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The original version of this essay was published in French in Aspects d'Islam (Brussels: Facultés Universitaires, Saint Louis, 1985). An English translation appears for the first time in this volume, since this study sheds light on the concept of "rupture" introduced by the author and debated in this seminar.

"What is there to keep men from believing, now that the Good Way has become apparent to them, and from imploring the forgiveness of their Lord, except their refusal to admit that the traditional lot (*sunna*) of the Ancients will reach them or that they will be put face to face with Torment?"

— Qur'an 18:55

"According to the tradition (*sunna*) of the Messengers that We have sent before you, and you will find no change in Our Tradition"

— Qur'an 17:77

It is no simple matter to speak of Islam facing its Tradition in the difficult historical circumstances of Muslim societies since the 1950s. Leaving aside the difficulties of speaking adequately, without reductionism or the blind equation of the Tradition with a great scriptural religion, we, in fact, face four possible approaches, illustrated by four concurrent forms of discourse:

- 1) Current Islamic discourse, which tends to dominate all the others by its political power and great social and psychological scope. It is deeply rooted in the mythical dimension of the Tradition while unwittingly secularising the religious contents of that Tradition.
- 2) Classical Islamic discourse, which explains the Tradition in the period of its being formed and fixed in authentic texts.
- 3) Orientalist discourse, which applies to the forming and fixing stage a philological and historical critique, predominantly historicist and positivist and which belongs to the nineteenth century.
- 4) The discourse of the sciences of man and society, which aims to rework the preceding three to emphasise in each instance those questions that are repressed as unthinkable or "unthought", and, thus, to make possible a *current* critical revival of the problem of the Tradition and traditions in Islam.

To deal with both the thought and the unthought that have accumulated in Islamic Tradition for fourteen centuries, we will begin by examining the concepts of Islam and tradition. We will then describe the situation

of the Tradition and traditions in the Islamic domain. Finally, we will strive on the basis of our findings to rethink the notion of Islamic Tradition in its totality.

I — The Concepts of Islam and Tradition

The debate about tradition is for the most part already open in the Qur'an: the whole Qur'anic message acts as an overturning "modernity" with respect to the beliefs and traditional practices allowed by "the fathers" or "the ancestors" (*aba'* used sixty-three times; *al-awwalun*, "the ancients", thirty-eight times). The preceding Arab tradition is entirely portrayed as belonging to the realm of ignorance, disorder, injustice, error, paganism, and oppression — in a word, "the darkness of the *jahiliyya*". The Tradition — with a capital "T" because it is divine, unmodifiable by man, and the expression of Eternal Truth — after twenty years of struggle at Mecca and Madina, seeks to enter a hostile socio-cultural field and becomes, precisely, *Islamic* Tradition.

Must we, in consequence, designate the notion of Tradition from the beginning of Islam onwards with a capital "T" because it is the *only* "orthodox" expression of the only Tradition received by the Community? Or, is it appropriate to redefine Islam as one socio-historical process among others, which has resulted in the formation of a tradition termed "Islamic", but always coincident with others, or modified by successive "innovations" or "modernities"?

The first approach corresponds to that of the current Islamic discourse of movements termed "Islamist", but, more generally, to all reformist discourse (*islah*). According to this view, Islam is entirely contained in the Qur'an as the Prophetic tradition (*hadith*) has explained it. That this tradition was made the object of oral transmission and then written during the first three centuries Hijra, that it consequently results from a complex socio-historical process subject to

criticism, is treated as having no effect at all on the absolute equation: Islam = Authentic Tradition. The sum total of beliefs, practices, institutions, ethico-juridical norms, and texts produced and recognised as Tradition by the community (*umma*) only serve to show that Islam is defined and willed by God, according to this approach. The Tradition is thus the incarnation of the "religion of Truth" (*din al-haqq*) in history; it is a force of sanctification and transcendentalisation (*tanzih*) of the space-time in which the life of the Community is enacted. In this way, the Caliph, the Sultan, and the Amir — although essentially secular — have become sacred to quite different degrees. A like conception explains why every Community member is treated as the immediate contemporary of all members past, present, and future. This approach grants authority to the spiritual *ethos* of the Tradition which nourishes the feeling of community identity, raises the hopes of believers, and assigns an eschatological and ontological finality to concrete historical behaviour, all the while refusing to integrate historicity with all of these effects. It is thus radically opposed to the "scientific" attitude that, in contrast, takes into account only "facts" (names, events, dates, textual statements and the like) that are verifiable according to the procedures of historical criticism.

The second approach consists of leaving open the concepts of Islam and tradition because they are subject to the incessant changes that history imposes. This is a matter of integrating, in analysis as in concrete practice, the spiritual *ethos* of Islam-Tradition with its historicity. This concern is new in Islamic thought; indeed, it goes beyond the criticism of chains of authorities and *hadith* texts as conceived and practised by the most prominent traditionists (*muhaddithun*). How does religion achieve form, continuity, and consistency in a social body and in a more or less rapid social progress? This question arises as soon as we consider religion from the angle of the tradition that is its expression. From this perspective, Islam is never concluded; it must be redefined in each socio-cultural context and at

each historical phase. It comprises, nevertheless, the following stable constituent elements:

- 1) The Qur'anic corpus (*mushaf*);
- 2) The various texts of traditions and jurisprudence;
- 3) The five canonical obligations and the ritual of their performance;
- 4) The spiritual *ethos* common to all of the faithful and characteristic of the Tradition.

The stabilising of these elements took time: this is what I call the socio-historical process of the formation of the Tradition. We will also see that, as a matter of fact, the *semantic* stabilisation of the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions is impossible insofar as it is a matter of *living* tradition. By the latter I mean of texts by which the faithful live, producing history and being unendingly reproduced by it. One of the functions of the Tradition is to furnish the necessary referents in order to secure unanimity about certain readings of the sacred texts, which is to say that the unity of Islam ideally claimed by the believers occurs progressively *in* history¹ on the basis of the four necessary referents enumerated above.²

Theologically, one can oppose this approach to the famous verse "Today I have brought to perfection for you your religion and completed My favour; I have chosen for you Islam as your religion". (Qur'an 5:3)

The reading of this verse — as of the whole Qur'an — depends on the role we accord historicity in deciphering the entire period of Revelation and prophetic action.³

Let us reiterate that historicity here is not to be confused with the purely accidental circumstances of the Revelation that the classical exegetes designated by the name of *asbab al-nuzul*. If chronologically the Revelation is effectively brought to a close by the death of the Prophet, it is still the case that its exegesis, explanation, and translation into ritual and ethico-juridical norms continue into our day; it is by the work of the individual self on itself and under the pressure of history, that the Community brings about Islam as living Tradition.

Let us take a closer look at the notion of tradition. The arguments, discussions, and writing of the first two centuries of the Hijra, in order to assert the notion of Prophetic tradition (*sunnat al-nabi*) against local customs or even other traditions actually going back to the companions of the Prophet (*sahaba*) or the followers (*tabi'un*), put into circulation a technical vocabulary often muddled by inconsistent usage. One will recollect in particular the terms: *sunna*, *khabar*, *athar*, *sama'*, *naql*, *riwaya*, *hadith*.⁴

All these terms had a standard meaning in Arabic linguistic usage before Islam; they were worked into the new semantic context created by the Qur'an and the experience of Madina in order to designate specifically a tradition, at once religious and cultural, in the process of formation.

