

The Traces of Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Thought in the Fiqh Framework of Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani's *Kasifatussaja* in the 19th Century

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Abstract

Previous studies on Al-Ghazali have predominantly focused on his philosophical and theological thought within the context of classical Islam, without specifically examining how these ideas were received and applied by scholars in the Malay-Indonesian world. This study addresses that gap by exploring the creative reception of Al-Ghazali's thought in the 19th-century *Kāsifatussajā*, a fiqh work by Syeikh Nawawi al-Bantani. The aim is to identify and analyze the manifestation of Al-Ghazali's philosophical-theological ideas within Nawawi's fiqh-ethical-transformative approach. Employing a qualitative descriptive method through library research and framed within Jaussian reception theory, this study finds that Nawawi integrated reason and revelation, emphasized the spiritual dimension of Islamic law, and adopted a moderate approach in issuing legal opinions. The findings reveal that Nawawi did not merely reproduce Al-Ghazali's ideas but reconstructed them to address the challenges of colonialism, identity crisis, and the need for a spiritually grounded legal ethics in the Nusantara. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamic transmission of classical Islamic intellectual heritage and its relevance in local socio-cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Al-Ghazali, Nawawi al-Bantani, Islamic Philosophy, Reception Theory, Fiqh, Nusantara Ulama.*

Abstrak

Kajian mengenai Al-Ghazali selama ini umumnya berfokus pada pemikiran falsafi dan teologisnya dalam konteks Islam klasik, tanpa mengkaji secara khusus bagaimana gagasan tersebut diresepsi dan diaplikasikan oleh ulama Nusantara. Studi ini mengisi celah tersebut dengan menelusuri bentuk resepsi kreatif pemikiran Al-Ghazali dalam karya fikih *Kāsifatussajā* karya Syeikh Nawawi al-Bantani abad ke-19. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis manifestasi pemikiran falsafi-teologis Al-Ghazali dalam pendekatan fikih-etis-transformatif Nawawi. penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif berbasis studi literatur dan kerangka resepsi Jaussian, penelitian menemukan bahwa Nawawi mengintegrasikan akal dan wahyu, menguatkan dimensi spiritual dalam hukum Islam, serta menerapkan pendekatan moderat dalam fatwa. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa Nawawi tidak sekadar mengulang gagasan Al-Ghazali, tetapi merekonstruksinya untuk merespons tantangan kolonialisme, krisis identitas, dan kebutuhan etika hukum berbasis spiritualitas di Nusantara. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman tentang transmisi dinamis warisan intelektual Islam klasik dan relevansinya dalam konteks sosial-budaya lokal.

Kata Kunci: *Al-Ghazali, Nawawi al-Bantani, Filsafat Islam, Teori Resepsi, Fikih, Ulama Nusantara.*

INTRODUCTION

Al-Ghazali, a towering figure in 11th-century Islamic thought, was born with the full name Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali in 450 H/1058 CE in the city of Thus, Persia (now Iran). He was known as an encyclopedic scholar who mastered *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), philosophy, *kalam* (theology), *tasawwuf* (Sufism), and logic, and once held the prestigious position of professor at the Nizamiyah Madrasah in Baghdad.¹ After experiencing a deep spiritual crisis, Al-Ghazali devoted himself largely to the Sufi life and produced monumental works. One of his famous quotes highlights the importance of character (*akhlak*) as the core of Sufism: “Tasawwuf is about character; whoever teaches you about character, has essentially taught you tasawwuf.”² His ideas, especially in *Ihya' 'Ulumuddin* and *al-Mustasfā*, were not only influential in his time but have continued to live on and be accepted by subsequent generations of scholars across different social, cultural, and intellectual contexts. One form of creative reception of Al-Ghazali's thought can be traced through the works of Nusantara (Southeast Asian) scholars, particularly Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani, a prominent 19th-century scholar widely known in the Islamic world for his contributions to *fiqh*, *tafsir* (exegesis), and *tasawwuf*. One of his notable works is *Kāsifatussajā*, a *fiqh* book dense with ethical substance and the inner dimension of Islamic law, which also contains philosophical thoughts aligned with Al-Ghazali.³

