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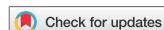


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# Decolonizing the Politics of Love: A Ghazālian Genealogy of Love in Islam

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## ABSTRACT

This article invites a consideration of more diverse conceptions of love. It proposes as a contribution specific Islamic forms of love, especially those theorized by the medieval Muslim theologian, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111). The goal is to decolonize the concept of love from dominant Christocentric notions of agape and redemptive forms of love that shape interfaith dialogue. It argues why we need to explore and take account of different conceptions of love. Pope Benedict scandalized the Muslim world with his 2006 Regensburg lecture. The source for many of these misunderstandings is the equation of the ontotheology of love in a particular strand of Christianity with love in Islam. Historically, Islam's ontotheology is centered around incumbent mercy, whereas love is a product within a theological apparatus of experiential relationships of humans with each other as well as with the divine. The article elaborates why Ghazālī's phenomenology of love enriches our understanding of love. Foregrounding knowledge, perception, and obedience, Ghazālī offers a complex experiential conception of love within a Muslim theological 'apparatus' and matrix. Proposing that Christianity and Islam have love in common, as some have proposed, does not do justice to the rich, but very different conceptions of love in each tradition.

He and Bev do not speak. He has learned by now, from her, to concentrate all his attention on the animal they are killing, giving it what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love. J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*

Love was duty, and duty was love. Vikram Chandra, *Sacred Games*

## Introduction

In October of 2007, 138 theologians, public figures, and leaders from among the global Muslim community signed and circulated an open letter, "A Common Word Between Us and You," applauding how Muslims and Christians pursued peace based on a shared value of love: love of One God and love of the neighbor.<sup>1</sup> Some 256 additional signatories have since endorsed that statement.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.acommonword.com/>

This overture from the Muslim side is part of a response to a severe disturbance that rocked relations between Catholics and Muslims. A year earlier Pope Benedict XVI delivered his famous September 12, 2006, Regensburg lecture titled “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections,” a part of which set off a global firestorm. While his lecture followed a meeting with leading scientists and was ostensibly about the place of reason in theology and science, the global controversy that followed was over a comment Pope Benedict made about Islam. The pontiff claimed that acting unreasonably contradicted God’s nature.<sup>2</sup> To illustrate Catholicism’s adoption of reason he contrasted it to the absence of reason in Islam. Benedict drew on the words of Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus who told a Muslim interlocutor sometime between 1394 and 1402 during the siege of Constantinople: “Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.”<sup>3</sup> Many in the global Muslim community found the characterization of both the Prophet Muḥammad and the distortion of their theology to be offensive. The Common Word statement served as a response to the pontiff specifically and as an attempt to pursue dialogue with Christendom more generally.

What was striking in the Common Word response was the overture that Islam and Christianity shared a common fount of love. In this article I wish to demonstrate that the superficial claim of love being common to Islam and Christianity is reductive of both Islam and Christianity. One of the weaknesses of interfaith dialogue is that the dominant side sets the agenda and narrative of what is the good and the holy. Discussions rarely touch on the differences between faith traditions. Love has a role in Islam and Christianity, but each function very differently in their respective theological discursivity. In the strands of Christianity that dominate interfaith dialogue love is an ontological category as *agape*. Furthermore, it is intimately related to a redemptive theology embedded in a conception of a Triune God. In Islam love operates along very different existential, epistemological, and ontological registers.

My objection to creating a false resonance between two faith traditions stems from an impulse to bring into visibility the particularity of each faith tradition rather than focus on the surface similarities. This exploration is an undertaking in the political theology of Islam namely, the politics of love in Islam and I will not undertake a comparison of love in two traditions.<sup>4</sup>

Rather in order to identify and understand the discourses of love in Islam means to bring into visibility the *apparatus (dispositif)*, a concept coined by Michel Foucault and later amplified by Giorgio Agamben, of love in Islam.<sup>5</sup> An apparatus is the “thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses” which would include architectural forms, regulations, laws, scientific, moral, and philosophical propositions, in Foucault’s view.<sup>6</sup> It includes the said and the unsaid, a system of relations between a plurality of elements and the different roles each element can play at different times.

<sup>2</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections”, 706. <https://familyofsites.bishopsconference.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/07/BXVI-2006-Regensburg-address.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>See Heydarpoor, “Love in Christianity and Islam: A Contribution to Religious Ethics”.

<sup>5</sup>Foucault and Gordon, “Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings”, 194; Giorgio Agamben, “What Is an Apparatus?”.

<sup>6</sup>Foucault and Gordon, “Power/Knowledge”, 194.

Key to an apparatus is the different roles any concept can play at different times, just as the concept of love plays multiple and varying roles in Islamic discursivity.

Proleptically, I will point to the system of theological relations, briefly. God, in multiple iterations of Islam – Sunni, Shī‘ī, Ibādī, Zaydī and Ismā‘īlī – is repeatedly described as compassionate and as the bestower of grace (*raḥmān*). Yet, the attribute of grace, benevolence, and infinite compassion (*raḥmānīya*) is different from love. Several authors like S H Nasr and Ghazi b. Muhammad b. Talal conflate these attributes of mercy and compassion with love.<sup>7</sup> How is infinite grace different from love? Grace is a sovereign Divine act in the world. In variations of Islamic theology this world is a product and outcome of infinite divine grace and compassion. But in Muslim political theology, as I read it, humans engage that grace and compassion by holding on to a covenant of obedience, not a covenant of love. Clearly, obedience has become unfashionable for the modern sensibility. Furthermore, the impulse to translate grace as love is understandable considering the hegemony of Christian discourses of love as well as in secular domains. The result is that the tradition of Islamic conceptions of love are marginalized and interpellated to unconsciously serve different agendas.

In the Common Word statement unique aspects of established Muslim subjectivity as provided by tradition are undone by its acquiescence to the demands of modern inter-faith politics, featuring cosmopolitanism and notions of solidarity premised on a politics of love. The desire to conflate multiple concepts that were carefully curated and elucidated in the elaborate historical Muslim scholarly tradition merely to show that Islam too has love at its core like Christianity is deeply problematic in bowdlerizing a tradition.<sup>8</sup>

At another level a specific genealogy of love filters into secular notions of the political in the West, most likely derived from European Christian culture and civilization. This is what Agamben would identify as the “apparatuses in which living beings are incessantly captured.”<sup>9</sup> So, any kind of conversation about love, when conflated between two faith traditions like Christianity and Islam, results in one being subordinated and refashioned in the image of the stronger and more powerful tradition, or the one is captured in the apparatus of the other. I think the authors of the Common Word statement unconsciously succumbed to the Christian apparatus of love.

