden (MA)-Oxford 2004. One of his most important sources is Robert Sokolowski, *The God of faith and reason: Foundations of Christian theology*, Notre Dame-London 1982.

2. ROOT METAPHORS IN SURVEYS OF MUSLIM SPIRITUALITY

One of the problems in the systematic study of Muslim spirituality is that this field of study has been dominated by Christian approaches from the very beginning. This is most explicitly the case with authors who write their studies of Muslim spirituality from the point of view of Christian theology, but implicitly it holds true for those who write as scholars of religion as well, since the very vocabulary of their studies is derived from the study of Christian spirituality. Being a Christian theologian myself, I am not in the position to change this situation – I can only be aware of the peculiarity of our trying to do justice to the particularity of Muslim spirituality while using a language that has been steeped in Christian spirituality.¹⁸ In this respect, it may be advantageous that some authors explicitly approach the study of Muslim spirituality in a comparative fashion, even if their comparisons sometimes seem to be somewhat overhasty.¹⁹ Since they are explicit about the Christian provenance of their terminology, the comparative study of Muslim spirituality may often begin by applying a hermeneutics of suspicion on previous comparative studies before being able to proceed constructively in a hermeneutics of historical reconstruction.²⁰

Although he writes about Muslim spirituality clearly from a Christian point of view, one cannot blame the French Islamicist Louis Massignon (1883-1962) for being overhasty in his comparisons. It took him fifteen years – between 1907 and 1922 – to write his elaborate study on the famous tenth-century Sufi mystic Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj and to have it published as a dissertation at the Sorbonne.²¹ Together with his *La Passion d'al-Hallaj*, Massignon presented an essay on the origins of the technical language of Islamic mysticism as a *thèse supplémentaire*. In this supplementary thesis Massignon argues that the language of Muslim spirituality was not derived from Christianity or another religion, but from the Qur'an – a thesis that was quite original at that time.²² Although

¹⁸ In his *Spirituality* (p. 840) Kees Waaijman shows that the systematic study of spirituality in Christian reference works (dictionaries and periodicals) hardly includes any reference to Islam or to other non-Christian religions, for that matter.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Maria Jaoudi, *Christian and Islamic spirituality: Sharing a journey*, New York-Mahwah (NJ) 1993.

²⁰ These are two important forms of hermeneutics in feminist liberation theology. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not stone: The challenge of feminist Biblical interpretation*, Boston 1984.

²¹ Mary Louise Gude, *Louis Massignon: the crucible of compassion*, Notre Dame-London 1996, 111.

²² Benjamin Clark in the introduction to his English translation of Massignon's *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane: Essay on the origins of the technical language of Islamic mysticism*, Notre Dame (IN) 1997, xxi.

Massignon discusses the possible influence of foreign cultures and religions – for instance, Semitic, Iranian or Hindu influences – he comes to the conclusion that Sufism is a natural development in Islam. When the word *sūfī* refers to an undyed rough wool garment, it does not refer to Christian monasticism but to a personal vow of penitence.²³ In the course of history, the term ‘Sufism’ (*tasawwuf* in Arabic) became the usual descriptive word for the more outspoken forms of Muslim spirituality to the extent that the word was used synonymously for Islamic mysticism. The word ‘way’ (*ṭarīqa*) was often used to describe both the spiritual movement of the Sufi in search of union with God – although the term ‘union’ itself caused some problems as it seemed to erase the fundamental difference between Creator and creatures – and the Sufi orders or brotherhoods. In the technical terminology of Sufi authors, the situation of the mystical seeker was often described as being in different stages (*maqāmāt*) or states (*ahwāl*), referring to the stages in the effort of the seeker and the states of grace bestowed by God.²⁴ Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj († 988), for instance, describes seven stages and eight states in his *Kitāb al-Lumaʾ*, in which he situates the Sufi path as a legitimate way to approach God among the Islamic religious disciplines.²⁵ Massignon’s interpretation of the distinction between stages and states, however, is clearly influenced by the Christian theological distinction between natural and supernatural mysticism. This distinction has been one of the major instruments of Christian theologians who wanted to do justice to the fact that other religions apparently knew the same forms and methods of spirituality while upholding their theological conviction that Christian spirituality is unique in its being endowed by God’s grace. Therefore, the mystics of different religions are similar in their efforts at approaching God (natural mysticism) but they can only reach God through God’s supernatural grace. Of course, most Christian theologians will say that God’s grace is clearly operative within the Christian tradition while it may sometimes be operative in other traditions on the understanding that it is the grace of Christ that is operative there as well.²⁶

Georges C. Anawati and Louis Gardet use the same Christian theological distinction in their comparative approach to Muslim mysticism.²⁷ They indicate the

²³ Massignon, *Essay*, 104.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁵ See *Knowledge of God in classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic mystical theology* (trans. & intr. John Renard), Mahwah (NJ) 2004 (The Classics of Western Spirituality), 30.