However, it is important to note that the reception of a classical figure's thought, such as Al-Ghazali's, does not proceed linearly and completely. This is where Hans Robert Jauss's Reception Theory becomes significant. Jauss views the reader as an active subject who interprets and revitalizes the meaning of a text based on the horizon of expectation of their lived social, cultural, and intellectual context. In this regard, Syekh Nawawi can be understood as an active reader of Al-Ghazali's thought who sought to adjust, reinterpret, and adapt those ideas to the reality of 19th-century Muslims, marked by colonialism, a crisis of scholarly identity, and social transformation.⁴

The book *Kāsifatussajā* does not merely contain normative *fiqh* rules but also implies an epistemological framework that champions the integration of reason and revelation, the inner and outer dimensions, and a moderate approach to issuing *fatwas* (legal rulings)—all of which are strong characteristics of Al-Ghazali's thought.⁵

¹ Sufyan Mubarak, “Riwayat Hidup Dan Pemikiran Al-Ghazali Dan Ibnu Maskawaih: Life History and Thoughts of al-Ghazali and Ibnu Maskawaih,” *Jurnal Qisthosia: Jurnal Syariah Dan Hukum* 1, no. 1 (2020): 50–74.

² Muhammad Rijal Fadli, “Hubungan Filsafat Dengan Ilmu Pengetahuan Dan Relevansinya Di Era Revolusi Industri 4.0 (Society 5.0),” *Jurnal Filsafat* 31, no. 1 (2021): 130, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.42521>.

³ Aris Priyanto, “Konsep Maqamat Menurut Syekh Nawawi Al-Bantani Dalam Kitab Salalim Al-Fudala,” *JOUSIP: Journal of Sufism and Psychotherapy* 1, no. 1 (2021): 32–50, <https://doi.org/10.28918/jousip.v1i1.3879>.

⁴ Nur Hadi Ihsan et al., “Syekh Nawawi Al-Bantani on Zuhd: A Spiritual Remedy for Compulsive Consumerism,” *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 19, no. 2 (2025): 234–59, <https://doi.org/10.15642/islamica.2025.19.2.234-259>.

⁵ Ali Muqoddas, “Syekh Nawawi Al-Bantani Al-Jawi Ilmuan Spesialis Ahli Syarah Kitab Kuning,” *Jurnal Tarbawi* 2, no. 1 (2014): 1–19.

Tabik's research⁶ found that Al-Ghazali was not anti-philosophy as a whole, but rather a reformer who used philosophy to strengthen Islamic creed (*aqidah*). He distinguished between neutral rational philosophy and metaphysical philosophy that deviated from *sharia*.

Furthermore, the research by Fadlullah and Hidayah⁷ states that Al-Ghazali underwent an evolution of thought from a philosophical approach to an integrative Sufism. This transformation shaped the ethical-spiritual framework that became the hallmark of his post-crisis works, especially *Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*. And the research by Martin and Hambali⁸ asserts that Al-Ghazali viewed happiness as something that cannot be achieved solely through intellect or outward worship, but must be attained through purification of the heart, knowledge, and sincere deeds. This work reinforces the position of Sufism as the core of religious life. Previous studies show depth regarding Al-Ghazali's philosophical and theological thought, but how that thought was received, reconstructed, and applied by Nusantara scholars like Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani, especially in a *fiqh* book like *Kāsifatussajā*, has not been deeply touched upon or discussed.

They focused more on Al-Ghazali as a subject in the context of classical Islamic history, rather than on the transformation of Al-Ghazali's thought in the intellectual space of Southeast Asian Islam. Therefore, this research is important as an effort to fill that gap, namely by exploring the form of creative reception of Al-Ghazali's thought manifested in Nawawi al-Bantani's *fiqh*-ethical-transformative approach in the 19th century.

This research aims to deeply trace the form and content of Al-Ghazali's philosophical thought as it is manifested in Nawawi's work. Utilizing the Jaussian approach, this paper also intends to show how the reception process does not just revitalize a classical idea, but also gives birth to a new reading that is contextual and relevant to the needs of the Muslim community in the Nusantara region at that time.⁹

This study is important for enriching our understanding of how the legacy of classical Islamic thought is not merely preserved textually, but is also intellectually reprocessed.¹⁰ Through the thought of Syekh Nawawi in *Kāsifatussajā*, we can see how the spirit of Al-Ghazali's scholarship was not only inherited but also "renewed" within the local context of the Nusantara. This opens up a new space for reading the relationship between classical texts and their readers across the long and dynamic trajectory of Islamic history.