More specifically, I resist equating the dominant conception of love as *agape*, the wholly selfless and disinterested love impossible among humans, but for the grace of God, to be compatible with notions of love in Islam.<sup>10</sup> *Agape* is a unique Christian form of love that finds its roots in the doctrine of original sin which in turn elicited a theology of redemption,<sup>11</sup> a concept that is absent in Islam. My goal is to show a Muslim difference

<sup>7</sup>Talal. In his foreword to the book, the distinguished scholar S H Nasr claims that God loved Himself, when in fact the tradition states God expressed a wish (*aḥbabtu*) to be worshipped. Everywhere the term mercy occurs the author of the foreword conflates it with love xxiii–xxv. Whereas the most authentic interpreter like Ibn ‘Arabi explains that divine benevolence or infinite mercy (*raḥmānīya*) is the grounds for all existence. Nasr argues that mercy and compassion involves love. If divine attributes are so interchangeable, then the multiplicity of divine attributes are rendered superfluous. For a discussion of mercy in the work of Ibn ‘Arabi, see Shaikh, Sa’diyya, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 75–81.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 37. There is a strong resemblance in the language of the Common Word statement and the book by Ghazi b. Muhammad b. Talal, which in itself lacks any discursive heft and is merely a potpourri of citations from various sources.

<sup>9</sup>Agamben, “What Is an Apparatus?”, 13.

<sup>10</sup>Nygren, “Agape and Eros”, pt. 1. A study of the Christian idea of love.--pt. 2. The history of the Christian idea of love.

<sup>11</sup>Gandolfo, “The Power and Vulnerability of Love a Theological Anthropology”, 178, 82. Gandolfo establishes how the theological anthropology of redemption is a product of original sin that creates vulnerability. Original sin as a doctrine is absent in Islam.

in the interest of discursive and the epistemic virtues of honesty, authenticity, and diversity. A lack of vigilance can result in the elimination of other knowledge traditions and degrading human diversity. Together with the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano as well as Walter Mignolo, among others, the goal is not to advance universality, but pluriversality.<sup>12</sup>

### Love: difference and discursivity

The discursive characterization of love and the place of love in Islamic teachings as portrayed in the Common Word statement around the theme of love is contrived to anyone familiar with classical Islamic teachings. Where the Qurʾān (3:64) does invoke the “Common Word” between “the People of the Book,” meaning Jews and Christians Muslims sharing common core doctrines, the proposed invitation and conciliation are centered on monotheism and an antipathy to polytheism and idolatory..

Elsewhere the Qurʾān and Islamic theology across the multiple Muslim sects does talk about love, but it does so in a very different theological framework or apparatus than the version presented in the Common Word. For instance, the Common Word statement cites a teaching that invites a believer to testify to God’s oneness, acknowledge multiple prophets, and concede to God’s sovereignty and power. Up to this point the statement is coherent within the Islamic theological tradition, broadly construed. But the further commentary of the writers of the document tells a different story. Each of Islam’s confessional phrases, the statement says, “describe a mode of love of God, and devotion to Him.” On the face of it, the commentary appears innocent unless one ignores the context in which it was articulated. This position bends to satisfy a position of immanent love, equating the confession of faith and worship, to both be acts of love. This comports more with a form of modern liberal Christian theology. However, such an articulation goes against the grain of foundational Islamic theology.

On the traditional account, Islam as a faith tradition, as a *dīn*, first elicits obedience and surrender to God. *Dīn* are those acts of obedience that are performed to attain salvation, since the world is described as an abode of moral obligation (*dār al-taklīf*).<sup>13</sup> By proclaiming Islam as a *dīn*, the believer announces obedience to a transcendent God. Obedience and surrender are not identical to love. As I will show later, at least one medieval Muslim theologian identified love to be a consequence of obedience to God. Once obedience is accomplished, a relationship of intimacy is established with the divine. The relationship of mutual love and adoration between God and worshiper grows out of a relationship between the Creator and the created, but it is preceded by obedience and surrender.

Christianity, in turn, has a unique sensibility of love that is essential to its Christology. H. G. Wells, novelist, and historian, but no theologian, reflexively described Jesus as “teaching a new and simple and profound doctrine—namely, the universal, loving Fatherhood of God and the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>14</sup> The “loving fatherhood of God” is part of a trinitarian understanding of the divine and is far from the Muslim imaginary of God. Islam instinctively resists trinitarian notions of the divine.

<sup>12</sup>Quijano, *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America*, 533–580; Mignolo, *Decoloniality and Phenomenology*, 360–387; “Foreword: On Pluriversality and Multipolarity”.

<sup>13</sup>Jili, *al-Insān al-Kāmil fī Maʾrifat al-Awāʾil wa al-Awākhir*, 184.

<sup>14</sup>Wells, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind*, 529.

The role and place of love in Augustinian Christianity is part of a complex and different theological imaginary, steeped in original sin and the need for sacrifice to redeem humanity. Jesus' crucifixion is a sacrificial love. Therefore, redemptive love via crucifixion to "love thy neighbor" is part of Christianity's unique triune theological complexity.<sup>15</sup> The unique role of love in a dominant European Christian context is consistent with its political-theological presuppositions and requirements. But this is not necessarily the case for a tradition like Islam. Muslims and other faith traditions are interpellated – unconsciously co-opted – through dominant moral and philosophical ideologies so that they better resonate with a Christian ontology of love.

