

TRANSLATION OF AL-HAYTAMĪ'S CRITIQUE OF IBN AL-MUQRĪ'S *TAKFĪR* OF
IBN ARABĪ FROM THE *FATĀWĀ ḤADĪTHIYYA*
BY GH HADDAD - RABI' AL-AKHĪR 1428 – MAY 2007

“ Our Shaykh [Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī] said in *Sharḥ al-Rawḍ* cited al-Taftāzānī in response to Ibn al-Muqrī's statement: “Whoever doubts in the disbelief (*kufīr*) of Ibn ‘Arabī's group, he himself is a disbeliever,” and I paraphrase (*mā ḥāṣiluhu*): “The truth is that Ibn ‘Arabī and his group are the elite of the *Umma*. Al-Yāfi‘ī, Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh and others have declared that they considered Ibn ‘Arabī a *walī*, noting that the language which Ṣūfīs use is appropriate among the experts in its usage and that the knower of Allāh (*‘arīf*), when he becomes completely absorbed in the oceans of Unity, might make some statements that are liable to be misconstrued as indwelling (*ḥulūl*) and union (*ittiḥād*), while in reality there is neither indwelling nor union.”¹

It has also been clearly stated by our Imāms, such as al-Rāfi‘ī in his book *al-‘Azīz*, al-Nawawī in *al-Rawḍa* and *al-Majmū‘*, and others, that “When a mufti is asked about a certain phrase that could be construed as disbelief, he should not immediately say that the speaker should be put to death nor immediately make permissible the shedding of his blood. Rather let him say: The speaker must be asked about what he meant by his statement, and he should hear his explanation, then act accordingly.”

Look at these guidelines – Allāh guide you! – and you will find that the deniers who assault this great man (Ibn ‘Arabī) and positively assert his disbelief, are riding upon blind mounts, and stumbling about like a camel affected with troubled vision. Verily Allāh has blocked their sight and hearing from perceiving this, until they fell into whatever they fell into, which caused them to be despised, and made their knowledge of no benefit.

The great knowledge of the Ṣūfīs and their utter renunciation of this world and of everything other than Allāh testify to their innocence from these terrible accusations, therefore we prefer to dismiss such accusations and consider that their statements are true realities in the way they expressed them. Their way cannot be denied without knowing the meaning of their statements and the expressions they use, and then turning to apply the expression to the meaning and see if they match or not. We thank Allāh that all of their deniers are ignorant in that kind of knowledge, as not one of them has mastered the sciences of unveilings (*mukāshafāt*), nor even smelled them from a distance! Nor has anyone of them sincerely followed any of the *awliyā’* so as to master their terminology.

You may object: “I disagree that their expressions refer to a reality rather than being metaphorical phrases, therefore show me something clearer than the explanations that have been given.”

I say: Rejection is stubbornness. Let us assume that you disagree with what I have mentioned, but the correct way of stating the objection is to say: “This statement could be interpreted in several ways,” and proceed to explain them. You should not say: “If it meant this, then... and if it meant that, then...” while stating from the start “This is *kufīr*!” That is ignorance and goes beyond the scope of absolute good faith (*naṣīḥa*) claimed by the critic.

Do you not see that if Ibn al-Muqrī's real motivation were absolute good faith, he would not have exaggerated by saying: “Whoever has a doubt in the disbelief of the group of Ibn ‘Arabī, he himself is a disbeliever”? So he extended his judgment that Ibn ‘Arabī's followers were disbelievers, to everyone who had a doubt as to their disbelief. Look at this fanaticism that exceeds all bounds and departs from the consensus of the Imāms, and goes so far as to accuse anyone who doubts their disbelief! **﴿Glorified are You, this is awful calumny﴾** (24:16) **﴿When you welcomed it with your tongues, and uttered with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, you counted it a trifle. In the sight of Allāh, it is very great﴾** (24:15).

¹Cf. Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī, *Asnā al-Matālib fī Sharḥi Rawḍ al-Tālib*, Zakariyyā's commentary on Ibn al-Muqrī's abridgment of al-Nawawī's *Rawḍat al-Tālibīn*, book of *Ridda*, first topic of the first chapter.

Notice also that his statement suggests that it is an obligation on the whole Community to believe that Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers are disbelievers, otherwise they will all be declared disbelievers – and no one thinks likes this. As a matter of fact, it might well lead into something forbidden which he himself has stated clearly in his book *al-Rawḍ* when he said: “Whoever accuses a Muslim of being a disbeliever based on a sin committed by him, and without an attempt to interpret it favorably, he himself commits disbelief.” Yet here he is accusing an entire group of Muslims of disbelief.² Moreover, no consideration should be paid to his interpretation, because he only gives the kind of interpretation that is detrimental to those he is criticizing, for that is all that their words have impressed upon him.

As for those who do not think of Ibn ‘Arabī and the Ṣūfīs except as a pure light in front of them, and believe in their sainthood – how can a Muslim attack them by accusing them of disbelief? No one would dare do so unless he is accepting the possibility to be himself called a disbeliever. This judgment reflects a great deal of fanaticism, and an assault on most of the Muslims. We ask Allāh, through His Mercy, to forgive the one who uttered it.

It has been narrated through more than one source and has become well-known to everyone that whoever opposes the Ṣūfīs, Allāh will not make His Knowledge beneficial, and he will be inflicted with the worst and ugliest diseases. We have witnessed this taking place with many nay-sayers. For example, al-Biqā‘ī – Allāh forgive him! – used to be one of the most distinguished scholars, blessed with many meritorious acts of worship, an exceptional intelligence, and an excellent memory in all kinds of knowledge, especially in the sciences of *tafsīr* and ḥadīth, and he wrote numerous books, but Allāh did not allow them to be of any kind of benefit to anyone. He also authored a book called *Munāsabāt al-Qur’ān* in about ten volumes, about which no one knows except the elite, and as for the rest, they never heard about it. If this book had been written by our Shaykh Zakariyyā [al-Anṣārī], or by anyone who believes [in *awliyā’*], it would have been copied with gold because, as a matter of fact, it has no equal: for **﴿Of the bounties of thy Lord We bestow freely on all, these as well as those: the bounties of thy Lord are not closed to anyone﴾** (17:20).

Al-Biqā‘ī went to extremes in his denial and wrote books about the subject, all of them clearly and excessively fanatical and deviating from the straight path. But then he paid for it fully and even more than that, for he was caught in the act on several occasions and was judged a disbeliever. It was ruled that his blood be shed and he was about to get killed, but he asked the help and protection of some influential people who rescued him, and he was made to repent in Ṣāliḥiyya,

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Egypt, and renew his Islām.³

²Al-Sakhāwī in *al-Daw’ al-Lāmi’* similarly points out this contradiction between al-Biqā‘ī’s expressed principles and his actual practices. See also al-Haytamī’s story in relation to al-Biqā‘ī’s criticism of Imām al-Ghazzālī in the latter’s biographical notice.

³Al-Haytamī, *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyya* (p. 331). For the account of the condemnation of al-Biqā‘ī himself as a *kāfir* see al-Sakhāwī’s *al-Daw’ al-Lāmi’* and al-Shawkānī’s *al-Badr al-Tāli’*.