RESEARCH METHOD

⁶ Ahmad Atabik, "Telaah Pemikiran Al-Ghazali Tentang Filsafat," *Fikrah* 2, no. 1 (2014): 19–40.

⁷ Muhammad Endy Fadlullah and Fathi Hidayah, "Transformasi Pemikiran Al-Ghazali Dari Kecenderungan Rasional Ke Sufistik (Telaah Kritis Epistemologi Sejarah Pemikiran)," *Ar-Risalah Media Keislaman Pendidikan Dan Hukum Islam* 18, no. 2 (2020): 379–97, <https://doi.org/10.29062/ar-ri-salah.v18i2.974>.

⁸ Erik Martin and Radea Yuli Ahmad Hambali, "Teologi Kebahagiaan Menurut Al-Ghazali (Kajian Terhadap Kitab Kimiyatus Sa'adah)," *Jurnal Riset Agama* 3, no. 1 (2023): 17–32, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jra.v3i1.19318>.

⁹ Irma Yuliyana et al., "Aksiologi Pemikiran Pendidikan Islam Syekh Nawawi Al-Bantani Di Era Globalisasi," *HEMAT: Journal of Humanities Education Management Accounting and Transportation* 1, no. 2 (2024): 893–900, <https://doi.org/10.57235/hemat.v1i2.2882>.

¹⁰ Amalul Aripin et al., "Medan Makna Dan Komponen Makna Al-Thaharah Dalam Kitab Kasyifat Saja," *Kode: Jurnal Bahasa* 13 (2024): 2024.

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature study (library research) method. The purpose of this approach is to study, understand, and describe how Al-Ghazali's philosophical thought was received and reinterpreted by Syeikh Nawawi al-Bantani in his *fiqh* work, specifically the book *Kāsifatussajā*, while considering the intellectual and social context of the 19th century in the Nusantara (Southeast Asia). This research also aims to identify the forms of integration between Al-Ghazali's thought and the construction of Islamic law offered by Syeikh Nawawi, and to examine the extent to which Al-Ghazali's philosophical and ethical approach influenced the epistemology of *fiqh* in that work.

The data sources in this research consist of two types: primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources include Al-Ghazali's original works, especially *Iḥyā' 'Ulūmiddīn* and *al-Mustaṣfā*, as well as the works of Syeikh Nawawi al-Bantani, with a main focus on *Kāsifatussajā*. Secondary sources encompass academic books, scholarly journals, dissertations, and articles that examine the thought of Al-Ghazali, Syeikh Nawawi al-Bantani, and the reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss. The literature used is selected critically and selectively based on thematic relevance and academic validity.

The data collection technique is carried out through the following steps: first, inventory and selection of literature relevant to the research focus. Second, in-depth reading of the main texts to explore the philosophical, ethical, and epistemological themes contained in the works of Al-Ghazali and Nawawi. Third, content analysis of the book *Kāsifatussajā* by tracing sections that demonstrate the influence of Al-Ghazali's thought, both directly (quotes, explicit references) and indirectly (argumentative style, ethical orientation, moderate approach, etc.). Fourth, the use of Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory approach as a conceptual framework to understand how Al-Ghazali's thought was reinterpreted by Syeikh Nawawi in accordance with the 19th-century horizon of expectation.

In the analysis process, the author uses a hermeneutic-contextual approach to understand the dynamics of thought occurring in a transhistorical context, namely between the 11th century (Al-Ghazali's era) and the 19th century (Nawawi al-Bantani's era). This research also considers socio-political factors such as colonialism, the crisis of scholarly identity, and the need of the Nusantara Muslim community for a model of *fiqh* that is not only normative but also transformative and spiritual.