### Ontotheology of mercy: the Islamic difference

What the authors of the Common Word ignored or overlooked was the centrality of the ontotheology of mercy in Islamic theology. Nothing is more primordial and pivotal than the absolute mercy of God to all of creation. This is a central and key doctrine in which theologians and those who blend mystical insights with theological and philosophical discourses share a broad agreement. Two of the preeminent divine predicates or attributes in Islamic theology are the attributes "Infinitely Merciful and Gracious-Raḥmān" and the "Dispenser of Grace-Raḥīm." Another way to frame Raḥmān is to describe it as "Incumbent Mercy" since God in the Qurʾān prescribes mercy for Himself and claims his mercy overwhelms everything.<sup>16</sup> Debates center on whether each description of a divine attribute can ever fully signify their intended meanings. Each predicate differs since the semiotic field for each expresses a different quality and meaning. In all instances, human-language falls short of fully explicating God's majesty. Even though Islamic theology identifies the number ninety-nine as the amount of divine attributes of God, in essence the divine attributes are infinite. If the trees were turned into pens and the oceans became ink, explains the Qurʾān, the description of the nature of God could never be exhausted.<sup>17</sup>

Say: "Even if the oceans were ink

For the words of my Lord,

The ocean would be spent.

Before the words of my Lord were exhausted,

Even if we provided its like to replenish it"<sup>18</sup>. (Q 18:109)

Of these divine names two are exclusive and do *not* possess a secondary referent. By secondary referent Muslim theologians mean just as God is "powerful-*qādir*" or is a "creator-*khāliq*," humans too possess the attributes of power and ability as well as the capacity to create. Humans can also be merciful to others, signified by the attribute *raḥīm*. In all instances these attributes are found to be perfect in God and imperfectly evident in humans.

<sup>15</sup>Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 584.

<sup>16</sup>Hamza, Rizvi, and Mayer, *An Anthology of Qurʾanic Commentaries*, 299–302.

<sup>17</sup>Asad, *The Message of the Qurʾān*, 27.

<sup>18</sup>See these various translations from which I have benefited. Ibid; Khalidi, *The Qurʾān*.

The exception are two attributes that attain sovereign status and do not have a secondary referent. The first is Allāh, which is the identity and exclusive proper name of the deity in Arabic as the creator of the universe. The second is *rahmān*, meaning the infinitely merciful one, who can be viewed as synonymous to Allāh.<sup>19</sup> The comparison is made in the words of the Qurʾān: “Say: ‘Invoke God (*Allāh*) or invoke the Infinitely Merciful (*al-Rahmān*): whatever way you address the deity, the most beautiful names are appropriate.’” (Q:17.110) No human can claim to share the attribute of *rahmān*, since it is the essence of the divine character if not the ontological character of the divine in Islam. As I will point out later, infinite incumbent mercy is the grounds for all existence.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) the renowned theologian and polymath in discussing the divine attributes, explained that the term *rahmān*, is also a synonym for Allāh.<sup>20</sup> Mercy and compassion in Ghazālī’s reading are of two kinds. The first is “perfect mercy” (*al-rahma al-tāmma*) where the divine attends to those in need, offers providential care and intends only the good for humans. The second kind is an “inclusive” or “universal mercy” (*rahma ʾamma*) that “embraces the deserving and the undeserving ... encompassing those in this world and in the other world,” a divine being who attends to every kind of need is a God who is “utterly and truly merciful.”<sup>21</sup>

Ghazālī adds:

It is appropriate to conceive of the attribute of infinite mercy (*al-rahmān*) to stem from a species of mercy (*rahma*), but one that is beyond the reach and capacity of the servants [to emulate], one which is primarily related to after worldly happiness. So, the infinitely merciful one (*al-rahmān*) firstly, displays tenderness towards all servants by way of originating (*ijād*) [the universe]; secondly, by way of guiding them to faith and the means to attain felicity; thirdly, by the provision of happiness in the hereafter; and fourthly, by granting them the contemplation of the noble face of God [in the hereafter].<sup>22</sup>

ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d.1408), an extraordinary writer on Islamic mysticism explains how the manifestation of mercy becomes evident in all existents, in fact in every particle of existence. With this mercy embedded in all existence it follows then that mercy is pervasive in all existents.<sup>23</sup> In other words mercy is intimately connected to creation and all of existence.

With mercy as the ontotheology of Islam, in other words as the formative divine impulse and action in the world, the theological apparatus curates the centrality of mercy. Authors who are steeped in mystical theology, such as Muḥī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (d.1240), clearly the most articulate of those writers who practice mysticism, writes:

Amplification (*mubālagha*) in mercy divides it into “obligatory/incumbent mercy” (*al-rahma al-wājiba*) and “gratuitous mercy” (*al-rahma al-imtīnāniya*) as God, the elevated, said: “My mercy encompasses every existing thing.” (Q 7:156) ... With “gratuitous mercy” the cosmos became manifest, and served as the means by which the folk of wretchedness

<sup>19</sup>al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and His People*, 67, 89. Al-Azmeh observes the universalizing perspectives of monotheism and notes that R̥hmn was the proper name of the montheistic deity of Christians as well as of henotheistic and monolatric deities.

<sup>20</sup>al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fi Sharḥ Maʾāni Asmāʾ Allāh al-Ḥusnā*, 63; Burrell, Daher, and Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God = al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fi Sharḥ Asmāʾ Allāh al-Ḥusnā Translated with Notes*, 53.

<sup>21</sup>al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, 62; Burrell, Daher, and Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 54.

<sup>22</sup>al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, 63.

<sup>23</sup>Jīlī, *al-Insān al-Kāmil fi Maʾrifat al-Awāʾil wa al-Awākhir*, 1:88.

will ultimately have an end in the comfort of the abode they will inhabit. Beginning with obligatory deeds enables the acquisition of “obligatory mercy,” namely the mercy about which God told His Prophet, on whom be peace and blessings, by way of gratuity [in the Qur’ān 3:159]: “So it is because of mercy from God/that you were mild to them.” “We have sent you only as a mercy to all peoples.” (Q 22: 107) are [instances of] “gratuitous mercy” by which the entire cosmos subsisted and then mercy became widespread ... And the one who knows the reason for the existence of the world and also knows of the self-description of the Real (*ḥaqq*), namely, that He loved being known, thus He created creation. Then He made Himself known to them, so they recognized Him. Therefore, every single thing sings His praise. From this is known the first thing mercy was attached to. So the lover is the object of mercy in terms of the concomitants of love and its external practices.<sup>24</sup>

Note that it is mercy as the sovereign attribute through which the Divine becomes disclosed to the world, not love.