Sunna is used in the Qur'an in relation to God to designate the *customary manner of acting* towards peoples who lived in error when the prophets transmitted the Revelation. More generally, *sunna* designates the customary behaviour of a group; this is why the *sunna* introduced by Muhammad only gradually and with difficulty gains recognition over local customs. In existing documentation, the first use of the expression *sunna al-nabi* appears only about 80/700 with the celebrated Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz (d. 99/717). Another step is taken by Shafi'i (d. 204/820), who pronounces the *sunna*, as the sum of authentic *hadith*, the second "objective" source (*asl*) of Religious Law (*shari'a*) after the Qur'an.

The notion of a textual body of traditions transmitted (*naql*, *riwaya*) according to regulated procedures thus acquires a decisive importance, which culminates in the elaboration of the great and so-called authentic (*al-sahih*) texts of Bukhari (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/875) for the Sunnis, and of Kulayni (or al-Kulini) (d. 329/940) and Ibn Babuya (d. 381/991) for the Shi'ites.⁵ *Khabar* and *athar* are more general terms for designating every statement or trace that conveys information.

Any bit of information, narrative, or news can be designated by *khabar* or *athar*; this is

why the two terms apply equally well to secular information from history and literature (*adab*) as to religious traditions that touch in particular the Qur'an and the *hadith*.

This indicates that the gathering of information about the Qur'an, the *sira* (biography of Muhammad), and the *hadith* was accomplished in a cultural climate in which secular objectives — such as poetry, political history, *maghazi* or military campaigns and economic facts — were as important as religious ones. The Umayyad and then the Abbasid state needed these *akhbar* (plural of *khabar*) in order to forge both an "orthodox" and a cultural tradition equally indispensable for consolidating the legitimacy and unity of "Islamic" power.

This official aspect of the forming and fixing of an Islamic Tradition is essential for understanding three consequences that are not equally addressed by Islamic thought: the splintering of the Tradition into Sunni and Shi'ite; the suppression, at least in theory, by the science of *usul al-fiqh*, of all local traditions deemed non-Islamic; and the weakness and discontinuity of a theology of the Tradition.

We shall return later to these three points. Let us again recall two important terms tied to the notion of tradition in Islam: namely *bid'a*, or innovation, and *taqlid*, or imitation. The latter involves scholastic reproduction of norms and teachings defined by the founding doctors of theologico-juridical schools, such as Malik b. Anas (d. 179/795); Abu Hanifa (d. 150/767); Shafi'i; and Ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855) for the Sunnis; Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765); and Ibn Babuya for the Shi'ites; and Ibn Ibad and Jabir b. Zayd al-Azdi (d. 103/721) for the Kharijites.

The more the Tradition is identified with the body of commandments and prohibitions (*awamir* and *nawahi*), defined in the Qur'an, the *hadith*, and the canonical *corpus juris*, the greater the barrier against "innovations" that can be "traditionalised", that is, integrated into the system of the Tradition with the assistance of the methodology of

the *usul al-fiqh*. There has thus always been more or less live tension (it is very strong today) between *sunna/bid'a* and, correspondingly, *taqlid/ijihad*, that is, between submission to the authority of the Tradition and rational effort to recognise and promote “good innovation”, or *bid'a hasana*. This means that in a cultural context where attitude and historical criticism are weak, the scriptural Tradition becomes a force that sanctifies and mythologises the founding period in which all Truth is centered on the rules of conduct and human belief: that is what has in fact happened in Islam since the 3rd/9th to 5th/11th centuries. We shall consider how one might revive today a thinking process and a search that has been long neglected.

II — Tradition and Traditions in the Islamic Domain

Just as there is but one Islam — willed by God as the Religion for all men — likewise there can be but one Tradition faithfully expressing and perpetuating this Islam. Such is the constant claim of orthodoxy, whether Sunni, Shi'ite, or Kharijite.

Christianity and Judaism have likewise imposed the supremacy of the Scriptural Tradition, limiting or eliminating concurrent traditions that did not benefit from two essential supports, State and Scripture. Historically dated, each Tradition so constituted nevertheless claims a supra-historical character because of being rooted in Revelation and expressing the transcendence thereof.

Historical reality does not confirm this theological claim. At the Prophet's death in 11/632, several alternative versions of tradition were possible in terms of the Qur'an, the Experience of Madina, and the socio-cultural conditions of Arabia and the surrounding countries. Three alternatives asserted claims in the course of the first century. Through bloody struggles and heated controversies there progressively emerged the three great orthodoxies: Sunni, Shi'ite,

and Kharijite, each of which developed greater or lesser differences from the others. Heresiographic literature bears clear witness to the multiplicity of groups, communities and sects (*milal, nihal, firaq*) that appeared during the first five centuries of the Hijra. Even when the two great orthodoxies, Sunni and Shi'ite, have their separate triumphs, one with the Seljuks and the other with the Safavids, very long-lived local traditions managed to survive in the setting of religious brotherhoods.

It stands to reason that each orthodoxy denies to concurrent movements participation in the Authentic Tradition. The framework, traditionally accepted as theological although in reality exclusively polemic, in which the battles of Sunnism against the “heresies” take place is determined by a very commonly cited *hadith*.

“The source of our subject”, writes Ibn 'Arabi, for example, “is the tradition related by Ibn 'Umar: The Messenger of God has said, ‘The children of Israel are divided into seventy-one sects: all of them will go to Hell except one. Those born of Jesus son of Mary number seventy-two: all will go to Hell except one. My Community itself will be divided into seventy-three sects: all will go to Hell except one’. They asked him, ‘What then is this unique (saved sect), O Messenger of God?’. He replied, ‘Islam, that is the Community (*jama'a*) of Muslims who will be like me and like you’ ”.⁶

The underlying assumptions of this passage have in effect governed the three orthodox versions of Muslim opinion up to the present day. It is therefore a good idea to explain them in order to show that common assumptions have nevertheless produced systems of representation sufficiently at variance to render unthinkable the revitalisation of Islamic consciousness by a critical rereading of the three traditions.⁷

The Organising Assumptions of Orthodoxy

These assumptions include the following:

1) The division among men is irremediable.

Only one group, put three times in succession before the Divine Message, is capable of grasping it and remaining rigorously faithful to it.

2) Truth is one like the Divine Message and the group that grasps it. Thus, there can be but one True Religion and one Authentic Tradition expressing this Religion.

3) The Companions of the Prophet (“like me and like you”) are the first generation of a spiritual community that reproduces itself strictly within the Accepted Tradition. As a result, successive generations are rigorously “contemporary” regarding the Salvation promised to all.

4) In these conditions, being “contemporary” means:

- The existence of homogeneous and unvarying semantic field within which all transmitters and receiver-actualisers of the Message and its fruition in the Tradition move without possible disagreement.
- The unequivocal semantic character of “objective” texts, transmitted and adequately explained via the exegeses received in the Tradition.
- That any sort of actualisation of the Tradition issues from “objective” texts, in the most varying historical and social contexts, without these contexts in turn affecting the Tradition.
- That each statement of Tradition refers to a behaviour-Model ordered by God or already demonstrated by the Prophet during his apostolic life (whence the importance of the *sira*). There is perfect congruence between the statement and the concrete referents in expected conduct, just as there is direct congruence between each statement and the behaviour of each of the faithful, independent of time and place.
- That there is no doubt about the authenticity of the accounts that transmit the initial Message and their actualisation in Living Tradition; the companions — in the manner of Christ's disciples — received a special charisma that shelters them from error or deviation when it comes to preserving the Message.