²⁶ In the Christian theology of religions, these inclusivist theories are known as the fulfillment theory (Jean Daniélou, Henri de Lubac) and the theory of the presence of the mystery of Christ (Karl Rahner, Raimon Panikkar). See Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the religions: From confrontation to dialogue*, Maryknoll (NY)-London 2002, 47-59.

²⁷ G.-C. Anawati & Louis Gardet, *Mystique Musulmane: Aspects et tendances, expériences et techniques*, Paris 1986 (4th ed.; Études Musulmanes 8).

Egyptian sufi Dhū l'Nūn al-Misrī († 859) as the source of the notion of the stages of the soul, and compare his sketch of the spiritual journey with the notion of the stairway to heaven in John Climacus.²⁸ They wonder if the stages of the soul in Muslim mysticism correspond to the active states in Christian mysticism that can be acquired by the spiritual seeker, while the states correspond to the passive states that are received rather than acquired.²⁹ Anawati and Gardet are aware of the fact that their approach to Muslim mysticism is conditioned by their background as members of Christian monastic orders. They describe their approach as a *méthode comparative* and, after having written an *essai de théologie comparée* before, realise that they have to be even more careful when comparing spiritual tendencies.³⁰ Nevertheless, they seem to give an interpretation of the relation between stages and states on the Sufi path that is largely dominated by a Christian concept of the relation between nature and the supernatural that dominated Henri de Lubac's study of Buddhism as well.³¹ More specifically, it is determined by Thomas Aquinas's theology on God the Saviour in which the tension between Christ as *viator*, i.e. as a human being on the way to God, and Christ as *comprehensor*, i.e. as someone who is completely united with God from the very beginning, plays an important part. Consequently, Aquinas differentiates between three forms of knowledge in Christ: a blessed knowledge, an infused knowledge and an acquired knowledge.³² This distinction is relevant to the tension between the two metaphors in our basic hypothesis: while the union with God characterizes Christ as One who is at home with God and participates in eternal bliss (*comprehensor, scientia beata*), his situation as a human being is characterized by a tension between the progress he made as a human being (*scientia acquisita*) and the knowledge proceeding from his being united with the Word of God (*scientia infusa*). This is the meaning of the words *viam veritatis nobis in seipso demonstravit* from Aquinas's prologue: because Christ is at the end of the way united with the Father, and at the same time shows us the way, the history of his human life uniquely connected with God shows us a way to proceed to the Father. While Christ as *comprehensor* hardly functions as model for most Muslim spiritual seekers, Christian theologians studying their testimonies may use their own spiritual background to explain Muslim spiritual texts.

It is quite clear how Christ may function as model on the human level as a wayfarer just like other beings, and how He functions as model of union with God

²⁸ Ibid., 27: fn 17.

²⁹ Ibid., 127.

³⁰ Ibid., 13-14. See also L. Gardet & M.-M. Anawati, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane: Essai de théologie comparée*, Paris 1948.

³¹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the religions*, 50.

³² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III 9.

in His blessed state. Since this *unio beata* is not a reality but an eschatological perspective for us human beings, the tension between our being on the way and our participation in God is expressed in the tension between acquired stages and infused states. While the grades of spiritual progress may be reached by human efforts (but not without God's giving them, of course), the states of participation in God's being belong to the category of grace that is given to us as human beings, but only partially and gradually. These states are quite difficult to imagine since they can only be received because God gives grace unconditionally but not without noting human conditions. Yet the question remains: do these Christian theological categories really explain the function of the distinction between stages and states in Muslim spirituality?

From their point of view, Anawati and Gardet consider the unfolding of the spiritual itinerary into a number of stages (*maqamāt*) and states (*ahwāl*) to be one of the basic characteristics of classical Sufism.³³ According to them, the ascetic or mystical way (*tariq* or *tariqa*) along which the believer proceeds towards union with God, is the basic metaphor in classical Sufi spirituality. This way is divided into three basic stages pertaining to beginners, advanced seekers, and perfect human beings. The basic stages of the way are further divided according to a number of stages that may vary according to different authors. Anawati and Gardet mention the sevenfold division according to al-Sarrāj in his *Kitāb al-Lumā'*: First comes repentance (*tawba*) which is mentioned as first stage by almost every spiritual writer, then godfearingness or conscience (*wara*), renunciation (*zuhd*) and poverty (*faqr*). The next stage is formed by endurance (*sabr*), which leads to trust in God (*tawakkul*) and contentment (*ridā*). It is quite clear that the spiritual way is largely characterized by asceticism in this enumeration of stages. While the seven stages may be reached by personal effort, the ten states distinguished by al-Sarrāj are results of God's mercy: observation (*murāqaba*), nearness (*qurb*), love (*mahabba*), fear (*khawf*), hope (*rajā'*), desire (*shawq*), intimacy (*uns*), appeasement (*tatmīn*), contemplation (*mushāhada*), and certitude (*yaqīn*). They acknowledge, however, the instability of such divisions. For instance, 'love' is mentioned as a stage by some authors, but as a state by others. This is an indication that the Christian distinction between natural stages and supernatural states does not match perfectly the Muslim vocabulary.³⁴