### Ghazālī on God

If we follow Ibn ‘Arabī, who existed several centuries after Ghazālī, then in his reasoning love is an outcome of mercy but not identical to it. Mercy is the universal, the primary source. Ghazālī had much to say about divine love and divine attributes. Ghazālī distinguished between God’s Acts and His Attributes. In terms of attributes, he had in mind basic attributes that were non-relational. These were the attributes like life, knowledge, power, will, hearing, sight, and speech. God’s acts were acts of creation: they caused events and things to occur. These events were the result of his specific relational attributes, such as Creator, Giver, Guide etc. God’s essence, Muslim theologians agreed, was uncaused. While discussions among Muslim dialectical theologians on these matters could provide dry theological discussions, theologians like Ghazālī were more mystical in their approach.

In the experience of being obedient to God there are multiple levels by which God is unveiled to the practitioner-mystic (henceforth, I will refer to the mystic as the dedicated practitioner or just as the practitioner). God, in Ghazālī’s view, is *within* the practitioner without *being part* of the human practitioner. The goal of the practitioner is to die in relation to all other things that are non-God, until only God remains alive as the content of his or her consciousness. God is the object of love, contemplation, and adoration. As an alternative to dying to all other things, the practitioner can attain an intuitive perspective from which (s)he sees none in existence except God.<sup>25</sup>

At a theological and philosophical level Ghazālī also held that God is unique and unknowable. However, as the scholar Fadlou Shehadi pointed out: “Any attempt to interpret the Ghazālīan or Muslim conception of God merely from the standpoint of religious need, and thus lament the aloofness or unavailability which are prominently part of the conception, misses one of the powerful insights that characterize Islam.”<sup>26</sup>

Shehadi explains that Islamic conceptions of the divine offer,

<sup>24</sup>Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya*, 7:294–295, bāb 558-*ma’rifat al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*.

<sup>25</sup>Shehadi, *Ghazali’s Unique and Unknowable God*, 33.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. (Franz Rosenzweig in *The Star of Redemption* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1985), 238–239 and adherents of immanentism in dominant modes of Jewish thought, often critique Muslim theology for the aloofness of the Muslim God. Rosenzweig, for example, found it unthinkable that God did not have a “need” for humans in Islam).

a way of looking at the divine for its own sake, a way of thinking about it as if nothing else existed. If religion is essentially the area of the relation between man and the divine, this perspective in Islam broadens the scope of the religious to include this concern for the divine as if man were not in the picture ... But there is the profoundest extension of the horizon of the religious in thinking about the divine itself, for itself, as if nothing else existed; and not in relation to the human scene, or the physical world. God created the Heavens and Earth. He cares for man. But God is also above creating, above caring, above relation. How low is the ceiling of that God-and-man universe. How infinitely open, how shatteringly vast, how breathlessly mystifying is that world where godliness is along, beyond any ken, beyond any relation holy (*"muqaddasun"* sanctified above), majestic.<sup>27</sup>

Shehadi's point of God being beyond need, creation and above the world, is well taken. A robust articulation of Muslim theological convictions will resist political pressures to immanentize Muslim theology. In the theological interaction between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, there is often the facile predisposition to overlook specificity and difference in the interest of a triumphalist, but often a shallow deference to an Abrahamic commonality between the three traditions.

Any reader of Muslim theology cannot miss the fact that Islam does indeed press on the idea of transcendence of the divine, as is in the case of the work of Ghazālī. For Ghazālī, no words can adequately describe God's nature under any aspect, including God's relation to humans and the world.<sup>28</sup> Yet when Ghazālī creates a picture of God for humans he uses the accessible language of positive attributes and predicates, Ghazālī would say is that the divine does not have an *informative descriptive* function. Rather, the divine has a *practical directing* function vis-a-vis humans.<sup>29</sup> In other words, the positive descriptions of God's attributes are a human-language picture of God. The metaphysical conception of God's essence does not inhabit a place, nor is God part of the universe nor outside the universe, neither connected nor disconnected to it.<sup>30</sup> Yet, God's presence inhabits the hearts of the believers, for their hearts are perceived to be the "receptacles" of God's presence.<sup>31</sup>

How do human beings encounter God? In Muslim practice the closest relation to the divine consists of the inner appropriation of God's character. Humans must internalize the characteristics of God via means authorized through revelation – which includes the practices of *dīn* and following the exemplary teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad. These practices include both the mandatory rituals as well as contemplative acts such as remembrance, adoration, and expressing love for God. Hence devotional acts which take the utter uniqueness and unknowability of God seriously cannot be *descriptive*, but rather they must be performative.

At the performative level the presence of God reaches the "receptacles" of God on earth namely, the hearts of worshipers. Thus, it is perfectly acceptable in Muslim theology to say that God's revelatory disclosure to humans occurred in a language they understand, but that at some level it remains a mystery. God's disclosure to humans occurs in words without flesh.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>28</sup>See my Moosa, *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination*.

<sup>29</sup>Shehadi, *Ghazali's Unique and Unknowable God*, 62.

<sup>30</sup>al-Ghazālī, *Mizān al-ʿĀlam*, 164.

<sup>31</sup>Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, "Kitāb Sharḥ 'ajā'ib Al-Qalb", 3:14 esp. fn 4.

The problem Ghazālī faced, as Shehadi so eloquently framed it, is that his theology leads to the following question: How can one say certain things about God, such as that He is just and compassionate? For the very moment one says something, then one will immediately have to negate it by saying, God is not *actually so*. Meaning, God is immensely more just or merciful than humans can ever perceive. In other words, in at least the Ghazālīan theological framework, one is worshipping God via a human-language that is descriptively inapplicable or inadequate in relation to God. Humans are asked to worship God, *as if* God were in our presence, with the knowledge that this perception falls short of the actual. Epistemologically, one is caught in an understandable, but descriptively inadequate version of comprehending the divine. At the same time, however, such a framework is also consistent with the idea that God is utterly unique and unknowable in His essence and nature.