Through this method, the research is expected to be able to show that *Kāsifatussajā* is not merely a technical *fiqh* book, but also a representation of the creative reception process of classical intellectual heritage, which was recontextualized by a Nusantara scholar.¹¹ This approach allows for a more holistic reading of the intellectual relationship between Al-Ghazali and Syeikh Nawawi al-Bantani, and the relevance of their thought in the context of Islamic education and civilization in the Nusantara.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biography of Imam Al-Ghazali

¹¹ Fadli, "Hubungan Filsafat Dengan Ilmu Pengetahuan Dan Relevansinya Di Era Revolusi Industri 4.0 (Society 5.0)."

Imam Al-Ghazali, whose full name is Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, was born in 450 H / 1058 CE in the city of Tūs, Persia (now Iran).¹² He is recognized as one of the greatest scholars in Islamic history, mastering various fields of knowledge such as *fiqh* (jurisprudence), philosophy, *kalam* (theology), and *tasawwuf* (Sufism).

His famous title is Hujjatul Islam (The Proof of Islam) due to his extraordinary ability to defend Islamic teachings through knowledge and *hujjah* (argumentation). He studied under many great scholars, including Imam Al-Haramain Al-Juwaini in Nishapur. Because of his brilliance, he was appointed as a professor at the Nizhamiyah Madrasah in Baghdad at a young age. However, at the peak of his career, he underwent a spiritual crisis, abandoning his position and worldly pursuits to seek inner peace through the path of Tasawwuf.¹³

This spiritual journey led him to write monumental works, one of which is *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), a highly influential book that combines *sharia*, philosophy, and *tasawwuf*.¹⁴ Imam Al-Ghazali also wrote important books criticizing the philosophers, such as *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), in which he refuted Greek philosophical views that contradicted Islamic teachings.¹⁵

Imam Al-Ghazali passed away in 505 H / 1111 CE in his birthplace, Tūs. His thought has had a massive influence on the Islamic world, and even in the West, and continues to be studied by scholars and academics globally.¹⁶

Imam Al-Ghazali played a crucial role in the history of Islamic philosophy. He lived during a time when Greek philosophy heavily influenced the thought of Muslim philosophers like Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and the Ikhwan al-Safa.¹⁷ Initially, Al-Ghazali studied philosophy in depth. He read the works of Muslim and Greek philosophers, especially in the fields of logic, metaphysics, and natural science.¹⁸ However, after a long phase of intellectual search, he identified aspects of philosophy that he deemed contradictory to Islamic teachings, particularly concerning metaphysics and the nature of God. The culmination of his philosophical engagement is evident in his famous work, *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers). In this book,

¹² Viva Fadma Onilivia et al., "Imam Al-Ghazali's Educational Thought and Its Relevance to Contemporary Islamic Education Literature Review on Scopus Indexed Article," *Tawazun: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 18, no. 1 (2025): 207–20, <https://doi.org/10.32832/tawazun.v18i1>.

¹³ Ahmad Muzakki, "Pemikiran Fiqh Dan Tasawwuf Syekh Muhammad Nawawi Banten Dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Moderasi Beragama Dan Perdamaian," *LISAN AL-HAL: Jurnal Pengembangan Pemikiran Dan Kebudayaan* 14, no. 2 (2020): 381–98, <https://doi.org/10.35316/lisanalhal.v14i2.770>.

¹⁴ Eva Dewi, *Islamic Education Thinking Perspective of Imam Al-Ghazali in the Book Iḥyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*, 2025.

¹⁵ Khairina Siregar, "Concept of Islamic Education Psychology in Iḥyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn by Al-Ghazali," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 2 (2020): 663–82.

¹⁶ Eko Setiawan, "Konsep Pendidikan Akhlak Anak Perspektif Imam Al Ghazali," *Jurnal Kependidikan* 5, no. 1 (2017): 55–70, <https://doi.org/10.24090/jk.v5i1.1252>.

¹⁷ Iin Sugiarti and Shofiyullah Muzammil, "Journal of Humanities Issues," *Humanities Issues* 1, no. 2 (2023): 138–49.

¹⁸ Mohammad Syukur and Mohammad Rezapour, *Analysis and Evaluation of Ghazali 'S Critiques in Tahafut Al-Falasifah To Ibn Sina in the Context Of*, 25, no. 2 (2023): 199–212.