In his entry on 'spiritual state' (*hāl*) in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Louis Gardet explains that the Sufi use of the term 'state' was influenced by its provenance from the medical sciences in which it denoted a physiological equilibrium of a being endowed with a soul. Consequently, the Sufis considered *hāl* to be 'the point of equilibrium of the soul in a state of acceptance' of the encounter with

³³ Anawati & Gardet, *Mystique Musulmane*, 41f.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

God.³⁵ The interpretation of *hāl* as a passive state by Christian authors is not entirely correct, since it ‘transposes too abruptly into *tasawwuf* a term of Christian mysticism’.³⁶ Although many authors distinguish between *maqamāt* as the acquired stations of the soul in its progression towards God and the *ahwāl* (plural of *hāl*) as the received states of the soul in its encounter with God, both categories are subsumed under the notion of *manāzil* or resting-places along the way. For some Sufi writers, the acquired stations are typical of the first steps of the stairway to heaven, while the received states are typical of the highest steps in which spiritual effort can be left behind because of the encounter with God. For some others, the acquired stations are characterized by their stability, while the received states are instantaneous. Al-Ghazālī, for instance, emphasizes the fact that there may be more *ahwāl* in the soul at the same time, that there is no continuity in their order and that they can hardly be stabilized because they are the result of an encounter with God.³⁷

Although hers is an Islamicist rather than a Christian theological approach, Annemarie Schimmel, in her famous companion *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, begins the central chapter on Sufism as a way by comparing the Christian tripartite division of *via purgativa*, *via contemplativa* and *via illuminativa* with the Muslim distinction between *sharīʿa*, *tarīqa* and *haqīqa*.³⁸ While the *sharīʿa* is the Law as a main road that leads all Muslims to salvation, *tarīqa* is the specific path of the spiritual wayfarers or advanced seekers. This path leads through different stations (Schimmel’s translation of *maqamāt*) to the spiritual truth (*haqīqa*). Schimmel distinguishes between stations and states as follows:

The *maqām* is a lasting stage, which man reaches, to a certain extent, by his own striving. It belongs to the category of acts, whereas the states are gifts of grace. The *maqāmāt*, ‘stations’, define the different stages the wayfarer has attained in his ascetic and moral discipline [...] The states that come over him will vary according to the station in which he is presently living.³⁹

However, the number and the sequence of stations and the experiences pertaining to them may vary, and some of the stations may also be described as states. Schimmel therefore restricts her description to the most important stations: repentance, trust in God, poverty, contentment, love and gnosis.⁴⁰ The first

³⁵ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. III, Leiden 1971, 83-85.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 84. See, for instance, the beginning of Book XXXIII on Fear and Hope of the *Ihyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, summarized in *Ghazālī, Iḥyāʾ ʿOulūm ed-dīn ou Vivification des sciences de la foi* (anal. & ind. G.-H. Bousquet), Paris 1955, 356.

³⁸ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill (NC) 1975, 98.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

⁴⁰ The term *gnosis* refers to the Arabic *maʿrifa* or experiential knowledge as contrasted to discursive knowledge (*ʿilm*). See Renard, *Knowledge of God in classical Sufism*, 7.

station and beginning of the spiritual path is repentance, turning away from sins and worldly concerns. Next come abstinence and renunciation by which one gives up what is ritually and religiously allowed but may distract the seeker from God.⁴¹ This requires a constant struggle against the inclinations of the *nafs*, the 'self' or 'soul'.⁴² The struggle may imply abstention from food or sleep, but renunciation must be seen as a means to spiritual progress, never as a goal in itself. *Tawakkul* or trust in God is a clear sign of this spiritual progress, since it implies the willingness to surrender oneself completely to God's providence. If practiced in the right way, trust leads to the spiritual attitude of poverty in which the Sufi desires nothing but God. This is sometimes equated with *fanā'* or annihilation in God as goal of the mystic, for instance in Jalalluddin Rūmī (1207-1273).⁴³ The next station, contentment, is often seen as the fruit of two previous stations, *sabr* or patience, and *shukr* or gratitude: it is the station of being happy in poverty and affliction. Because of psychological reasons, Schimmel disagrees with al-Sarrāj in including fear and hope among the stations, since an equilibrium between both aspects is very important in the religious life of many Muslims. Finally, the last stations on the mystical path are characterized as 'love' (*mahabba*) and 'gnosis' (*ma'rifa*). While some Sufis will claim that 'love' is the highest station, others will see 'knowledge' as the highest one.⁴⁴ Although love is a rather contested notion among orthodox Muslims who prefer to see it as obedience, it is essential for Muslim spirituality.⁴⁵ Some Sufi authors further divide it into 'intimacy', 'proximity' and 'longing' or even 'passionate love' as separate notions. It is quite clear that Schimmel prefers the tradition in which love is the central notion in the last station of the Sufi path, since she describes the several forms of love and their relation to the goal of the Sufi path much more extensively than the notion of existential knowledge or – in her translation – gnosis.⁴⁶

The new edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* describes the basic metaphors of mysticism within Islam in two entries: *tasawwuf* and *tariqa*.⁴⁷ While the first word – a *masdar* or verbal noun of the fifth form of the radicals *swf* from which the more familiar word *sufi* is derived as well – denotes the phenomenon of

⁴¹ Schimmel, *Mystical dimensions of Islam*, 110.