If we accept this point, it raises the real question about revelation: does it also suffer from the inadequacy criteria? The answer to that is, yes. The crucial point is that revelation discloses God's *will*, not God's *nature*. The purpose of revelation is to guide the lives of humans in a language they can understand. In other words, the creed is secured through authoritative revelation. This is the crucial difference between Islam and perhaps the other monotheistic traditions where revelation provides guidance, not a self-description of the divine, a certain taste of divine speech.<sup>32</sup>

The question of guidance brings to the fore the question of norms and normativity. In fact, Muslim theological doctrine centers more on *how* we know the divine will, and furthermore, how the divine will informs the normative tradition. Thus, the ontological question is very closely hewed to the epistemological one.

## Ghazālī on love

When Ghazālī discusses the issue of love, in “*The Book of Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*” of his opus, *Resuscitation of the Sciences of Religion* (*Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*) he confronts a different set of issues in the human encounter with the divine. For now, I will rehearse a few selective themes for the purpose of this discussion.

In the prelude to *Love, Longing Intimacy and Contentment* Ghazālī writes beautifully and descriptively.<sup>33</sup> God “exalts the hearts of His saints,” purifies their inmost beings from worldly distractions and only keeps the hearts of saints focused on divine “presence (*ḥaḍra*).”<sup>34</sup> Ghazālī then plays with glimpses of the divine majesty that could burn the saint in the fire of Divine love. Or the Divine face can be concealed by means of a certain dust on reason and perception. When perplexed by this phenomenon the practitioner or seeker is counseled to observe patience. In the encounter with God the hearts, according to Ghazālī, “remained suspended between rejection and acceptance, between denial and attainment, at once drowned in the sea of knowing Him and scorched in the fire of loving Him.”<sup>35</sup>

And in the exordium (*khuṭba*) to the book of the *Marvels of the Heart*, a section of his opus, Ghazālī announces the themes of monotheistic devotion, divine self-disclosure

<sup>32</sup>Moosa, *Allegory of the Rule (Hukm): Law as Simulacrum in Islam?*.

<sup>33</sup>al-Ghazālī, “*Kitāb al-Maḥabba wa al-Shawq wa al-Uns wa al-Riḍā*”, 1.

<sup>34</sup>al-Ghazālī and Ormsby, *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*, 1.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

through knowledge, ecstatic love, perplexity, complexity, and paradox. Love embraces all these themes. The economy of love is in knowing God through experiencing God. This knowledge of God is in effect the “beauty and perfection and glory” of humans in this world. The moral and political subject experiences the Divine. Yet, the economy of love is filtered through a grasping understanding of the divine. A qualified understanding is reached but never fully grasped intellectually; nonetheless, one is fully embraced affectively. However, Ghazālī is explicit: “Love cannot be conceptualized except through knowing (*maʿrifa*) and perception (*idrāk*). A human being does not love except what one knows.”<sup>36</sup>

Very much consistent with his notion of the unknowable God, Ghazālī talks about love as rapture and perplexity. Deeper knowledge of the divine and intimacy is mediated through love. Yet, the dilemma and perplexity of love is not resolved but sustained in a creative tension. There is both burning in the flame of love and suffering; hesitation in the wilderness of reason as well as certainty; drowning in the perplexity of reason and burning in the flame of love; veiling and unveiling. In short, the possibility of love is made possible by its very impossibility. Even when there is burning which produces light, it is the very light itself that both obscures and dazzles.

Ghazālī categorically states that the love for God and his messenger Muḥammad is an obligation, a duty (*farḍ*).<sup>37</sup> But then he asks: How can you identify something as a *duty* when that thing, love, does not exist? How can one articulate love as obedience, he continues, when in fact, obedience is a product of love? In his rhetorical provocation and citations of Qurʾānic and prophetic teachings it might appear that love precedes all else because revelation informs believers that they are people “whom God loves and who love God” (Qurʾan 5:54) in return. Ghazālī cites the Qurʾan: “And those who believe, are stronger in love for God.” (Q2:165) A prophetic tradition states: “None of you truly believe until you love God and His Messenger more than anything else.”<sup>38</sup> He then recounts multiple narratives from a variety of sources ranging from the statements of the Prophet Muḥammad to the accounts of saints and sufis, all of which reinforce the pre-eminence of love. So, the two things Ghazālī raises and grapples with are the ostensible tension between the invitation to love God and to love as a duty and obedience. So, one must first grasp how Ghazālī conceptualizes love.

Love is the propensity of one’s character toward a pleasure-giving object. When that propensity intensifies, then it is called passionate love (*ʿishq*).<sup>39</sup> Objects that are compatible with one’s temper are beloved and those that are incompatible with one’s senses are detested. One can also be indifferent to some object. But love cannot be imagined unless it is preceded by a cognition or a form of knowing (*maʿrifa*) and perception (*idrāk*), saying: “... A human being does not love except what one knows.”<sup>40</sup>

In short, the phenomenology of love for Ghazālī is experiential. But that experience is dependent on a phenomenology of knowing and perception. By phenomenal, I mean it is dependent on certain things. In other words, our understanding and experiences are dependent on cognitions, forms of sense perception, styles of thinking or the pursuit

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<sup>36</sup>al-Ghazālī *Kitāb al-Maḥabba*, 4:259.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 4:257.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 4:258.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 4:259.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

of essences. It might not be too far-fetched to say that if Augustine thought of love as a kind of craving, then for Ghazālī love was a form of knowing, cognition, perception and the search for an essence. The structure of this phenomenology of knowing and perception is not detached from the five senses that capture the external stimuli, but the real source of love is internal. That interior sense is called the intellect, light, heart, or insight.

He then elucidates several manifestations of love drawn from human experiences. Ghazālī writes:

It is no secret that a human being loves himself [or herself]. Obviously, too, one may love someone else for one for one's own benefit. But can one conceivably love someone other than oneself for that other person's sake, and not for one's own benefit? For the weak-minded this poses a difficulty, for in their view it is simply unimaginable for one to love anyone other than oneself, and for the others' sake, so long as the lover receives no benefit from this beyond the mere perception itself. But in truth, not only is this conceivable, it does in fact exist.<sup>41</sup>

Ghazālī explains that sometimes one loves another person, for the sake of that person alone, without any vested interest in such a love. "Is it conceivable that a human being loves another for the latter's essence, and not for the sake of his own self?," he asks. He then adds:

... Indeed, the first beloved among all living creatures is one's self and one's essence. And the purpose of this self-love stems from the fact that ingrained in one's character is a propensity to perpetuate one's existence (survival), and an aversion to non-existence and destruction ... Therefore, humans love to perpetuate their survival (*wujūd*) and abhor death and destruction ... One does not love death and extinction, except in proportion to some agony in life ...<sup>42</sup>

Ghazālī articulates, what I would call a discrete phenomenology of love. He describes how we experience love in the world and meditates on its forms and essences drawing on his observations of love among human beings. This same schema also serves as a basis for the human-God relationship of love.