Al-Ghazali criticized Muslim philosophers, especially Ibn Sina and Al-Farabi, on 20 critical issues. This was one of his most significant contributions to philosophy.¹⁹

1. Imam Al-Ghazali's Contribution to Philosophical Scholarship

Imam Al-Ghazali's role in the history of Islamic philosophy is profoundly important. He lived at a time when Greek philosophy greatly influenced Muslim philosophers such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and Ikhwan al-Safa. Initially, Al-Ghazali thoroughly studied philosophy. He read the works of both Muslim and Greek philosophers, focusing on logic, metaphysics, and natural science. However, following an extensive intellectual search, he observed aspects of philosophy that he believed contradicted Islamic teachings, especially in the areas of metaphysics and divinity.²⁰

The peak of his philosophical engagement is embodied in his famous work, *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers). In this book, Al-Ghazali criticized Muslim philosophers, particularly Ibn Sina and Al-Farabi, regarding 20 significant issues. He accused these philosophers of falling into error, and even disbelief (*kufur*), on three core issues:

- a. The Eternity of the World (*Qidam al-'Alam*): The philosophers argued that the world is co-eternal with God. Al-Ghazali strongly rejected this view, as it contradicts the concept of creation *ex nihilo* (creation from nothing).
- b. God's Lack of Knowledge of Particulars in Detail: The philosophers maintained that God's knowledge is universal, not encompassing particular events. Al-Ghazali considered this an affront to the perfection of God's knowledge.
- c. No Bodily Resurrection (Only Spiritual) in the Hereafter: Some philosophers denied the bodily resurrection on the Day of Judgment. Al-Ghazali viewed this as contrary to the explicit texts (*nash*) of the Qur'an.

Despite being known for his sharp critique, Al-Ghazali was not absolutely anti-philosophy. In his book *Maqasid al-Falasifah* (The Aims of the Philosophers), he systematically explained philosophy, particularly logic, physics, and natural science.²¹ This book was widely used as a reference by the educated, even by his opponents later on. This signifies that Al-Ghazali differentiated between philosophy as a useful method (logic/reason) and philosophy containing metaphysical doctrines that he deemed heretical. His contribution to philosophy is immense because he established a tradition of philosophical critique within Islam, paving the way for deep discussions between reason and revelation. He encouraged the legitimate use of logic (*mantiq*) as a tool for scientific thinking in religious sciences. He also inspired subsequent figures, including Ibn Rushd (Averroes), who wrote *Tahafut al-Tahafut* as a rebuttal to Al-Ghazali's critique. Al-Ghazali's thought also had a major influence

¹⁹ Juwaini Juwaini et al., "Al-Ghazali's Refutations of Philosophers: Examining Tahafut al-Falasifah on Eternity, Divine Knowledge, and Resurrection," *SINTHOP: Media Kajian Pendidikan, Agama, Sosial Dan Budaya* 3, no. 2 (2024): 87–97, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sinthop.v3i2.6470>.

²⁰ Fadlullah and Hidayah, "Transformasi Pemikiran Al-Ghazali Dari Kecenderungan Rasional Ke Sufistik (Telaah Kritis Epistemologi Sejarah Pemikiran)."

²¹ Abdul Wahab Junaedi and Ela Sartika, "Historical and Theological Study: The Concept of the Seven Heavens and Their Awaited Prophet in the Perspective of the Qur'an and Hadith," *Afkaruna: International Journal of Islamic Studies (AIJIS)* 2, no. 2 (2025): 236–50, <https://doi.org/10.38073/aijis.v2i2.2568>.

on Latin Western philosophy. His works were translated into Latin, notably by Gerardus Cremonensis and Dominicus Gundissalinus, and became part of the scholastic discourse in Europe.

Thus, Imam Al-Ghazali's contribution to philosophy served as a crucial bridge between rationality and spirituality, establishing a balance between the sciences of reason and the sciences of revelation, earning him the title of Hujjatul Islam.