It is apparent that these postulates are not common only to Muslims; they are found to an equal degree among all peoples of the Book (*ahl al-kitab*), as a very orthodox work of Y. Congar testifies.⁸ How, then, do we explain the existence of theological and psychological schisms? This question brings us back to the constituent elements of any tradition and to the process of their being combined.

The Sunnis appeal to the *sunnat al-nabi*, while the Shi'ites speak of the *sunnat al-bayt*, or Tradition of the members of the family of Muhammad. While the former piously gather the *hadith* transmitted by the first three Caliphs, qualified by them as orthodox, the latter abide by the traditions by 'Ali, the fourth Caliph, and his descendants, all of whom are deemed to possess a particular charisma. Neither of them takes into account the actual political and psycho-cultural conditions within which is accomplished, over generations, the mythical and imaginary crystallising of such secular events as the succession of the Caliphs known as orthodox, the assassination of 'Ali and his son Husayn, the persecution of the Kharijites and Alids by the Umayyad Caliphs, of the Umayyad Caliphs by the Abbasid Caliphs and the like. The religious reading of secular events erases their political and social forces or transforms them into supports for mythical constructions that enrich the Tradition. In contrast, the Orientalists' historicist reading from the nineteenth century onwards displaces the symbols and myths to a domain of legend or popular exaggeration, in order to retain only those facts that are duly localised in concrete time and space.

We can nevertheless observe, in this connection, an essential difference between the Sunni and Shi'ite processes of producing the Tradition. The Sunnis have in actuality always been the side in power; they have accepted this political *fait accompli* whether it resulted from consultation (*shura*), as in the Caliphate of Madina, or from acts of force, as in the case of the Umayyads and Abbasids. The decisions of the Caliphs in office and their administrations helped in

large part to nourish the tradition that is called Sunni by instituting the official corpus of the Qur'an (*mushaf*) under the Caliph 'Uthman, as well as the collective memory with its religious, juridical, and historiographic referents. This is why it is so difficult today to disentangle the religious contents of the Qur'an from the secular ones: all the forms of power that have appeared in Islam since 11/632 have exploited this confusion of jurisdiction in order to gain legitimacy (The process asserts itself still more strongly in the current powers born of military caste or the religious setting, as in Iran).

With the exception of the short reign of 'Ali (36/656-41/661), the Shi'ites were in the opposition and had to undergo frequent persecution until the advent of the Fatimids in the Maghrib (297/909) and the Buyids in Baghdad (334/945). They had time to develop a tragic vision, one inseparably religious and secular, of history. In his lifetime, Muhammad had explicitly entrusted to 'Ali and his descendants the charismatic power and the temporal charge to watch over, until the end of earthly history, the *integrity* of the revealed message. This meant *integrity* concerning the transmission of the texts and traditions (cf. the disputes about the *mushaf* and the compilation of the *hadith*); the exegesis of their contents in order to elaborate the law; and the rigorous application of the law by a just Guide (*Imam*).⁹

We can see that the split between Sunni and Shi'ite traditions¹⁰ can be correctly characterised neither in purely historical terms nor in exclusively theological ones. Only semiotic analysis, cultural anthropology, and the philosophy of the language can attain the ultimate goals of sorting out an opposition until now principally addressed by historicist history (offered by Orientalist science), or by dogmatic theology (offered by the believers in the two camps), or by a pietistic phenomenon (offered by the work of Henri Corbin and certain followers). We will come back to the methodological and epistemological priority of semiotic analysis, both for uniting different points of view and for getting beyond the inherited interpretations of tradition.

Let us correct in advance any simplistic notion that our opposition is only between a Sunni tradition tied to official power and a Shi'ite tradition sworn to contest this *fait accompli*. It is impossible to reconstruct here a complete account of all the intellectual movements that for five centuries enriched the debate about Islamic tradition and all the problems connected with it. Let us only recall another significant schism that appeared very early, between the traditionalists dedicated to the collecting of authentic *hadith* and their literal interpretation (in particular the Hanbalite line) and the *ahl al-ra'y*, who allowed that reason might validate personal opinion (*ra'y*) in matters of legal qualification (*hukm*, in the Hanafite line). As for the Shi'ites, the Fatimid State, and later the Safavid State in Iran, involved an official use of the Tradition and the law, like that in the Sunni environment.

We are consequently entitled to say that beyond distinctions of circumstantial and ideological import, there are grounds for thorough study of the schism, anthropological in nature, between mythical and historiographic (or only historical at the particular stage that concerns us) consciousness; between mythical and logo-centric discourse; between symbol, sign and even cultural sign; between imagination and discursive reason; and between metaphorical and literal meaning.

Everything that has just been said concerns the phase of formation and stabilisation of the classical forms of the Tradition. What happened to this in the long period of what is termed *taqlid*, or the repetition of norms, values, and beliefs set by the Guides who founded schools (*a'imma mujtahidun*)? We can verify the previously noted existence of a solidarity between State, Scripture, and Orthodox Tradition sustained by the official culture. Indeed, each time a great power manages to take over, as in the cases of the Seljuks, Fatimids, and Safavids, and the first Ottomans, the Orthodox Tradition maintains supremacy over local traditions and checks the forces of innovation. The *'ulama* keep watch on doctrinal rectitude, and the judicial administration applies the *shari'a*. When, on the other hand, central power

weakens (as with the Ottomans and their satellites from the eighteenth century on, and in Morocco and Iran), Maraboutic dynasties (roughly, dynasties based on saintly lineages) take the place of the failing State in regions that are generally only partially Islamicised, as in the case of Maraboutism in North Africa. We then witness the revivification of very old local traditions covered by scraps of Islamic Tradition interpreted and adapted by the holy founder of the dynasty.¹¹ The colonial phenomenon aggravates this evolution, freezing the diverse local traditions that have served as systems of security and refuges of identity until the recent period of national liberation.

It is important to understand that the Islam to which Islamist movements today appeal is characterised by a splintered, scholastic, static, and repetitive Tradition rather than by the dynamic and open Tradition, highly capable of integration, that corresponded to the golden age of the Caliphal State. Hence, Islam of the Maghrib is strictly Malikiite, while Saudi Islam adheres to the Hanbalite tradition, and Turkish Islam to the Hanafite. This situation justifies the historical and theological reconstruction of Islamic Tradition in its totality, the conditions of which we will define further.