First, Ghazālī explains how human beings love themselves, which I would describe as a phenomenology of existential love. Perpetuating one's existence is based on an almost primal impulse of love that a human being experiences. Some might also view this as egotistical or self-love. Ghazālī explains love as an expression of essences, forms of disclosure, and relations between the subject and self, and between different selves. Thus, one's love for one's body and limbs, offspring, family, and friends are all part of the circle of love since they perpetuate and extend one's existence and perfect it.

A second form of love is when a feeling is nurtured in a subject because he or she is the recipient of a benefaction or beneficence (*ihsān*) from another person. The recipient of benefaction acquires an object of attention namely, the benefactor, to whom one expresses gratitude, which can also turn into an emotive response that we can call love. So, the recipient (lover) and the benefactor (beloved) exchange something valuable. It could almost be like receiving a gift. This could be designated as an instrumental or a utilitarian form of love stemming from benefaction. Humans love whoever cause them

<sup>41</sup>al-Ghazālī and Ormsby *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment* 12–13. I have also used Ormsby's translation with some amendment.

<sup>42</sup>al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb Al-Maḥabba*, 4:260; al-Ghazālī and Ormsby *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*, 13.

benefit, even if such a person be a stranger. Beneficence is an important category since it is the action of one human being performed in relation to another human being. The attention, intention, and action that reaches the recipient makes the benefactor a beloved person or the object of love. This might well be a form of subjectification, the production of the subject.<sup>43</sup>

The third form is to love someone for their own goodness or for their own sake. This form of love is purely devoted to the good itself. It is a love for the intrinsic nature of good. One loves the good qualities and traits in persons, but Ghazālī pays special attention to two qualities that constitute the matrix: knowledge (*ilm*) and power/capacity (*qudra*). We have an attachment and love for the qualities a person inhabits. This is how we relate to leaders and learned people who enjoy our support and admiration, even if we never met them nor were we contemporaries of such persons. Yet we express deep emotions of affection and love toward such persons.

The fourth form of love is when beauty and goodness are loved for their own sake. We witness beauty and goodness, and they then impact our senses externally; internally or affectively, beauty and goodness are experienced in the heart as a form of affective perception. Here goodness and beauty can be visualized as ends in themselves that are synonymous with love. Alternately one can say goodness and beauty are means to love. Aesthetics as the highest expression of love comes to mind. “A visible example of this is love for the prophets and the learned,” writes Ghazālī, “as well as for those with lofty traits and pleasing characters; in fact, this remains conceivable despite any indistinctness in their faces or bodily forms. This is what is meant by the beauty of the inner form.”<sup>44</sup>

The fifth form of love is what Ghazālī calls the “hidden affinity” between the lover and the beloved. Love intensifies between two souls as an expression of spiritual affinity. Here love is present via a transcendent relationship where souls are bound together by the good.

Most widely discussed among the forms of love by Ghazālī is love as an end itself. Ghazālī writes:

It is necessary to love a thing by virtue of its own reality (essence) (*dhātihi*), not on account of some benefit to be attained beyond that reality. Experiencing the reality, in itself, is the advantage. This is the deep and authentic (*ḥaqīqī*) love that grows stronger as it grows. It is like the love for beauty and everything that is exquisite. Everything of beauty is beloved by the one who apprehends beauty for the very fact (identity) of beauty itself. The perception of beauty captures the quintessence of pleasure; and pleasure is loved for its own reality, not for something other than its own reality.<sup>45</sup>

Two important things need to be noted here in the Ghazālīan phenomenology of love. First, the apparatus of love does not create a caesura, an interruption or break, between being and action, ontology, and praxis. The being of God in Muslim theology is not severed between being and action, as happened in Christendom to accommodate the triune notion of God, where God as to his being and substance is one but “as to his

<sup>43</sup>Lingis, *Subjectification*, 11; Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?*

<sup>44</sup>al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-Maḥabba*, 4:265; al-Ghazālī and Ormsby *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*, 30.

<sup>45</sup>al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-Maḥabba*, 4:261; al-Ghazālī and Ormsby *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*, 16.

*oikonomia* – that is to say the way in which he administers his home, his life, and the world he created – he is, rather, triple.”<sup>46</sup>

Second, the remarkable aspects of Ghazālī’s discussion of love is the way he ties love to ethical action and performance. “In summation, all the meritorious acts in the practices of obedience (*maḥāsīn al-dīn*) and noble traits of character (*makārim al-akhlāq*) are the fruits of love (*thamra-t ‘l-ḥubb*),” Ghazālī wrote.<sup>47</sup>

On the face of it this statement could give the impression that Ghazālī is making love the centerpiece and source of worship, and may superficially affirm the claims of the authors of the Common Word statement. However, one can only reach this conclusion if one ignored his commitment to *dīn* as obedience, the significant place of mercy in Ghazālī’s schema and the cultivation of a relationship of obedience which then instills love between God and the obedient creature. Recall that Ghazālī at first puzzlingly asked: how can obedience be a product of love? For he explains how love is cultivated in the body and soul through actions of obedience. In fact, it might be fair to say that love is a synecdoche for obedience.

Ghazālī himself answers this question on the relationship of love and obedience in multiple ways. Some scholars, he argumentatively explained, believed that love was not possible except between identical entities and species. Hence, there could in theory be no love between God and humans because of their absolute difference.<sup>48</sup> Clearly, he was not persuaded by this viewpoint. For there is ample evidence in the tradition inviting and insisting on a relationship of love between God and servant.