Biography of Syeikh Nawawi al-Bantani

Syeikh Nawawi al-Bantani is a great scholar from Indonesia who is highly renowned throughout the Islamic world. He was born in Banten in 1813 CE (1220 H) and passed away in Mecca in 1897 CE (1314 H). His full name is Muhammad Nawawi bin Umar al-Jawi al-Bantani. The terms "al-Jawi" and "al-Bantani" indicate that he originated from Java, specifically the Banten region.²²

From an early age, Syeikh Nawawi showed remarkable intelligence and an extraordinary passion for religious learning. He studied fundamental Islamic sciences in his hometown before traveling to Mecca to pursue deeper knowledge.²³ In Mecca, he studied under many great scholars and eventually became a regular teacher at the Grand Mosque (*Masjidil Haram*). Syeikh Nawawi was immensely prolific in writing. He authored over 100 books in various fields, such as *tafsir* (exegesis), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *tasawwuf* (Sufism), and *aqidah* (creed). Some of his famous works include: (a) *Tafsir Marah Labid* (Qur'anic exegesis), (b) *Nihayatuz Zain* (*fiqh*), (c) *Syarah Safinatun Najah*, and (d) *Tanqihul Qaul*.

His books are still widely taught in *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools) in Indonesia today. Syeikh Nawawi was known as a scholar who was very humble, diligent, and deeply devoted to knowledge. Due to his immense scholarship, he was nicknamed the "Imam of the Scholars of the Hijaz" and became a reference point for scholars from various parts of the world.

1. Syeikh Nawawi al-Bantani's Contribution to Philosophical Scholarship

Syeikh Nawawi al-Bantani is widely known as a major Nusantara scholar mastering *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *tasawwuf*, and *aqidah*. Although he did not explicitly write philosophical works, many of his writings demonstrate a philosophical approach, particularly in the fields of rational theology and Sufism. In books like *Nashaih al-'Ibad* and *Tijan al-Durar*, Syeikh Nawawi employed logical arguments to strengthen *aqidah*, while also emphasizing the importance of purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*), which is part of practical Islamic philosophy. He also followed the path of Imam al-Ghazali in harmoniously integrating *sharia* and *tasawwuf*, which serves as a contextual and grounded application of Islamic philosophy. He criticized excessive philosophical speculation but still valued reason (*aql*) as a tool for understanding religion.²⁴

²² Harry Wiyanto, "Pendidikan Islam Prespektif Syeikh Nawawi Al-Bantani Dan Relevansinya Di Era Modern," *Revorma: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran* 4, no. 1 (2024): 13–22, <https://doi.org/10.62825/revorma.v4i1.105>.

²³ J Beno et al., "Jurnal Edukasi Nonformal," *Braz Dent J.* 33, no. 1 (2022): 1–12.

²⁴ Juwaini et al., "Al-Ghazali's Refutations of Philosophers: Examining Tahafut al-Falasifah on Eternity, Divine Knowledge, and Resurrection."

Examination of Imam Al-Ghazali's Theological Framework in Syekh Nawawi's Thought

Imam Al-Ghazali, as one of the great Islamic scholars of the 11th century, possessed a deeply influential framework of theological thought (*kalam*) in Islamic intellectual history.²⁵ Al-Ghazali's theological framework is characterized by three main principles: the integration of reason and revelation, the emphasis on the inner (esoteric) dimension of religion, and a moderate stance (*tawassuth*) in religious practice.²⁶ Through his works like *Ihyā' 'Ulūmiddīn* and *al-Mustasfā*, Al-Ghazali successfully merged rational-philosophical knowledge with Sufi spirituality, making religion not merely an external ritual but also a means for the development of the soul and human character (*akhlak*).²⁷

Al-Ghazali's theological concepts did not cease with his era. His thought continued to be transmitted and creatively adopted by subsequent generations of scholars, including Nusantara scholars like Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani.²⁸ Nawawi, a prominent 19th-century scholar born in Tanara, Banten, is widely known as a multifaceted scholar in the fields of *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *kalam*, and *tasawwuf*.²⁹ One of his works, *Kāṣifatussajā*, serves as a tangible example of how Nawawi reflected upon and reconstructed Al-Ghazali's theological framework within the context of Islamic law (*fiqh*) in the Nusantara.³⁰

