

ISLAM FACING DEVELOPMENT

*“D'emblée, l'univers apparait partagé entre
l'élan des forces et la définition des formes.”*

(R. Huyghe)

It is difficult to make valid statements on a subject over which the most distressing commonplaces are poured out daily and which escapes, in large measure, the competence of any one man.* Since the area for all fruitful reflection is encumbered by knotty and prejudicial diagrams, the first task must be to clear an empty space in which to inscribe some concepts and some measures appropriate to the historical and sociological situation of the Islamic countries. However, the situation itself is very little understood because of the very backward state of modern Islamological studies. Under these conditions, it will be understood that theoretical and practical thought cannot avoid

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Islam Facing Development

encountering obstacles in the question of Islam's development. True scientific research consists in posing *real* problems *well*, not so much in defining more or less durable solutions. That does not mean that theory must develop in parallel with practice: the decisions of political man have such a greater import because they are inscribed in a problematic at once large and rigorous. We shall try to surmount the obstacles that hinder reflection and distort the results of the best-intentioned action, by (1) discarding the false problems and (2) posing the essential question.

I. FALSE PROBLEMS

The whole debate commences from the notion of development or, more accurately, from the absence of a precise and properly chosen notion of development. The Western Nations, (Europe, U.S.S.R., North America), stirred by harsh rivalries and swept along by an increasingly accelerated history, have frenetically investigated socio-economic growth. A confidence in the maturity and universality of their classical civilization or in the infallibility of Marxist ideology has led them *all* to see the problems of man as solved, except for those of *national* glory and power. The "national" community is at once the instrument and the heir of a materialistic civilization whose most spectacular deployments we are all familiar with today.

But such a civilization, to develop, must search out raw materials and manpower wherever they are plentiful in the world. The result has been this iron law which, since the sixteenth century, has not ceased to control the historical evolution of what are called rich countries and poor countries. Thus it is that we can put in relief a more and more implacable *correlation* between the Christian and Moslem countries which border the Mediterranean.

This is not the place for a lengthy description of this correlation which has gone blithely neglected for some time by the historiographies of both areas—the one for ideological reasons, the other from ignorance. It will suffice to show how the Marxist and capitalist ideology of development have been transposed with some aggravating modalities into the Islamic climate.

The undeniable successes of technological civilization have imposed the polarities of developed/under-developed (or backward), rich/poor, Western/Third World, etc., paired off from an ethico-political vocabulary destined to veil the real weight of relations ("community," "cooperation," "aid," "friendship"...). It is within this complex that the ancient colonies, having become "privileged partners," are realizing the necessity of promoting an economic politics, the models of which must be borrowed either from popular democracies or from liberal democracies. Since the 1950's, we have been witnessing an expansion (though very unequal) of the "planning" mentality, notably in the Islamic countries. This mentality now implies certain modes of thought, practical programs, conceptions of man and history for which Islamic societies as such, with individual evolutions, are not in the least prepared.

Thus, unending debates have resulted which follow one another with increasing vehemence over false problems. In lectures, conversation, magazines, journals, school texts, etc., there are indefatigable demonstrations that Islam is not only compatible with socialism but taught and employed it before the Western experiments. It is repeated that nothing in the Koran precisely contradicts economic growth. Conversely, this growth could not prejudice the quality of religious sentiment and, in any case, Islam could not allow itself to be invaded by the materialistic errors of the West... In other words, the "developed/under-developed" polarity obliges Islamic societies to reinforce the *ideology of combat* already stirred up by the "colonizer/colonial" polarity. The debates summon forth fragments of history and philosophy, as well, to justify certain new political, social, and economic policies. The research will seek integration (and not merely justification) in the Islamic tradition or the national patrimony, of ideas, systems, concepts, and practical methods by the hastiest and most surreptitious assimilation, all of which have a date and place of birth located, from all evidence, in the western countries. The adoption of the "national" idea, with all the pains and effort that accompanied it in the West, is very characteristic in this regard.