Let us underscore at the outset that there is a double action of nationalising the Tradition and appropriating it for the State. The new states in their quest for legitimacy rely on the Islamic heritage for consolidating their power and building national unity, in the sense of the positivist nationalisms of the nineteenth-century Europe and no longer of the *umma* of spiritual dimensions. This is a secularising of the Tradition without naming it as such. On the other hand, economic practices, political or juridical institutions, the educational system, and the official ideology (such as socialism) all get traditionalised, the whole overlaid with an "Islamic" appearance with the help of traditional vocabulary.¹²

Such is the last historical embodiment of the Tradition. The outside observer speaks of a "resurgence of Islam", while it is mainly ideologically makeshift operations that are



on the rise, aided by disparate elements retrieved from a past that is discontinuous, mythologised, or prescribed by the Western model of development. Muslim societies live in an era of institutional, industrial, agrarian, and cultural revolutions that in the West have been spread over nearly four centuries, but that are condensed in brief periods in Muslim societies. In this context of crisis and structural upheaval, the Tradition has an irreplaceable function of supplying stability, security, and legitimacy; but this contribution, vital for the whole social body, effectively shelters the Tradition from all critical analysis or objective evaluation. Today, we can less than ever open records that were closed in the third and fourth centuries on the subjects of the *mushaf*, the great collections of *hadith*, the *Islamic corpus juris*, *usul al-din*, *usul al-fiqh*, and exegesis.

III — Rethinking Islamic Tradition in Its Totality

Rethinking Islamic Tradition today is an intellectually urgent and necessary act, politically and culturally destabilising and psychologically and socially delicate. We are in fact obliged to uncover, much more clearly than did classic criticism, the ideological functions, semantic manipulations, cultural discontinuities, and intellectual inconsistencies that come together to delegitimise what over centuries we have been given to perceive and live as the authentic expression of Divine Will manifested in the Revelation. To rethink Islamic Tradition is to violate official prohibitions past and present, and the social censure that conspires to keep off limits the *unthinkable* questions that were asked at the early phase of Islam, but inquiry into which was closed off with the triumph of the official orthodoxy that was based on the classic texts.

But, how are we to rethink Tradition in positive terms that is, enabling it via constructive criticism to fulfill new functions in a socio-historical context radically changed in the last thirty years?¹³ Doubtless, we do not have to worry inordinately about the fate of the Tradition: it will always survive the most radical criticism and the most brutal revolution, because, as a mainspring of unity and continuity, it has over the centuries forged the collective sensibility and memory. That must not impede a constant effort to pass beyond reductionist theories and inappropriate analyses.

We cannot start from a theological definition, because Islamic thought, as we have seen, very quickly favoured a framework of polemics that was designed to uphold a kind of reflection that was exclusively preoccupied with deepening the faith. It is essential to create the possible conditions for a theology of the Tradition. We must therefore borrow current ways of thinking opened up by the sciences of man and society. This being first a matter of *reading* the Scriptures (Qur'an and *hadith*), we will begin by showing why it is advisable to base research on semiotics. We will then open the historical and sociological record, but from the perspective of a larger inquiry into the anthropology of tradition and modernity. On the basis of the information thus reunited, we may justifiably undertake inquiry on the new status of the theological attitude.

It goes without saying that such an itinerary cannot be followed to its end; it will be a matter, in this first effort, of establishing the necessity that Islamic thought must free itself from tradition-repetition and from tradition-constraints in order to recover or find a tradition that safeguards the richness suggested in the following definition:

"Tradition carries with it more than ideas capable of logical form: it embodies a life that includes at the same time sentiments, thoughts, beliefs, aspirations, and actions. Individual and collective effort can draw from it indefinitely without exhausting it. Consequently, it implies the spiritual communion of souls that feel, think, and will in

the unity of a like patriotic or religious ideal; and by the same token, it is a condition of progress in so far as it permits some bits from the ingot of never-completely-coinable truth to be passed from Implicit Living to Explicit Knowledge; for tradition — well-spring of unity, continuity, and fecundity, and at the same time beginning, anticipatory, and final — precedes every constructive synthesis and outlives every reflective analysis".¹⁴

1. The priority of the semiotic approach

It is now well established that semiotic analysis requires an indispensable exercise of intellectual self-discipline, a quality all the more precious when it comes to reading texts that for generations have forged individual and collective sensibility and imagination. We learn to introduce a methodological distance *vis-à-vis* "sacred" texts (the quotation marks are an expression of this distance) without pronouncing any of those theological or historical judgments that immediately block communication. This is what Orientalist historical criticism on the subject of the Qur'an and the *hadith* has never understood, and it continues to be unaware of the semiotic and anthropological approach, as is attested by the recent work of G.H.A. Juynboll.¹⁵

The text that are the point of departure and the inexhaustible source of the Tradition offer themselves as a perfectly defined cultural object, definitively closed on themselves since the community received them; hallowed as the only collections that are complete, authentic, and transmitted according to an ideal chain of authorities (*isnad*) or witnesses of the Revealed Truth, invariably in the following sequence:

God



- 1) Muhammad → the Companions → the Followers → the scholar-initiators → the worthy receivers (the Sunni path)
- 2) Muhammad → the *Imams* → the receivers → the *marji' al-taqid*, or doctrinal authority (the Shi'ite path)

This cultural object has been turned into a living *subject*, historically active through the reading-participation of the believers. By the process of selection, of decontextualisation, of recontextualisation, of retrospective and prospective projection, of literal or esoteric interpretation, and of semantic or mythical amplification, the readings of believers indefinitely go on creating secondary cultural objects, while being removed from the initial object due to its linguistic, historical, or socio-cultural connection with a single space-and-time. The sum total of these operations constitutes *living* tradition. The empirical effectiveness of daily life bears on the cognitive aspects of the human condition. To paraphrase M. Blondel, *Implicit Living* expends effort in order to gain access to *Explicit Knowledge*. Thus, the unthought accumulates in living tradition.

How do we get back to the initial object in its genesis, its constituent parts and its own determining factors? This return to the source is a leitmotif of the Tradition, but it involves returning to the mythical founding age, a space-and-time transfigured by the traditional readings and modes of behaviour. Semiotics aspires to a summary criticism that at once goes beyond both the object that is read and all the second objects that are produced by the Tradition. How do the *signs* used in the texts signify? What linguistic mechanisms are used to produce *this* meaning and not another? For whom, and in what conditions, does *this* particular meaning arise?

These questions involve neither the revealed character of statements, nor their sacred charge, nor the results of their spiritual meaning for the believers. Instead, they concern the qualifications and functions of meaning as modalities of significance, the cognitive status of which must be established in a comprehensive approach to everything that has meaning.

It turns out that the texts we read are not preoccupied with distinguishing *knowing* from *believing*.¹⁶ Instead, they teach that it is first necessary to *believe* — to open one's heart (in the Biblical and Qur'anic sense) — in order to gain access to perfect, complete,

and totally true knowledge. "God taught Adam all the names". By these names — collected, memorised, and assimilated — one enters "the Religion of Truth". This definition, the keystone of later theological constructions, asserts a relationship of thought to language that modern linguistics compel us to reconsider.