His most persuasive answer is to create the epistemic scaffolding for love. Love, he says, cannot be imagined prior to knowing and perception. Love is not automatically installed in a relationship between God and servant. Something prior takes place. Love is preceded by a certain phenomenology of knowing and perception. It is that knowing and perception that imposes obedience at first. Without grasping this phenomenology or apparatus of knowing, love is not decipherable or experienced. Only humans or sentient beings have perception, Ghazālī explains.<sup>49</sup> Love is intimately related to Ghazālī’s phenomenology of knowledge and perception that runs through his work on moral philosophy in his works of legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) as well as in his most elaborate meditations in ethics in his opus.<sup>50</sup> Human beings prefer and like those things that accord with their nature and detest those things that cause them displeasure and pain. “Every perception that contains pleasures and comfort is beloved by the perceiver; that perception involving pain is despised by the perceiver,” Ghazālī wrote.<sup>51</sup> One is indifferent to perceptions that neither cause pleasure nor pain, he explains.

What makes one take knowledge and perception seriously? What precedes the relationship of loving God and loving his prophet? What precedes all this is the ability to hear and to take seriously the call to obedience, the invitation to *dīn*. Love is cultivated within that theological apparatus and matrix.

<sup>46</sup>Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?*, 9–10.

<sup>47</sup>al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-Maḥabba*, 4:295; al-Ghazālī and Ormsby *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*, 130.

<sup>48</sup>al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-Maḥabba*, 4:257; al-Ghazālī and Ormsby *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*, 2.

<sup>49</sup>al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-Maḥabba*, 4:259; al-Ghazālī and Ormsby *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*, 10.

<sup>50</sup>al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustaṣfā min ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl*, 1:167–178.

<sup>51</sup>al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-Maḥabba*, 4:259; al-Ghazālī and Ormsby *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*, 10.

So now it hopefully becomes clearer when I argue that Ghazālī claims that love is the seedbed and substrate of ethical action. The substrate of love is preceded or is layered on top of a phenomenology of knowing, perception, and obedience. Thus, love is a product of a specific form of knowing, perception, and obedience provided by tradition. But obedience and ethical action are not automatically identical to love. If, for instance, you confess love, but your actions of obedience and ethical action are absent, then that confession of love is a false one and a hypocritical claim. It is a requirement that tradition be adhered to in the exercise of obedience. Whatever is not grown in the seedbed of obedience, in Ghazālī's view, is the product of base desire and moral depredation. Love does not become a pretext for the release from restraint but just the opposite. In other words, love ought to instill a restraint or obedience on the moral subject. Obedience to God, called *nomos* in Biblical terms, is an act of love.

The phenomenology of love is Ghazālī's explanation of the relationship between God and humans. Interwoven in this phenomenology is the idea that self-knowledge is tied to the well-known teaching that "the one who knows one's self, also then knows one's Lord."<sup>52</sup> Human beings are dependent on God. Lack of self-knowledge leads to an ignorance of God and the creator of the world. So, not only is self-knowledge vital to grasping love, but knowledge is always tethered to human capacity and power.

Ghazālī states clearly: "Love is the fruit of knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*), love dissipates when knowledge of God becomes non-existent; love weakens with the weakening of the knowledge of God and love is bolstered with the strengthening of the knowledge of God."<sup>53</sup> If anything this shows how dependent love is on forms of knowing and perception. It proves the nullity of the superficial claim of love being common to Islam and Christianity, when in fact it is reductive of both traditions. The location of love in the theological apparatus and practice of Islam is very different to its location in the apparatus of multiple Christian theologies.

Ghazālī draws an intimate relationship between love and beauty, as well as desire and aesthetics. Love of beauty is exclusive in and of itself, to the point that he insists that this love is "ingrained in nature."<sup>54</sup> Beauty beheld by the physical eye is its outer form while the countenance of the "eye of the heart" is its inner form. The latter is superior and highly valued.

In experiential terms the beauty beheld by the heart is embodied in our love for prophets, the learned, persons with noble character traits, and persons with pleasing dispositions. Our ability to appreciate a work of prose, a poem, a painting, or an architectural feat, explains Ghazālī, stems from the fact that these artistic works disclose to us their "beautiful inner qualities." The beautiful attributes of these artistic objects become manifest to an observer because these works are intimately tied to "a quest for knowledge and capability" which their authors and producers attained from the wellsprings of knowledge and power.

Thus, whenever the known (object of knowledge) was more elevated and perfected in beauty and magnificence, so was the knowledge nobler and more beautiful. The same is true for the

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<sup>52</sup>al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-Maḥabba*, 4:263.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 4:265.

object of power. Whenever power was magnificent in status and grander in rank, so too was the power on display to accomplish it greater in dignity and nobler in appraisal.<sup>55</sup>

When people love and admire with all their hearts, what they do admire are the attributes they find in truthful people. Ghazālī sees knowledge and power to identify beauty and love on the one hand, and abstinence from vicious and impure habits, on the other hand, all to be interweaved dimensions. One source of inspiration is knowledge of God, his Prophets, books of revelation, divine laws, and angels. The second source is the capacity of people to rehabilitate themselves and others by way of guidance. The power to govern and regulate (*al-siyāsa*) one's own soul and the souls of others is the ability to avert bad conduct by way of a display of discipline and control.<sup>56</sup> Persons who acquired such virtues do love the prophets, adore the learned ones, adulate the "folk of justice and generosity," namely those political leaders and monarchs, who meet those standards. However, knowledge, power, and the ability to transcend human limitations are in humans far beyond comparison when relating these qualities to God whose perfection in each is immaculate, unmatched, and unfathomable.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

The prevalent concepts of love are merely one iteration of a very complex experience in human history. Even secularized versions of love perpetuate a certain amount of sedimented ontotheology of love.<sup>58</sup> Yet in other traditions the story of love is very different, as is in the case of Islam, which I demonstrated with the help of the prominent thinker Ghazālī. If Muslim conceptions of love are presented in terms of the historical genealogy of the tradition, they could contribute to the diversity of the concept and decenter hegemonic understandings of love.

The absence of Muslim theological concepts and its concepts of mercy and love in debates in political theology and politics generally have impeded dialogue and mutual understanding. Translation without an awareness of the phenomenology and genealogy of a concept such as love in Islam can only result in mistranslation and confusion.