⁴² See also Pim Valkenberg, 'Ziel en zaligheid loslaten: Roemi', in: *Speling* 55 (2003) no.1, 41-46.

⁴³ Schimmel, *Mystical dimensions*, 123; Valkenberg, 'Ziel en zaligheid loslaten', 44.

⁴⁴ The difference is nicely translated in the titles of two books by William Chittick: *The Sufi path of love: The spiritual teachings of Rumi* (Albany 1983) and *The Sufi path of knowledge: Ibn al-'Arab's Metaphysics of imagination* (Albany 1989).

⁴⁵ Schimmel, *Mystical dimensions*, 131.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 132-148.

⁴⁷ Both in *The Encyclopedia of islam*. New Edition, Vol. X (Leiden 2000), 313-340 and 243ff.

mysticism in Islam in general, the word *tarīqa* (‘way’ or ‘path’) has three more specific meanings. In the first centuries of Islam, the word referred to a peculiar spiritual habit or manner of behaving by a certain Muslim, or to his form of worship. If such a person developed a specific school, his *tarīqa* became a spiritual method. Furthermore, if several of his followers gathered to live according to the *tarīqa* of their master, their organisation was called a *tarīqa* (spiritual family or brotherhood) as well. In the context of Abrahamic religions, it is worth mentioning that the word *tarīqa* may have the same function as the Hebrew *halakhab* for Jews – and early Christians as well, as their identification as ‘people of the way’ in Acts 9:2 shows.⁴⁸

E. Geoffroy, the author of the entry on the nature and development of the word *tarīqa* in the Encyclopaedia of Islam, describes this notion in almost the same words as Schimmel did: ‘In Muslim mysticism, the *tarīqa* thus denotes the way which guides man from the manifest Law (*Sharī’a*) to the divine Reality (*Haqīqa*)’.⁴⁹ The way towards God consists in passing through a number of spiritual abodes and stations (*manāzil* or *maqāmāt*).⁵⁰ Geoffroy, however, places the spiritual states or *ahwāl* as markers on the spiritual way for those who do not have to pass through the various stations anymore but are ‘enraptured by God’ (*majdhūb*) and ‘pass through various gradations in condensed form, with the fulguration that characterises [their] state’.⁵¹

B. Radtke, who revised Louis Massignon’s entry on *tasawwuf* for the new edition of the Encyclopaedia of Islam, seems to favour a less systematic approach: ‘In the internal experience, it [the road along which the mystic travelled] led across a number of way stations (*manāzil*), locations (*maqām*, pl. *maqāmāt*) and situations (*hāl*, pl. *ahwāl*), for which in later times classification systems were established in the handbooks’.⁵²

This survey of some basic Islamicist sources may lead us to reconsider our basic hypothesis. In the first place, the structuring of the Sufi way by means of stages, stations and states is rather loose in the writings of the early Sufi masters. There

⁴⁸ See, among others, Pim Valkenberg, ‘Christ and the other ways’, in: Toine van den Hoogen, Hans Küng, & Jean-Pierre Wils (Hgs.), *Die Widerspenstige Religion: Orientierung für eine Kultur der Autonomie?*, Kampen 1997, 377-396; 384.

⁴⁹ *Encyclopaedia of Islam* X, 244. In order to avoid confusion, I did not adopt the usual orthography in the EI (with dots under t and h, and dotted k instead of q).

⁵⁰ Anawati and Gardet note the similarities between the spiritual abodes in Sufi mysticism and the spiritual abodes or ‘castles of the soul’ in Teresa of Avila, remarking: ‘Toute une étude pourrait être faite à ce sujet, marquant les points de rencontre et les différences’ (*Mystique Musulmane*, 127: fn 6).

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² *Encyclopaedia of Islam* X, 314; for orthography, see note 49.

is a general understanding that it is important to be aware that spiritual seekers usually go through a process with different phases and that these phases require different spiritual techniques. This, however, is a matter of personal guidance by which a spiritual master (*shaykh*) guides his pupil (*murīd*). Generally speaking, the *tariqa* as spiritual habit of the master became the model for the path that the pupil had to take. Only later, spiritual writers began to systematize these phases and expanding them to a group of spiritual seekers (*sālikūn*) by distinguishing between ascetic and moral processes that could be accomplished by the seekers themselves – though not without the help of God – and blessed states that could be given by God only. In this way, *tariqa* became the basic metaphor for a spiritual method.