We will take for granted the transfer brought about, in this regard, by recent semiotic research: what supports communication is not "true" knowledge that bears on objects — objective referents of words in the language — but, rather, the reciprocity of perspectives established between interlocutor-protagonists sharing the same framework of perception and of representations, or mental images to which the linguistic signs refer. Tradition takes form at just the moment when the members of a group (such as the first nucleus of believers, called *mu'minun*, around Muhammad at Mecca and then Madina) gain access, aided by a foundation-laying account, to a common frame of perception and representation. Semiotically speaking, all of the Tradition — and every tradition — functions as a foundation-laying account perpetually enriched by the significant experiences of the group or the community.¹⁷

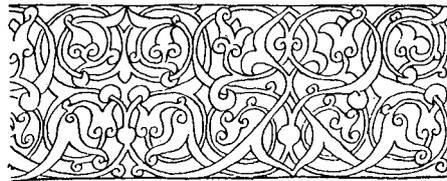
The oneness of Truth and the subsequent unequivocal nature of meaning as presented in the Qur'an do not have the same significance as in the theological systems constructed via the logical principles of Aristotelianism. In the latter, they nourish nostalgia for the Absolute, the One, Unity, Justice and Eternity in terms of dynamistic utopia like the Platonic line. In the former they command a rigid system of beliefs and unbeliefs. Addressing a greater number, the Tradition tends to function like the former model, rejecting in the name of orthodoxy both the plurality of meanings put forth by the exegeses and the various schools and the potential meanings not yet made actual by new readings of the Scriptures. I have already shown how the modern treatment of metaphor, symbol, and myth authorise readings of the Qur'an quite different from all those bequeathed by the exegetic tradition.¹⁸

2. The Historical and Sociological Approach

Just as the Tradition implies a relationship of thought to language, as we have seen, so it imposes a vision of history, with a framework and writing adapted to its expression. Transmitting the statements of the Qur'an and the *hadith*, testifying about the behaviour of the Prophet and the companions, selecting the significant facts and events for the religious memory of the community — these constitute acts that presuppose a certain use of history. One is preoccupied with chronology, biography, and circumstantial accounts in order to establish the authenticity of everything transmitted. Once the Tradition is constituted, all the discussions between the scholars and the schools fundamentally invoke “historical” arguments.

This constant concern for historical verification of the transmitted traditions today constitutes one of the subjects of pride and confidence often invoked by Muslims against Orientalist criticism. There is no going back on the authenticity of texts elaborated by witnesses and of scholars absolutely worthy of trust (*thiqa*). The Orientalists who cast doubt on these texts are either malevolent or misinformed about the seriousness of historical science in Islam.

Modern authors — even Muslims such as Taha Hussein — who have taken the greatest interest in the critical revival of religious and/or cultural Tradition, have not known how to move the debate towards previous studies framed in socio-cultural terms of knowledge in the first two centuries of the Hijra. It is not enough to recall that oral transmission then prevailed over written transmission. More fundamentally, it must be shown how, in the formation and function of the *social imaginary*, the dimension of the marvellous, the mythical, the symbolic, and the metaphorical prevailed over the rational categories and discursive procedures that would develop in relation to the invention of paper, the perfecting and diffusion of Arabic writing, and the expansion of Greek logocentrism. All cultural history of the Arab and Islamic domain must be reconsidered from this two-fold perspective of



rivalry between oral and written, *mythos* and *logos*, marvellous and empirical, and sacred and profane. *Historically*, the Tradition, as textual form and meaning, bears the stamp of this rivalry; that is what today makes a re-evaluation of form and meaning indispensable, since all the determining concepts assumed in the *Implicit Living* of the believers (sacred, marvellous, mythical, oral, written, imaginary, rational, and irrational) are in the process of passing over the *Explicit Knowledge*, thanks to the new explorations of the sciences of man and society.

Involved in the new and pressing inquiries of these sciences, certain Christian thinkers, within the limits allowed by doctrinal authority, venture toward a revision of the relations between Scripture, Revelation, and Tradition. Thus when Breton tries to put forth a theory of “scriptural space” in order to situate the Book within a universe of the written word, he goes so far as to recognise that, Jesus being “forever screened from the plenitude of actual experience, He henceforth exists for us only in a body of writing and in a Church that memorialises Him”.¹⁹

This position is new because it allows us to develop a common theory for what I prefer to call *societies of the Book*.²⁰ The concept of a society of the Book permits us to place emphasis on two dimensions of the Tradition minimised or transfigured by the advent of dogmatic theology: the *historicity* of all cultural processes, and the practical forms of conduct by which the Book is incorporated into the social body: the *sociology of reception*, by ethno-culturally diverse groups, of the Tradition. The concept of reception is complementary to that of historicity; I use it here from the theoretical perspective defined by Hans R. Jauss, one of the leaders of the “School of Constance”, in his work *Pour une esthétique de la réception*.²¹ The idea is

that the literary work, or the work of art in general, exists and endures only with the active participation and continuous intervention, at multiple levels, of its successive publics. Now, that is *a fortiori* true in large degree of those literary and artistic works that are religious texts. In this sense, Tradition in societies of the Book is not just a “hoarded collection of testimony left to us by all those whom the Spirit of revelation has touched throughout history”.²² It is a collective creation of all those who draw their identity from it and contribute to its production-reproduction.

The historical criticism applied by the philologist to this collective creation is an indispensable first stage, but it is never conclusive. In re-establishing the actual chronology of texts and facts, the correct attribution of works and testimonies, and the real derivation of notions, the philologist constructs a scientific object that, as such, does not exist in the mind of the agent-receivers of the Tradition. Like any composite in which authentic and apocryphal accounts, positive historical data and imaginary recreations and concrete and mythical space-and-time are co-mingled, the Tradition nourishes the ethical and spiritual *ethos*, but also the ideological pressures of the collective subject that is the community. It is thus necessary to expand philological criticism by anthropological analysis in order to make the scientific object coincide, on the one hand, with the actually experienced contents of the Tradition, and, on the other hand, with the psychological activity and psychic configuration of the collective subject.

It is, therefore, no longer just the relationships between Scripture, Revelation, and Tradition that must be redefined from a perspective that is more concerned with explanatory adequacy than with edification; it is also the presence of belief, affected in the substance and functions that “the witnesses touched by the spirit of revelation” have always recognised in it. Without radically challenging the dynamic potential of this spirit, we may say that it is always mediated by social agents — that is, the sum total of amplifications, misrepresentations, semantic

and textual manipulations, deviations, fabrications, mystifications and ideologisations — that are inherent in the reception and reproduction of the Tradition.

Islamist movements, which have steadily gained importance since the 1930s, illustrate our theoretical propositions very clearly. All of them as a matter of fact lay claim to the most complete, authentic, and effective Tradition: that of the time of the foundation by the Prophet and his companions. In actuality, the discourse of these movements expresses a total historic rupture with Madinan Islam. It offers all forms of Messianic appeals addressed to populations that are culturally and economically disinherited, politically oppressed, psychologically frustrated (due to factors like male-female relationships, children's status, and patriarchal structures), and who are therefore ready to follow any movement that fosters mythically the expectation of Deliverance and the hope of Salvation. This explains why the ideology of Nasser, which opposed the Muslim Brothers, at the same time favoured the psychological and cultural conditions that encouraged their expansion. Despite its secularising orientation, Nasserism licensed the same fundamental themes common to all Islamist movements: antiquarianism, the Golden Age, Arab unity, nobility of the Arabs, anti-Imperialism, anti-Zionism and social justice. We encounter the same phenomenon in socialist Algeria and under the monarchy of Hassan II. The Iran-Iraq War forces Saddam Hussein, who presents himself as the great representative of the secular Ba'th, also to favour Islamism — that is, the language and behaviour of traditionalisation. The more Islam is transformed into an ideology of contestation and change, the farther one gets from the Tradition as spirit of Revelation, or even just as an ethical *ethos* that lays the foundation of a certain idea of the human individual.

How is modernity to be worked into such an evolution of the Tradition? Are there some forms and contents that fit more easily than do others the most widespread traditional forms of behaviour?