It is very important to note how this ideological use of Islamic and modern cultural scrap pieces goes hand in hand with a style of "development." For many reasons, the latter

takes its own time, is sectorial and, above all, dependent on the political and military strategies of the "big ones." The rapidly multiplying demand for manufactured products creates a dependence on industrial countries, whence the limiting measures taken by certain countries. But there are two areas where the priority of needs is satisfied: the information media (press, radio, television) and education. In the economic and political context of certain contemporary Islamic countries, the priority accorded to those two sectors of development is not necessarily beneficial. It can easily be shown, in fact, that mass media and education are the instruments of mythologizing and ideologizing more than liberation in the modern world, generally, but even more so in societies invested with modernity. Long and minute analyses¹ would be necessary to show how Islam has acted in rapport with the necessity and the style of each socio-economic politics in social programs and in displays of ideology. The Arabic- or Islamic-style culture thus tends to become an ideological excrescence all the more oppressive because socio-economic development is restrained either by exterior pressure (it suffices to mention Israel here) or a defective interior strategy or the compounding of the two difficulties. So false problems proliferate in every area. They are organized into themes which are commonplace to the "cultivated" man and the militant. These themes are interdependent and constitute in turn a rigid scheme which Abdallah Laroui has partly described by the name "contemporary Arab ideology."² Let us briefly recall the lines of force in this ideology which nourishes itself on various mythologies. Let us be quite precise, however, in envisaging the notion of ideology and mythology here from a strictly anthropological point of view. It is in no way a matter of judging a culture to be "under-developed" or "obsolescent" if it commences from a totally emancipated culture in possession of inexhaustible intellectual resources. On the contrary, let us

¹ An interesting example of this type of research has just been produced by O. Carré: *Le contenu socio-économique des manuels d'enseignement religieux musulmans dans l'Égypte actuelle*, in *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1970/1. See also the very suggestive work of Sayyid 'Uways: *Zâhirait irsâl al-rasâ'il ilâ qarîb al-imâm al-shâfi 'î*, Cairo, 1965. This is the kind of inquiry which must be cultivated in order to diagnose in time the evils menacing Islam in its test of development.

² Ed. Maspéro, 1967.

continue to denounce precisely that ethnographic mentality which has made and continues to make the most serious ravages in a whole Islamological literature. Even within the Western framework, the ethnographic mentality has imperiously utilized its clichés which are then taken up by large sections of the various elites formed in Western universities. They begin merely by picking up the notion that the civilization and culture developed in the West are those of the *white* man (*vs.* “colored men,” “barbarians,” “savages,” “underdeveloped people,” those “developing,” “backward,” etc...) *Christian* (*vs.* “non-Christians,” as the recent Vatican II text puts it), *male* (*vs.* female), *adult* (*vs.* young). This mental attitude is expressed in France, for example, by the popularization of the “colonization” notion: one hears repeatedly that Paris colonizes the provinces, adults colonize young people, men colonize women, etc.... Let us keep in mind that these clichés function at full efficiency on the Moslem side: a person *Arab*, *Moslem*, *male*, and *adult* exerts everywhere a supremacy all the more uncontested because it hides behind nationalist ideology, temporarily. In addition, anthropological procedure, new and insufficiently disseminated in the West, is still practically unknown in Islamic thought. Social, political, and cultural anthropology teaches that every society, in fact, secretes mythologies adapted to the levels of culture of its constituent groups. Furthermore, modern societies need an official ideology to assure a certain cohesion of the whole. Mythology consists in gathering up realities which are desirable, not those perceivable. It abandons its primary senses to take refuge in secondary senses which transform all sorts of concrete givens of human existence into innocent truths, ideal images or maleficent powers. Ideology claims to purge mythology of all legendary and popular representations, effective only for presenting a rationalized vision of the present and future of society, a conceptualized evocation (cf. socialist ideology), to be sure, apparently serious but, in fact, as misleading, dangerous, and *functional* as mythology itself. To each type of social and economic organization corresponds a type of culture, that is to say an accentuation of knowledge which is rational, rationalizing, or mythologizing. Thus to speak of an ideological or mythological emphasis in contemporary Islamic culture is quite simply to discover a level and a style of economic and social development.

Islam Facing Development

The reader will easily recognize that these exact points are indispensable in giving the themes of Arabic-Islamic³ ideology their true significance as they are now set out. We shall take up six of them:

1) The *theme of the West* is doubtless the most powerful and decisive. It translates into an acceptance of the *fact*—conscious or unconscious—of numerous cultural models (with their original ideological import) and a mass denial inspired by imperialistic action. This distinction between the positive and negative aspects of the same civilization attains the rigidity and simplicity of a Manichean vision. It does not proceed from a scientific understanding of Western civilization; from this fact, it transfers (and even aggravates) the insufficiencies and follies from which the West is laboriously seeking to disengage itself at this moment.