In the second place, the central place of *tariqa* seems to make the metaphor of ‘the way’ more important than the metaphor of participation. Accordingly, the stages that can be accomplished by human effort are described in much greater detail than the states of grace. Christian comparative theologians who would draw the conclusion that Sufism is mainly natural mysticism, would miss the point, however. They would miss the foundational function of Islamic Law or *sharī’a* as the basis of the Sufi path, and of the Divine Truth or *haqīqa* as its goal. Geoffroy expresses this foundational function when he says that the *tariqa* ‘includes all the means (doctrines, rituals, techniques of meditation, etc.) which enable man to comprehend the profound identity of the *Sharī’a* and the *Haqīqa*’.⁵³ Because the Sufi remains faithful to Islamic Law, his (or her) spiritual path is characterised by an eminently practical orientation. Because participation in the Truth remains the goal of this path, it is characterised by a profound theological orientation as well. Both orientations are different in character, however: while the practical orientation can be described by giving many indications, the theological orientation is situated at a deeper level and cannot be described directly. This is the reason why the basic metaphor of the way and its stages is clearly visible at the surface level, while the basic metaphor of participation in God is only visible beneath the surface. Yet it is fundamental, and therefore the best Islamic equivalent of ‘participation in God’ may be found in the famous expression *wahdāt al-wujūd*, coined by the followers of Ibn al-‘Arabī (1165-1240) but criticized by many others. It is usually translated as ‘unity of existence’ but a literal translation from the Arabic would render ‘unity of being-found’.⁵⁴ The insight that we are seekers on our way to God while existing because being found by God at the same time, is the deep theological truth that determines the basic structure of al-Ghazālī’s famous *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*.

⁵³ Ibid., 244.

⁵⁴ This expression is not used by Ibn al-‘Arabī, but it expresses some of his thoughts very well. See William C. Chittick, *Imaginal worlds: Ibn al-‘Arabī and the problem of religious diversity*, Albany (NY) 1994, 15.

3. AL-GHAZALI AND THE STRUCTURE OF LIFE-SAVING MATTERS OF THE SOUL

Abū Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) probably wrote the forty books of his spiritual compendium on the revival of religious knowledge during his long period of retreat between 1095 and 1106 according to the Western calendar. The title of this book suggests a severe spiritual crisis, not only in Ghazālī himself, but also in the world surrounding him.⁵⁵ In the introduction, al-Ghazālī describes this situation as a severe illness, a

malady which has become an epidemic among the multitudes. That malady consists in not discerning this matter's importance, the gravity of the problem, and the seriousness of the crisis; in not seeing that life is waning and that what is to come is close at hand, that death is imminent but that the journey is still long, that the provisions are scanty, the dangers great, and the road blocked. The perceptive know that only knowledge and works devoted to God avail.⁵⁶

He then goes on to indicate the reason for this gloomy description: 'To tread the crowded and dangerous path of the hereafter with neither guide nor companion is difficult, tiring, and strenuous. The guides for the road are the learned men who are the heirs of the Prophet, but the times are void of them now and only the superficial are left, most of whom have been lured by iniquity and overcome by Satan'.⁵⁷ It is this science of the path of the hereafter (*'ilm tariq al-āchira*) that al-Ghazālī seeks to revive by writing the forty books of his *ihyā'*. Many theories have been brought forward on the structure of this work, analogous to the case of Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, but in both cases the research may profit from a close reading of the few indications that the authors themselves give.

Al-Ghazālī is quite explicit about the division of the work in four quarters, each comprising ten books: religious observances (*'ibādāt*), habits (*'ādāt*), destructive matters (*muhlikāt*) and saving matters (*manjiyāt*). The first quarter deals with the practical matters of Muslim religious life, such as articles of faith, the

⁵⁵ On the spiritual crisis of Ghazālī, see his 'spiritual autobiography' *Munqidh min al-dalāl*. Richard Joseph McCarthy's translation of this work has recently been re-published as *Al-Ghazali's path to Sufism and his deliverance from error*, Louisville (KY) 2000. For a somewhat longer introduction to my Christian theological reading of al-Ghazālī, see my *Sharing lights on the way to God: Muslim-Christian dialogue and theology in the context of Abrahamic partnership*, Amsterdam-New York (NY) 2006.

⁵⁶ From the *muqaddima* (introduction) to *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* I used Nabih Amin Faris's translation of the first book: *The book of knowledge* (Lahore 1962), and checked the translation by using two Arabic editions: an edition in four volumes (al-Qahira 1289, new ed. 1352/1933) and an edition in sixteen volumes (al-Qahira 1356-7/1937-8).

⁵⁷ *Book of knowledge*, 2.

Five Pillars, reading the Qur'an and supererogatory prayers. It is prefaced by a book on Knowledge, since 'it is of the utmost importance to determine first of all the knowledge which God has, through His Apostle, ordered the elite to seek'.⁵⁸ The second quarter deals with practical matters in daily life in which moral behaviour is important, such as eating, marriage, earning a livelihood, and travel; in short: living according to the model of the Prophet (book XX).