Let us first observe that it is not a question today of opposing modernity that is eternally and totally positive and situated on the side of progress to a tradition rejected as archaic, obsolete, constraining and negative. Conversely, one cannot conform to the theology of the Tradition, which puts the latter on the side of the absolute, the transcendent, the sacred, and the revealed. The examination of current societies discloses three forces in competition:

- 1) Tradition in the general and archaic sense, present in all societies, and preceding the scriptural Tradition of the revealed religions.
- 2) Scriptural Tradition, which has occupied us to this point.
- 3) Modernity, which tends to sanction rupture with the preceding forces without totally bringing it about. In reality, the three forces nourish the dialectic of any society via a stronger accentuation of one over the others, according to the socio-cultural setting and the historical circumstances.

The Scriptural Tradition, at its beginnings in the three monotheistic religions, appeared as modernity *par excellence*, because it consigned previous traditions to the darkness of ignorance and disorder (*jahiliyya*).²³

Modernity is transformed into tradition with the accumulation over time of events, works, values, success and trials significant for the collective subject. Since the 1950s, change has been so rapid, so profound, and so general that tradition has disintegrated and slipped away. In the so-called backward or traditional societies, in contrast to industrial or post-industrial ones, the presence and effects of material modernity are more obvious than those of intellectual modernity. I shall not reiterate the differences between these two aspects of modernity²⁴; it will prove more illuminating to concentrate on the historical conditions of the production and repression of modernity in the West and in Islam.

The most prominent historians continue to present this essential question in a highly conformist manner. I cannot pass in review here all the authors most involved in this

enterprise to show the inadequacy of their approach.²⁵ The readers themselves can develop some idea of this by taking into account the following observations.

In the West, material modernity and intellectual or cognitive modernity have received varied emphasis, the one in relation to the other, according to historical circumstance (the Renaissance and the Reformation; the European *Crise de la Conscience* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the great French Revolution; the Industrial Revolution and capitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; present-day high technology and the scientific movements of anthropology and sociology). It remains true that at all these stages, there is connection and integration of the whole society by a like process of development *from within*. Thus, the uniting of the nobility and clergy on the one hand, and of the merchant bourgeoisie on the other in the eighteenth century, and of the capitalist bourgeoisie and the proletariat from the nineteenth century onwards, nourished the debates and produced the institutions and models of historic action that today define the two sides in the modern West: socialist-communist (with its socialist and communist variants) and liberal.

Without anywhere constituting a social class homogeneous and influential enough to play a decisive mediating role, the community of scientists, thinkers, and artists, within the crisis of models of development, tends to set intellectual modernity, as a cognitive project of the spirit, above all the ideological formations that are enclosed within a national or community framework or even within the limits of a social class that still claims to incarnate the universal history of humanity.²⁶

This new ambition of modernity, tied to the development of the community of scholars in the world, everywhere comes under the great historical and socio-cultural weight of each *national* context. Beyond the ideological cleavages that divide the contemporary world and favour, in particular, a negative perception of Islam, the most open-minded scholars continue to be prisoners of a linear,

polemical and even theological vision of the West. The linear vision that springs from an image of Greco-Roman antiquity separate from “the Muslim East” and traces a continuous evolution up to our day, while characterising as simple historical incident the role of Islam between the seventh and twelfth centuries. The polemic vision continues to perceive Islam first and foremost as an obstacle to reduce or shape in order to open up the imperial path of the West. The theological vision is due to Christian theology of the Revelation and the justification of the state of Israel that revive the old systems of reciprocal exclusion that have dominated the whole history of societies of the Book precisely since the appearance of Islam in the Mediterranean world.

In the grip of these visions that perpetuate and reinforce all sorts of collective phantasms, obsolete cultural schemes and epistemological barriers, cognitive modernity endeavors to reach a restored cognisance of what I have called Greco-Semitic space.

I have pointed out that this space in actuality extends from the Indus to the Atlantic; that Islam is not to be cast back into a romantic, dreamy, Bedouin, intolerant, or falsely spiritual “Orient”.²⁷ On the contrary, it must be reintegrated as one of the historic factors that have contributed to the emergence of the cultural concept of the modern West. To be sure, Islam is tied to two types of civilisation already fully discerned by Ibn Khaldun: the city dwelling type, which prolongs the sedentary Yemenite, Mesopotamian, Iranian, Palestinian, Egyptian, and Mediterranean civilisations, and the nomadic type, already harshly judged in the Qur’an, which, throughout history, resists total integration into the former. The problem of the Western Sahara and the situation of the Tuaregs in the extreme south of the Algerian Sahara today illustrate an ecologically based opposition that still persists.

“Western” Islam is obviously that of the city, and, like Christianity, developed a functional solidarity between, State, Scripture (the Book), orthodoxy and a scholarly culture deeply penetrated by Greek thought.



The medieval Christian West did not simply collect disparate elements of this or that work or Arab thinker; one can speak of “Christian” reason in the same sense and from the same critical and historical perspectives as I have developed for Islamic reason.

The splitting of Greco-Semitic space into a modern West and an East devoted to Tradition, to traditionalisation, and to recurrence of archaic forms of behaviour begins with the Renaissance and the Reformation. As early as Petrarch the tradition-modernity relationship is reversed: contrary to the Christian vision (or the Islamic view of the *jahiliyya*), it is the fall of Rome that marks the passage to barbarity; the metaphor of darkness and light, as dear to Christianity as to Islam, in the sense that Revealed Truth equals light, and paganism darkness (*zulumat al-jahiliyya/nur al-Islam*), is reversed with the humanists and scholars of the Renaissance. Luther, for his part, puts a check on doctrinal authority (the *fuqaha* and *’ulama* of Islam) in prescribing free investigation even in the realm of the Scriptures, an attitude encouraged by Spinoza. (Ibn Rushd attempted this for Islam, but the scholastic “orthodoxy” eliminated his work). A series of developments that desymbolise and restrict the concept of existence then take place in this “modern” West: Descartes separates extension from thought and substance from the subject to make of the material universe a homogeneous continuum that may be explained mechanistically. To think is to classify, to devise, to describe, to exclude: that is the method. Hegel softens this mechanistic linearity by introducing the dialectic, but Marx makes political economy the key to all history, just as Freud reduces the structuring force of the individual psyche to the repression of fantasies. Nietzsche, on his part, shatters value in going back to the roots of the Greco-Roman ethic.

The reader will kindly excuse such a summary presentation of some of the great moments or protagonists in what I have called

intellectual modernity²⁸; my particular objective is to stress that Islamic Tradition as I have presented it has remained rigorously separate from the Western adventure of man since the sixteenth century, and, more importantly, from that which, in this adventure, involves the destiny of man as such. I also want to note that, far from recognising and *rethinking* the reasons for and consequences of this exit from a history involving mind and consciousness, Islamic thought since the nineteenth century has been exclusively preoccupied with the defensive justification of its tradition, with polemic against the colonial and imperialist West and with the mythologising of its own history.