An examination of *Kāṣifatussajā* reveals traces of Al-Ghazali's theological thought in several key aspects.³¹ Firstly, Nawawi appears to adopt the framework of integrating reason and revelation that is characteristic of Al-Ghazali.³² In explaining *fiqh* issues, Nawawi does not rely solely on literal texts, but also considers wisdom (*hikmah*), the objectives of *Sharia* (*maqāṣid syarī'ah*), and the social context of the community.³³ This kind of approach is highly identical to Al-Ghazali's method, which constantly balances scriptural evidence (*dalil naqli*) with rational consideration for the sake of the community's benefit (*maslahah*).³⁴

Secondly, Nawawi al-Bantani also vitalizes the inner (esoteric) dimension of religious teachings, which forms the foundation of Al-Ghazali's theology. In

²⁵ Erik Martin and Radea Yuli Ahmad Hambali, "Teologi Kebahagiaan Menurut Al-Ghazali (Kajian Terhadap Kitab Kimiyatus Sa'adah)," *Jurnal Riset Agama* 3, no. 1 (2023): 17–32, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jra.v3i1.19318>.

²⁶ Whan Nurdiana, "Metodologi Pemikiran Dalam Perspektif Teori Imam Al-Ghazali," *AL-Ikhtiar: Jurnal Studi Islam* 2, no. 3 (2025): 254–63.

²⁷ Juwaini et al., "Al-Ghazali's Refutations of Philosophers: Examining Tahafut al-Falasifah on Eternity, Divine Knowledge, and Resurrection."

²⁸ Muhammad Sulthon et al., "Decentering Islamic Authority in The Digital Sphere: Gus Baha's Al-Hikam and The Reconfiguration of Vernacular Sufism in Indonesia," *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 36, no. 2 (2025): 401–30, <https://doi.org/10.33367/sbrzww51>.

²⁹ Moh Abid Mabrur, "Pengaruh Karya Syekh Nawawi Al-Bantani Dalam Tradisi Kajian Kitab Kuning (Kitab Klasik) Di Pesantren Buntet," *Tamaddun* 4, no. 2 (2016): 69–92.

³⁰ Atabik, "Telaah Pemikiran Al-Ghazali Tentang Filsafat."

³¹ Martin and Hambali, "Teologi Kebahagiaan Menurut Al-Ghazali (Kajian Terhadap Kitab Kimiyatus Sa'adah)."

³² Rofik Maftuh, "Konsep Ahl Al-Fatrḥ Ash'ariyah Dan Salafi," *Jurnal Ilmiah Spritualis* 8, no. 1 (2022): 28.

³³ Imawan et al., "Shaykh Nawawi Al-Bantani's Contribution to Grounding Shafi'i Islamic Law in the Indonesian Archipelago during the 19th Century," *Al'Adalah* 27, no. 2 (2024): 187–200, <https://doi.org/10.35719/aladalah.v27i2.540>.

³⁴ Aan Parhani, "Metode Penafsiran Syekh Nawawi Al-Bantani Dalam Tafsir Marah Labid," *Tsaqofah Dan Tarikh* 1 (2013): 15.

Kāsifatussajā, Nawawi frequently stresses the importance of intention (*niyyah*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), and purity of heart in performing worship. He repeatedly reminds readers that *fiqh* rulings are not just external but possess a spiritual dimension that must be maintained. For example, when discussing *salat* (prayer), Nawawi not only explains the physical procedures but also emphasizes the importance of reverence (*khushu'*) and awareness of the heart.³⁵ This style of discussion reflects Al-Ghazali's pattern of thought, which consistently places character (*akhlak*) and spirituality (*ruhaniyah*) at the core of worship.

Thirdly, in terms of moderation (*tawassuth*), Nawawi displays an attitude that is very close to Al-Ghazali's. He consistently seeks to take a middle position between extreme views.³⁶ In certain *fiqh* issues, Nawawi often opts for the lighter opinion (*rukhsah*) if it serves a public benefit.³⁷ This is evident, for instance, in his discussions on the rulings of impurities (*najis*), transactions (*muamalah*), or specific ritual practices.³⁸ This stance mirrors Al-Ghazali's theological approach, which strives to uphold religion without overburdening the community, consistent with the *sharia* principle of ease and avoiding difficulty (*yusr wa raf'ul haraj*).³⁹