While the first twenty books concentrate on the physical wellbeing of Muslims and the role of their religion, the last twenty books concentrate on their spiritual wellbeing. Consequently, al-Ghazālī starts the third quarter with reflections on the remarkable things of the heart (*'ajā'ib al-qalb*) and the exercise of the soul (*riyāda al-naḥs*). This third quarter is dedicated to matters that destroy spiritual life, such as lust, anger, wealth, pride and vanity. This quarter may be regarded as a treatment of the negative or ascetic aspects of the spiritual path, while the fourth and final quarter deals with its positive aspects in enumerating 'every praiseworthy trait and every one of the desirable qualities of God's favourites [...] and the saints, by means of which the slave seeks to draw near to the Lord of the Universe'.⁵⁹ According to this description, the saving matters are the qualities of those who are near to God (*muqarrabūn*) and who are his true friends (*sadiqūn*). These qualities may aid the servant (*'abd*) in his approach (*taqarraba*) to the Lord of the Worlds (*rabb al-'ālamīn*). In this context, al-Ghazālī extensively treats some of the stages of the spiritual way: repentance (*tawba*) in book XXXI, patience (or endurance: *sabr*) and gratitude (*shukr*) in book XXXII, fear (*khawf*) and hope (*rajā'*) in book XXXIII, and poverty (*faqr*) and renunciation (*zuhd*) in book XXXIV. Next comes Divine Unity (*tawhīd*) together with trust in God's providence (*tawakkul*) in book XXXV, and love (*mahabba*) together with desire (*shawq*), intimacy (*uns*) and contentment (*ridā*) in book XXXVI. After these traditional topics follow further reflections on intention (*niya*), truthfulness (*sidq*) and sincerity in religion (*ikhlas*) in book XXXVII, on inspection (*murāqaba*) and examination of conscience (*muhāsaba*) in book XXXVIII, and finally on meditation (*tafakkur*) in book XXXIX and on constant reflection on death (*dhikr al-mawt*) in book XL.

The reasons for this division into forty books, and the underlying motives behind it may not be immediately clear. Al-Ghazālī mentions two motives, the first of which may be of particular importance since it reveals his insistence on practical matters and his relative reticence on theological matters. I quote once again from the introduction to the *Ihya' 'ulūm al-dīn*:

Two things have induced me to divide the work into four quarters. The first and original motive is that such an arrangement in research and exposition is impera-

⁵⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 5.

tive because the science by which we approach the hereafter is divided into the science of revelation and the science of practical religion. By the science of revelation I mean knowledge and only knowledge. By the science of practical religion I mean knowledge as well as action in accordance with that knowledge. This work will deal only with the science of practical religion, and not with revelation, which one is not permitted to record in writing, although it is the ultimate aim of saints and the desire of the eyes of the *Sincere*. The science of practical religion is merely a path which leads to revelation and only through that path did the prophets of God communicate with the people and lead them to Him. Concerning revelation itself, the prophets spoke only figuratively and briefly through signs and symbols, because they realized the inability of man's mind to comprehend. Therefore since the learned men are heirs of the prophets, they cannot but follow in their footsteps and emulate their ways.⁶⁰

Al-Ghazālī describes the science of religion as a science by which we are directed to the hereafter. It consists of the 'science of behaviour' (*'ilm al-mu'āmalā*) and the 'science of revelation' or 'science of unveiling' (*'ilm al-mukāshafā*). Here and in various other writings al-Ghazālī argues that this 'science of revelation' transcends the abilities of the human mind and cannot be unveiled in writing. It is the science that belongs to those who received God's revelation: the Prophets and the spiritual seekers who find God at the end of their spiritual way because they exist as being found by God and being enlightened by His revelation. For spiritual seekers who are still on their way to God – *viatores* and not yet *comprehensores* – the only science that remains is the science of practical behaviour in which the spiritual way (*tarīqa*) is connected with the practice of being a Muslim by observing the *sharī'a*. This decision to distinguish the spiritual and the ritual way as two dimensions of the 'science of behaviour' structures Ghazālī's book. In his *muqaddima*, he makes a distinction between an outward science dealing with the functions of the senses, and an inward science dealing with the functions of the heart. The outward science is subdivided into acts of worship – the first quarter of the *Ihyā'* – and usages of life – the second quarter. The inward science is subdivided into objectionable and praiseworthy things.

The structuring of the *Ihyā'* as a guide to the science of physical and spiritual behaviour implies that al-Ghazālī connects the traditional material of the science of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the experiential knowledge of Sufism. In this context, Kenneth Garden of the University of Chicago has remarked that the old hypothesis brought forward by McDonald and Goldziher, according to which Ghazālī's objective in the *Ihyā'* would be to render Sufism orthodox, should be amended to saying that Ghazālī's objective of reviving the sciences of religion was

⁶⁰ Ibid., 6.

patterned according to Fiqh and Sufi rules.⁶¹ In a comparative perspective, Marianne Farina has shown that Ghazālī, as well as Thomas Aquinas, connects the stages of moral growth and the stages of spiritual growth to the basic metaphor of friendship with God.⁶²

Al-Ghazālī ends the introduction to his *Ihyāʾ* by revealing his second motive for dividing the work into four parts. This is a usual practice in books of jurisprudence and books of medicine. And therefore, if such a structure is useful for those who study the art of healing human bodies, it will certainly be useful for those who study the higher art of healing hearts and souls. We can now understand why al-Ghazālī uses the word *ihyāʾ* (revival) to characterize his work: it is a book of spiritual medicine that guides the senses of the faithful by indicating the proper behaviour in their religious and their daily lives, and guides their hearts by indicating what is damaging and what is beneficial to their spiritual well-being.