I am not saying, however, that the modern West, as its dominant classes claim, has forged a model of historical consciousness and action respectful of all the dimensions of man. But modernity is engaged in changing dimensions, ambitions, and horizons while opening up a new space of intelligibility and historical action, where not only the traditions of societies of the Book may be reintegrated in their totality, but also where historical totality, with all its cultural forms of expression in the world, may be explored and recapitulated by a cultural anthropology unrestricted to a single centre

It is from this perspective that the project of a quest and re-examination of Islamic Tradition in its totality takes all its meaning, both for the Muslim Community and for contemporary thought engaged in exploring the universe, our planet and the human condition. The Tradition in its totality implies an exit from the framework of heresiographic thought set by the *hadith* cited above. All the familiar concepts of traditional theological discourse split apart and gain new dimensions, without losing their critical function concerning both scholastic traditions and provincial, ethnocentric, unitarian or positivist modernity. Among these concepts I shall cite religion and the religious in so far as they are tied to politics and to the secular world (*din, dawla, dunya*), the Revelation, the Book, the Scriptures, the sacred, the spiritual, the transcendent, and all the vocabulary of classical metaphysics,

ethics, law, psychology and political economy. What are the local traditions reduced to residue or relics by the Orthodox Tradition, and after that by unitarian modernity²⁹? How does Orthodox Tradition itself tend to become repressed as obsolete, inadequate and archaic by material modernity in the absence of an intellectual modernity capable of reconsidering it? What mutilations has this same Orthodox Tradition inflicted on itself by eliminating the schools, works and thinkers that have come forth within Islam but that have been judged deviant or “heretic” — not by an entitled doctrinal tribunal but by the protagonists in a rivalry between professional categories, ethno-cultural groups or visions of the world?

These questions must first be answered historically, leaving aside any doctrinal judgement.³⁰ That current Muslim societies cannot accept the critical discourse of the historian does not mean that he has constructed a scientific object as abstract as that of the Orientalist philologists tracking down apocryphal *hadith*. To examine the Tradition in its totality in the sense I indicate here is to grapple directly with the roots of evil that undermine those confessional societies that are closed in what they believe to be their traditions. I do not mean that religious reference alone explains the tragedies that are taking place in Lebanon, Nigeria, or elsewhere, but it remains true that the religious imagination is particularly promptly mobilised to carry on “holy” combat. The function of history and cultural anthropology is to lay bare the realities travestied by the manipulators of the religious imagination.³¹

Is the notion we have just presented of the Tradition in its totality thinkable for a traditional theologian within the one framework of inherited theologies in each community based on the Book? What does theological attitude become in the new context created by the joint pressures of present-day history and of the cognitive strategies imposed by the sciences of man and society, themselves the product of this history and the answers to its challenge?

3. The theological attitude

“Ways of living and transforming the world”: this is the fine title of the first section of *Initiation à la pratique de la théologie* (Initiation to the Practice of Theology) recently published in France.³² This title and the whole book are the sign of an evolution that, like modernity, has taken place in the West but remains absent from Islam; an evolution limited, nevertheless, because the takeover by thought of the ways to live and transform the world remains strictly dependent on “the awareness of Faith (that) is tied to an institutional aggregate in the Church (scriptural canon, tradition, ministers) and around the university (diverse specialisations, centres of teaching, etc.)”.³³ If we go so far as to give the floor to a representative of Islam and one of Judaism (how do we choose? according to a criterion of orthodoxy or epistemological involvement with Tradition in its totality?) in order that they “give their interpretation of Christianity (and) not lock it up in its own declaration of unique meaning”,³⁴ we find that the evidence they provide will only juxtapose orthodoxies, without any attempts at the theological integration of their differences in terms of places (*topoi*) of a theology of the Tradition in its totality that would spring from the *aporias* common to the three scriptural traditions.³⁵ The task remains very significant because it allows one to establish what is newly thinkable and what remains unthinkable in the theological field most open at the present time.

Let us reflect on a precise example of *aporia* common to Christianity and Islam: the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus on the one hand, and the divine authenticity of the Qur’an on the other. In the historicist context developed in the West since the nineteenth century, Christian theologians have not been able to avoid answering denials of the resurrection with historico-critical scholarship. Bernard Lauret’s very clear restatement of the most recent arguments³⁶ shows the limits of recourse to the University and the primacy given to the awareness of faith. The author first applies himself to saving something of the “historical probability” of

the fact of the resurrection; he then passes to the examination of the functions and meanings of the *idea* of resurrection without explicitly acknowledging that he accepts the substitution of the *idea* of resurrection for the undemonstrable historical fact, in order not to give up totally the search for the coherence of the awareness of faith. Such an acknowledgement cannot only be demanded from every scientific scholar; it is particularly required of the theologian, who too easily takes advantage of the mystifying power of the invocation of faith. The psychologist and the psychoanalyst have shown us that under faith lie indistinct the most irrepressible compulsions of desire, the most complex contents of memory, the greatest phantasms of the imaginations, the most powerful impulses of the heart and the firmest demands of reason; and that the mastery of these different faculties depends on the forms of discipline of the spirit recognised and practised by each culture. No less does the theologian continue to presuppose in his discourse the existence and generalisation to all believers of a faith that is acquiescence, meet and right, to the Act of God that shows itself in the Revelation. One can conceive that the theologian aims to substantiate this ideal faith with a conscientious pedagogy of all the obstacles to be overcome, but one cannot forgive him for the constraints and confusions that he continues to force on this same human spirit that he claims to lead toward the absolute.

I am not saying this to prove the position of Islam superior to the resurrection, but to open up a new field of reflection, where the traditional claims of Christianity and Islam will be transcended by the consideration of problems situated upstream from both the resurrection and the divine authenticity of the Qur’an. I have shown how the opponents at Mecca and Madina required proofs to establish this identity, just as from the time of the disciples, debates had taken place on the subject of the empty tomb and the resurrection.³⁷ In the two cases, we are first confronted with a problem of the psychology of knowledge: how do we establish the frontier between empirical knowledge of natural occurrences and the mental

representation of occurrences called supernatural or divine? In the time of Jesus, as in that of Muhammad, rational intelligibility based on experience of the senses was already asserting its rights; but "the heart" stayed open to the marvellous and to mythical knowledge: it is advisable that one, as a *historian*, appraise first and foremost the interferences and ruptures between these two configurations of consciousness in the face of the sorts of knowledge that have been proposed. It is a *historical* fact that theological speculation in the three religions has acted *as if* the question of the psychology of knowledge — if indeed it could have been posed as radically as in our day³⁸ — was resolved in the Revelation. We thus return to tradition and to the historical conditions of its formation. The whole theory of the *'i'jaz*, or divine origin of the Qur'an, attests to the surreptitious transformation of a serious problem of the mind raised in the two cases (resurrection and Qur'an) into apologist and didactic "solutions". Unlike Christian thought, current Islamic thought refuses to consider any question of historicity.

I believe that I can predict that these critical observations and their calls to a trans-traditional theological attitude will leave indifferent both the Christian authorities and the Muslim *'ulama*. (It is clear that the rabbis are not exempt from my criticism). I have already had many an occasion to verify the existence of this secret connivance, unacknowledgeable among the dogmatic traditions, that, in explicit terms, defend "irreducible authenticities". In this domain there is no point in waiting for the community of scholars harnessed to tasks more "serious" and scientifically profitable. To state the matter clearly, religious thought is in quest of *independent* thinkers after having been, over the centuries, either the monopoly of zealous servants or the target of polemicists aiming at other objectives.