A review of the literature shows that Nawawi al-Bantani's thought in *Kāsifatussajā* is not merely a textual preservation of Al-Ghazali's teachings. Nawawi performed a process of creative reception: he read, understood, and then adapted Al-Ghazali's ideas to the social and cultural conditions of the 19th-century Nusantara community. This process aligns with Hans Robert Jauss's Reception Theory, which views the reader not as a passive imitator but as an active agent who transforms the meaning of the classical text according to their social and cultural horizon of expectation. Nawawi faced the reality of Nusantara Muslims under colonial pressure, a crisis of scholarly identity, and social transformation, resulting in works that are heavily laden with moral and spiritual messages and calls for maintaining community unity.⁴⁰

It is asserted that there is a continuity of Al-Ghazali's thought in Southeast Asia, especially in the Sufi-*fiqh* character of Malay-Indonesian scholars, and that Nawawi's work is the clearest example of how *fiqh* can become a medium for the internalization of Ghazalian ethical values. This is evidenced by the many terms and approaches in Nawawi's work that are identical to Al-Ghazali's, both in terminology and methodology.⁴¹

Thus, it can be concluded that Al-Ghazali's theological framework had a very strong influence on the thought of Syeikh Nawawi al-Bantani, particularly in the book *Kāsifatussajā*. Al-Ghazali's thought served as a foundation for Nawawi in constructing a *fiqh* that is not only normative but also educational, ethical, and spiritual. This also

³⁵ Muqoddas, "Syeikh Nawawi Al-Bantani Al-Jawi Ilmuan Spesialis Ahli Syarah Kitab Kuning."

³⁶ Nurdiana, "Metodologi Pemikiran Dalam Perspektif Teori Imam Al-Ghazali."

³⁷ Aripin et al., "Medan Makna Dan Komponen Makna Al-Thaharah Dalam Kitab Kasyifatus Saja."

³⁸ Yuyun Rohmatul Uyuni and Nuroh Nuroh, "Syeikh Nawawi Al-Bantani Thoughts on Bridging Differences Management Fiqh in Indonesia," *JUSPI (Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam)* 8, no. 2 (2025): 212, <https://doi.org/10.30829/juspi.v8i2.18063>.

³⁹ Samsul Munir Amin, "Syaikh Nawawi Al-Bantani Tokoh Intelektual Pesantren," *Manarul Qur'an: Jurnal Ilmiah Studi Islam* 19, no. 2 (2019): 136–48, <https://doi.org/10.32699/mq.v19i2.1609>.

⁴⁰ Edi Sumanto, "Penulis Adalah Alumni FUAD IAIN Bengkulu," *El-Afkar* 6, no. II (2017): 1–12.

⁴¹ Nur Hadi Ihsan et al., "Syaikh Nawawi Al-Bantani's Perspective on Integrating Sufism and Fiqh to Address Modern Human Challenges," *Karsa* 32, no. 2 (2024): 170–92, <https://doi.org/10.19105/karsa.v32i2.10064>.

demonstrates that the legacy of classical thought in Islam is dynamic and continuously undergoes a process of adaptation according to the context of the era and the needs of the community. Through Nawawi, Al-Ghazali's thought not only survived as a historical text but became a living intellectual spirit within the Nusantara society.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the philosophical theology of Imam Al-Ghazali is not only preserved within the textual tradition but is also revitalized through the intellectual work of Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani in *Kāṣifatussajā*. Nawawi's reception of Al-Ghazali's thought is evident in his emphasis on the integration of reason and revelation, the spiritual dimension within Islamic law, and a moderate approach in delivering legal rulings (*fatwas*). These characteristics reflect Al-Ghazali's influence while simultaneously demonstrating the dynamic transmission of classical Islamic thought into the 19th-century socio-cultural context of the Nusantara (Southeast Asia). Nawawi did not merely repeat Al-Ghazali's ideas but reconstructed them as a response to the challenges of colonialism, identity crisis, and the need for a legal ethic rooted in spirituality. This finding confirms that the classical Islamic intellectual heritage is a living tradition that continues to be interpreted and contextualized across space and time. Further research can examine how other Nusantara scholars received and developed Al-Ghazali's thought to broaden the understanding of the continuity and transformation of Islamic intellectualism.

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