It is in this context of things beneficial to spiritual well-being that al-Ghazālī structures some of the basic metaphors in Muslim spirituality. Richard Gramlich has characterized the order of books XXXI-XXXVI as a stairway to the love of God.⁶³ Although al-Ghazālī borrowed much of the materials in these books from Abū Tālib al-Makkī's *Qūt al-qulūb*, he did not take over the structure of Makkī's book because he wanted to consider the stages of the mystical path from a theological point of view.⁶⁴ Al-Ghazālī is fairly traditional in beginning with repentance (*tawba*) as first of the beneficial things for the heart on its way to God, but he is less traditional in his choice of the other stages in pairs: patience and gratitude (book XXXII), hope and fear (book XXXIII), poverty and renunciation (book XXIV), faith and trust in God (book XXXV) and finally love and its consequences: desire, intimacy and contentment (book XXXVI). Gramlich remarks that al-Ghazālī on the one hand sees this order as a necessary order, but on the other hand allows for some variation even in his own works.⁶⁵ It is, of course, impossible to go into the details of these six books in the remainder of this article; the reader may consult summaries in most European languages.⁶⁶ It would

⁶¹ Kenneth Garden, *Al-Ghazali's four-part structure and the underlying logic of the revival of the religious sciences*. (Paper presented to the Study of Islam Section and Islamic Mysticism Group of the American Academy of Religion, San Antonio, Nov. 20, 2004.)

⁶² Marianne Farina, *Moral goodness and friendship with God: The moral teachings of Thomas Aquinas and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali* (unpublished PhD-thesis, Boston 2004), 252-272 (Aquinas) and 303-343 (al-Ghazālī).

⁶³ Richard Gramlich, *Muhammad al-Gazzālīs Lehre von den Stufen zur Gottesliebe* (ed., trans. & intr. Richard Gramlich), Wiesbaden 1984.

⁶⁴ Gramlich, *Stufen*, 5-6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁶⁶ For a summary in German, see Gramlich, *Stufen*, 9-16; for a summary in French, see *Ghazālī, Ihyaʾ ʿOulūm ed-dīn ou Vivification des sciences de la foi* (anal. & index G.-H. Bousquet), Paris

be tempting to concentrate on 'love' as the basic metaphor in Sufi spirituality, since al-Ghazālī begins book XXXVI by saying that love is the supreme station of mysticism.⁶⁷ This would, however, involve the risk of harmonizing Christian and Muslim spirituality in a comparative approach, since most Christian authors would agree that 'love' certainly may be considered as the basis of Christian religion in general and Christian spirituality in particular.⁶⁸ Therefore, it may be better to concentrate on a root metaphor that expresses the disposition of Muslim spirituality as distinct from Christian spirituality somewhat better, without forgetting that both forms of spirituality are characterized by the same basic tension between 'way' as an expression of human effort towards God, and 'participation' as expression of the human receptivity for the unity of being-found (*wahdāt al-wujūd*) by God. It is my contention that the Muslim expression of this basic tension is best explained by al-Ghazālī's bringing together of the notions of bearing witness to the unity of God (*tawhīd*) and practicing trust in God's providence (*tawakkul*) in book XXXV of his *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*. Since trust in God is both the spiritual basis and the practical consequence of the central Muslim tenet of *tawhīd*, a comparative spiritual theology may fruitfully start at this point.⁶⁹

In the introduction to his English translation of the book, David Burrell remarks that *tawakkul* 'entails accepting whatever happens as part of the inscrutable decree of a just and merciful God. Yet such an action cannot be reduced to mere resignation, and so caricatured as "Islamic fatalism"'.⁷⁰ Al-Ghazālī distinguishes three stages of trust in God. The first stage belongs to those who place their trust in God in the same manner as they would trust a trustee (*wakīl*). There is some real trust and confidence in God's security and solicitude here, but the relation between God and those who trust in God is not very intimate. In the second stage, the faithful take refuge in God in the same manner as children would hang unto the hem of the skirts of their mothers. This is a very personal relation in which the faithful rely utterly on God but not without an awareness

1955, 313-407 and *Abou Hamid al-Ghazālī, L'apaisement du coeur, de la jalousie à la méditation* (trans. Hédi Djebnoun), Beyrouth 2000. A summary in English may be found in the appendices to Richard Joseph McCarthy, *Freedom and fulfillment: an annotated translation of al-Ghazālī's al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl and other relevant works of al-Ghazālī*, Boston 1980.

⁶⁷ Gramlich, *Stufen*, 15; Bousquet, *Vivification*, 395. A full French translation and commentary in *Al-Ghazālī, Livre de l'amour* (intr., trans. & notes Marie-Louise Siauve), Paris 1986. A partial Dutch translation and commentary in Herman Henry Dingemans, *Alghazali's Boek der Liefde*, Leiden 1938.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, the recent encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, by Pope Benedict XVI.