The ethical-theology of Islam is premised on a phenomenology of perception, knowing and obedience. The commandment "Love thy neighbor!" is a centerpiece of Christian theology and stands at the heart of its redemptive story. Love, as in "love thy neighbor," is a redemptive act and is integral to Christian ontotheology. In Islamic teachings there is no commandment to love your neighbor. Yes, you are required to be just and fair in dealing with your neighbor and to honor and show kindness.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 4:266.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 4:265.

<sup>58</sup>Eagleton, *The Event of Literature*. Eagleton wrestles with essentialism, a concept that philosophers treat in ontological terms, "as a question about the nature of a thing's being." Love is what comes to his mind as an ontological category, but then proposes to approach an essence like say love ethically. "What is the "essence" of a human being were whatever it is one loves about them?" (17–18) "To love others is not in the first place to feel a certain way about them, but to behave in a certain way towards them." (61) Here Eagleton is pushing love from an ontology of being to an ethics of conduct. But the next line slips into a different ontological mode. "This is why the paradigm of charity is the love of strangers, not of friends. In trying to love strangers, we are less likely to confuse love with a warm glow in the pit of one's stomach." (61–62) Ghazālī would think that a warm glow in the pit of one's stomach is indeed love, a love that can include both friends and strangers. What causes pleasure is loved. To love someone can be both, to feel a certain way about them as well as to behave in a certain way towards them, Ghazālī would argue. Eagleton is clearly grappling with love as an ontology, not a phenomenology, hence the separation between feeling and behaving.

Mistreating neighbors elicit God's displeasure. To sleep with a full belly while one's neighbor is unfed or in poverty is intolerable in Islam.

In Islamic theology, the focus is on "adoring God" or "serving God." Serving God means to serve God's creation. There are teachings that proclaim that God addresses the human being, and in one account the addressee is the Prophet Moses, to whom God says: "I was sick, and you did not visit me.' Moses replied, 'O Lord, how can this be?' God answered: 'My servant so-and-so was sick, and you did not visit him. Had you visited him you would have found me with him.'"<sup>59</sup> Earlier the Bible too, in Matthew 25:31–46 narrated a similar account that Muslims later preserved in the ḥadīth traditions attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad. Other Muslim versions of this tradition included those who were hungry and in pain whom their fellow humans did not feed or comfort. When the servant is aghast at how he could visit, feed and comfort God, he is told that serving the sick, needy, and hungry is like feeding God. The simile involved is that those acts of kindness is *like* feeding God, but never ontologically the equivalent of feeding God. Recall that from the very beginning Muslim theology tries to keep a clear distinction between Creator and created.

Resemblances in identical narratives and traditions might superficially give the impression that Muslim and Christian traditions have parallel theologies when they are indeed different. Each has a complex theological apparatus and the place of love in that theological matrix is different with serious and consequential outcomes. As I have pointed out earlier, the authors of the Common Word overlook significant differences in theory and outcome in the interests of an unproductive and faux theological reconciliation between Islam and Christianity.

What one can conclude from Ghazālī's teachings is that an affirmation of the unknowability of God is, in other words, a negation of the absolute and totalizing epistemological claims of the human subject. This is the absolute that some are so enthusiastic to frame God as pure immanence or absolute transcendence. Is it not possible that the desire to know a lovable God and to love a knowable God is a search for something else? Might it not be a sheer exercise of will that tries to ensure that our enframing of the divine does not escape our discursive horizon? Might this desire to know God not in itself be a desire for power? The Islamic tradition and Islamic theology, tries to retain the idea of the mystery of the divine being beyond the full grasp of humans.

However, when one reads, "A Common Word Between Us and You," in the open letter to the leaders of the Christian world, one does not get a sense of its Islamic particularity.<sup>60</sup> The signatories of this statement, many of whom are Muslim intellectuals situated in Europe and North America, remind the Pope that the God of the Qur'ān had prescribed for Himself mercy (Q 6:12; see also 6:54). They also remind him of another Qur'ānic verse: "My Mercy encompasses everything" (al-A'raf 7:156).

However, in their exegesis of this passage, they claim that the word for "mercy, *rahmah*, can also be translated as love, kindness, and compassion". From this word *rahmah* comes the sacred formula Muslims use daily, "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate." Where I depart from the authors of the Common Word is to show that divine mercy in Muslim theology is a sovereign act of the divine. Love, on the other

<sup>59</sup>al-Ghazālī, Kitāb al-Maḥabba, 4:268; al-Ghazālī and Ormsby *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*, 39.

<sup>60</sup><http://www.acommonword.com/>

hand, mutually binds Creator and creature in a relationship of dependency and of friendship, as explained by Ghazālī.<sup>61</sup>

If the Muslim categories of love were retained as per traditional formulations, then a whole variety of impulses can count as love. Unconditional love is not always attainable. But ordinary forms of love, everyday forms of love ranging from egotistical love, love through benefaction, selfless love, and love for the good then are all the varieties of our experiences of love in a single day. Ghazālī's articulation of love might allow us to live out love in the ways we experience it.

In Islam, the locus of love is in a range of practices that do not separate being and action, ontology, and practice. In contemplative activity, devotions, and social and ethical transactions, love is embedded. In other words, exploring Islamic resources in a bid to refine a politics of love means focusing on the micro units that constitute collective life: the individual, the family, and the community. This returning is not without risk, for there are tensions between the kinds of authority that the idea of a family constructs, at least in the inherited notions of family. Society is the aggregation of individuals who have been gathered based on shared interests. Community, in turn, is based on a feeling of belonging. What a politics of love brings back into the center of social life is the requirement to ponder issues of normativity. In other words, embracing obligations and duties that are often antithetical to rights cultures, that valorize liberty over all other values. A politics of love also forces us to re-think the categories by which we imagine our collectivity as a human society, but with an emphasis on diversity and pluriversality.

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<sup>61</sup>Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, (London:Verso, 1992), 190. As Ahmad put it: "What has been at issue in orthodox Islam is not the status of Jesus but that of Christianity, and of the way Jesus surfaces in Christian belief. For if orthodox Christianity regards Islam as a heresy, orthodox Islam has historically regarded some of the main tenets of Christianity as altogether blasphemous: the idea of the Trinity, the idea of Jesus as a *Son of God*".

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