It will be understood, I hope, that I am not excluding theology from the field of investigating man and society; but theology must submit to rules common to every cognitive undertaking. For this, on *new* grounds, it must again raise the whole question of the

revealed. It is not just a matter of *tolerating* the co-existence of discourse that each tradition pronounces about itself; it is necessary to explain first and foremost the historical, psychological and anthropological conditions of the emergence and functioning of any tradition, and then of the three monotheistic traditions. It will at that point be possible to envisage a theology of relations between Scripture, Revelation, and Tradition in societies of the Book.

Reference Notes

¹ See M. Arkoun, "L'Islam dans l'histoire", *Maghreb: Machrek*, 102 (1983), pp. 5-22

² I distinguish necessary referents and *usul*: the first constitute the stable level of Islam and remain open to any exploration or critical analysis; they could not be the object of an orthodox or dogmatic discussion; the second, on the contrary, have long been studied by the two disciplines, *usul al-din*, or theology, and *usul al-fiqh*, or methodology-epistemology of law. The *usul* are subjective references in the sense that each school proposes definitions and uses for them.

³ See M. Arkoun, *Lectures du Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve-Larose, 1982)

⁴ On all these terms, see *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Maisonneuve-Larose, 1960-1973); on *khabar* see L. Souami, "Introduction à la théorie du *khabar* chez Jahiz: définition et constitution", in *Studia Islamica*, 53 (1961), pp. 27-50

⁵ One will find in the *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, s.v. *hadith*, the references to all the classic text editions. The most recent critical account is given by G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)

⁶ Ibn 'Arabi, *La profession de foi*, R. Daladrière, tr. (Paris: Editions Orientales, 1978), p. 87. To this *hadith*, one should add all those that are habitually cited to combat the *bid'a*. See M. Talbi, "Les *Bida'*", *Studia Islamica*, 52 (1960), pp. 43-78

⁷ See M. Arkoun, "Pour un remembrement de la conscience islamique", in *Pour une critique de la Raison islamique* (Paris: Maisonneuve-Larose, 1984)

⁸ Y. Congar, *La tradition et les traditions*. I "Essai historique" and II "Essai théologique" (Paris, Fayard, 1963)

⁹ The text by which Muhammad is to have designated 'Ali is untiringly cited and commended on by the Shi'ites under the title, *hadith ghadir khumm*. See *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, s.v.

¹⁰ The Kharijite line obviously must not be neglected, especially from the perspective of the Tradition in its totality, which I shall define below. Umayyad persecution hurt the Kharijites even more than the Shi'ites and had effects disastrous to knowledge about the currents of thought and the forces present in the first century A.H. Fervent witnesses of the most decisive struggles, the Kharijites were pushed back by the Umayyads, and then by the Fatimids in the Maghrib, toward the far peripheries of the Empire. The small communities that still subsist (e.g. the Mozabites in Algeria) continue to bear witness to a sensibility and a store of knowledge rejected by the Sunni and Shi'ite powers. See *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, s.v. *Ibadiyya*

¹¹ See J. Berque, *Ulemas, fondateurs, insurgés du Maghreb XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Sinbad, 1982); *Islam in Tribal Societies, from the Atlas to the Indus*, Akbar S. Ahmed and David M. Hart, eds. (London, 1984)

¹² See A. Laroui, *La crise des intellectuels arabes; traditionisme ou historicisme* (Paris: Maspero, 1974)

¹³ Demographic pressure, secularisation, nationalisation, substitution of an economy of profit and productivity for the ethic of poverty and scorn for the world, the Western model of consumption, etc.

¹⁴ I cite this text for two reasons: first, I agree with the comments of Y. Congar on the pertinence of his vocabulary and approach to tradition faced with positivist criticism in the context of modernist crisis very closely related to that which Islam is at present undergoing; second, my objective is to use the example of Islam to work my way up to two levels of thought infrequently or never addressed until now: the elaborating of the concept of Tradition in its totality for the three revealed religions (*ahl al-kitab*), and the opening of the way to an anthropology of tradition and modernity.

¹⁵ Juynboll, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ See A. J. Greimas, *Du sens II* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), pp. 115-133

¹⁷ See P. Ricoeur, *Temps et récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1983)

¹⁸ See my *Lectures du Coran* and *Pour une critique de la Raison islamique*

¹⁹ S. Breton, *Écriture et Révélation* (Paris: Cerf, 1979), p. 155

²⁰ See what I have said about this in "Autorité et pouvoir en Islam", in *Pour une critique*

²¹ Paris: Gallimard, 1978

²² Y. Congar, *op. cit.* vol. II, pl. 163. Compare the way in which Ibn Taymiyya and the Sunni tradition present the *Sahaba*. See my *Pensée arabe*, 2nd ed. (Paris: P. U. F., 1979), p. 20

²³ In Christianity, *modernus* was employed for the first time around 480-500 to designate the passage from Roman antiquity to Christianity. See a good historical account of modernity in the West in H. R. Jauss, *Pour une esthétique de la réception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), pp. 158-209, and what I have said on the subject for Islam in *L'Islam, hier, demain*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1982), pp. 120-137

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ For the West, one may consult in particular F Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme XVe-XVIIIe siècle*, vol 3 (Paris: A Colin, 1979); for Islam, B Lewis, *Comment l'Islam a découvert l'Europe* (Paris: La Découverte, 1984); A Hourani, *Europe and the Middle East* (London, 1980)

²⁶ Semiotics seems to me to be at present the discipline that crosses most effectively the national, ideological, and traditional frontiers of discourse with the knowledge it conveys

²⁷ M Rodinson, *La fascination de l'Islam* (Paris: Maspero, 1980)

²⁸ It would be necessary to emphasise even more all the scholarship and thought that have brought to fruition the most positive contributions of the great initiators of modernity I am thinking, for example, of the stimulating readings of Descartes by F Alquié

²⁹ By unitarian modernity I mean the historical and cultural process by which Western thought, from the thirteenth-fourteenth century on, has imposed a model both explanatory and historically active, which sanctions the dissociation of the subject from his body and asserts a set of propositions and concepts summed up in *classical metaphysics*: transcendent ontology; Promethean time of Progress and Evolution and then Development; concrete space of productivity, legitimisation through Secular Reason, oppressive manipulation of groups with phantasmic constructions that allow the emergence of "great men": the state; the nation; democracy; universal; suffrage; secularisation and separation of powers; equality; liberty; fraternity; the Great Leap Forward, and so on

³⁰ That is what I have tried to do in several essays in *Pour une critique*

³¹ I distinguish ideological manipulation from semiotic manipulation: the former is tactical, strategic, cynical; it controls all the strategies of domination in international life and political gamesmanship in order to obtain or keep power in the national sphere; the latter is inherent in every enunciation; it designates the operations of selection that every speaker performs in the language

³² Under the direction of B Lauret and F Refoulé, 5 vols (Paris: Cerf, 1982-1983)

³³ *Initiation*, vol 1, p 12

³⁴ *Ibid*

³⁵ M Talbi's contribution on Islam is purely descriptive

³⁶ *Initiation*, vol 2, pp 378-407

³⁷ See M Arkoun, "Le problème de l'authenticité divine du Coran", in *Lectures du Coran*, loc cit

³⁸ Concerning Islam, the Mu'tazilite School has gone fairly far in examining the question: see Marie Bernard, *Le problème de la connaissance d'après le Mughni du cadi 'Abd al-Jabbar* (Algiers, 1982)