⁶⁹ Compare Anawati & Gardet, *Mystique musulmane*, 125.

⁷⁰ *Al-Ghazali, Faith in Divine unity & trust in Divine providence. Kitab al-tawhid wa'l-tawakkul. Book XXXV of The revival of the religious sciences Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (ed., intr. & trans. David D. Burrell), Louisville (KY) 2001, xix-xx.

of being different from God. This difference disappears in the third stage, which is characterized by a total submissiveness. Al-Ghazālī clarifies this stage by using the image of a dead corpse being washed: ‘it is to be in the presence of God Most High, whether active or at rest, like a corpse in the hands of the one washing it, differing only in that while one regards oneself to be dead, the eternal omnipotence moves one to action, as the hand of the one washing it moves the corpse’.⁷¹ The highest form of trust in God implies that human beings let God be the only agent, surrendering themselves totally to His actions. Although such an image will seem less suited to the taste of most Christians than the personal image of the second stage, a comparative approach may refer to similar images in Christian spirituality.⁷² Al-Ghazālī explains the difference between the second and the third stage as follows:

Such a one differs from the child, for the child takes refuge in his mother, cries and hangs onto the hem of her skirt, running after her; but this one is rather like a child who knows that his mother is looking for him whether he screams for her or not, that she is carrying him whether he hangs on the hem of her skirt or not, and that she will extend her breast to him and give him to drink whether he asks for milk or not.⁷³

It is quite clear that al-Ghazālī sees the process from the first to the second and then to the third stage of trust as a process of spiritual growth in which we learn to trust in God by diminishing our trust in our own powers. As al-Ghazālī remarks in the same context: we do not need petitionary prayer anymore, because we know that God will give what is best for us. This is the spiritual path of *fanā’*, the vanishing of the self before God. In the systematic study of spirituality, one may describe this as a full blossoming of the theological dimension in which human beings learn to rely on God and to become receptive in their seeking God that can now be reformulated as a being-found by God: the loss of self leads to the union of being-found (*wahdāt al-wujūd*).

At the same time, such trust in God has a practical side as well: one should learn to trust God without being hazardous or irresponsible. For instance, it would be nonsensical to refuse eating while trusting that God will feed you. ‘If you were to wait for God Most High to create satiety in you without bread, or to create in bread a motion towards you, or to enjoin an angel to chew it for you and see that it reaches your stomach – that would simply display your ignorance of the practice [*sunna*] of God Most High’.⁷⁴ Even if we concentrate our

⁷¹ *Faith in Divine unity*, 61.

⁷² For instance, Rom 8:10-11. See Valkenberg, *Sharing lights on the way to God*, 251.

⁷³ *Faith in Divine unity*, 61-62.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

lives on trust in God, we still have to live as social human beings, and this is why al-Ghazālī connects the practical side of the things that are beneficial to the hearts of the faithful with their spiritual side. For the systematic study of spirituality this means that the theological dimension of participation in God cannot exist apart from the anthropological dimension of human beings seeking God in the behaviour of their daily lives. Yet, the theological dimension that is so present in the works of al-Ghazālī – as in those of Thomas Aquinas, for that matter – without them ever being able to express it directly – which makes them apophatic theologians – grounds the anthropological dimension because ‘to exist’ means ‘to be found by God’ while seeking Him. The basic structure of the Sufi *tariqa* as a series of abodes in which Muslims and others may seek God while being found by God may be seen as a root metaphor expressing the deep structure of spirituality as a process of transformation in the relation between God and human beings.

SUMMARY

The author of this article sketches a new approach to root metaphors in spirituality by considering systematic approaches to Muslim sources. In Abrahamic religions the notion of ‘the way’ is often used in descriptions of spiritual processes, but this notion has to be complemented by the metaphor of ‘participation’ because the spiritual wayfarer, while seeking God, finds that he or she is already found by God. In Sufi spirituality, this basic tension is expressed in the notions of ‘stations’ (*manazil*) and ‘states’ (*ahwal*). After a general introduction, the comparative research first engages in deconstructing the way in which Christian authors have interpreted the tension between ‘stations’ and ‘states’ by referring to Christian concepts of nature and grace, and finally engages in reconstructing the basic structure of root metaphors in Muslim spirituality with reference to the structure of al-Ghazālī’s systematic approach to spirituality in his *Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din*.

Pim (W.G.B.M.) Valkenberg is associate professor of Dogmatic Theology and Theology of Religions at the Radboud University Nijmegen. His main fields of interest are Christology and Trinitarian theology, theology of religions and the comparative study of Abrahamic religions. His main publications include Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas (Leuven 2000), The Three Rings: Textual Studies in the historical dialogue of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (ed. with Barbara Roggema and Marcel Poorthuis, Leuven 2005) and Sharing Lights on the Way to God: Muslim-Christian dialogue and theology in the context of Abrahamic partnership (Amsterdam – New York 2006).

Address: Faculty of Theology, Radboud University, P.O. Box 9102, NL-6500 HC Nijmegen, The Netherlands

E-mail: P.Valkenberg@theo.ru.nl