2) The *theme of the "individual" nation* which combines an artificial continuity in Islamic history and a discontinuity in recent history. Each of the "Arab" nations, in particular, wishes to recover some fragments of the exploded myth of the Mohammedan community (*Umma*) and to see itself at the same time as a contemporary and *original* construction. Thus, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco would wish to be "Arab" nations individually but, nonetheless, "individual."⁴ And these divergent wishes, borrowed notably from France, assert themselves and are realized in the framework of centralizing and standardizing nationalist ideology.

3) The *theme of the superiority of Islam* and of its civilization unjustly suppressed by efforts of Christian missionaries linked with imperialist aggression. This theme is one of the constants in Islamic consciousness since some Christians and, even more, the Jews of Medina have refused to recognize Mohammed as Prophet and Messenger of God. Various historical junctures (the struggle against Byzantium, the Crusades, Spanish

³ The same themes with some correctives are found among non-Arabic-speaking Moslems. For the sake of convenience and reasons of competence, this analysis is limited to the Arabic countries.

⁴ The frequency of this word in conversations, lectures, articles, and essays is very indicative of a desire for the "recovery of self." See for example the Tunisian review, *Al-Fiker*; the two recent Algerian reviews *Al-Asāla* and *Al-taqāfa*; or, with a different point of view, A. Mazouni: *Culture et enseignement en Algérie et au Maghreb*, ed. Maspéro, 1969.

Reconquest, the competition for the Mediterranean, colonial conquests, imperialist oppression) have transformed a profound spiritual debate into an ideology of combat.⁵

4) The *theme of a return to the sources of Islam*, a corollary of the above and variously handled by *integriste* believers and liberal intellectuals. In the face of “values” fiercely proclaimed by the West, there is the reclaiming of even more ancient and “authentic” ones. A survival of mythic consciousness is here rediscovered for which the senses have *already* been set free *in illo tempore*—in the inaugurating time of the Revelation for Islamic consciousness, a survival explained by the permanence of archaic socio-economic structures (another indication of a “development” scarcely begun).

5) The *theme of Arabization*, insofar as it is linked to a return to the sources and is handled by political leaders more than by men of learning, proves to be at once efficacious in the short-term for reaching the first stage of national construction and dangerous in the long-term when seen from the perspective of a liberating culture. This does not mean that the Arab language cannot inspire a liberating culture. It has amply proven its capacity for this high office in the past. But the essentially ideological use made of the Arabization theme accumulates false problems, multiplies emotional solutions and reinforces the difficulties of a *global* development of society.

6) The *theme of the solidarity of the state, the party, religion, and national culture* becomes explicit in certain countries by the creation of a “minister of national orientation” or a “*ministère de l’enseignement originel*.” This theme, in itself, is an orchestration of those above. It too features in a long historical continuity, as much in the Western as in the Mohammedan world. The caliphate has always linked its destiny to that of an “orthodox” Islam (*sunnite* for Abbasides, *shi’ite* for Fatimites) and an Arabic-Islamic culture. This solidarity is perhaps necessarily due to the present imperatives of development; but it is fraught with danger for the *quality* of the civilization which Moslems wish to found.

⁵ For the ancient period, cf. E. Sivan: *L’Islam et la croisade. Idéologie et propagande dans les réactions musulmanes aux croisades*, Paris, 1968. For the modern period, cf. J. Berque: *Les Arabes d’hier à demain*, 2nd ed., Seuil, 1969 and all of his work concerned with the future of contemporary Islam.

Despite all warnings, many readers will have interpreted this essay, unfortunately, as an inadmissible criticism of current experiments in the Arabic-Islamic world. Let us then repeat to these readers: to persist in turning a fervent effort to liberate an area for constructive thought into a sterile critique is merely to translate the *effects* of the ideology which have just been described. It demonstrates precisely the truth of our analysis, namely, that for a given stage of development, it is structurally impossible for a great number of persons to grasp a certain scientific language.

Let us be confident and try, nevertheless, to evoke now some conditions of a strong re-entry by Islam into a civilization obsessed by development.

II. THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION

A pretense of having acquired sufficient knowledge to delineate *the* essential question today would be ridiculous. What we are about to say rests, in fact, on an intellectual attitude common to all intellectual researchers who have themselves undergone the characteristic epistemological mutation of our times. This mutation is signalled quite simply by the following proposition: *there is no innocent discourse*. There lies the feeling of a whole current of today's thought which desires the destruction of language. And some semiologists or semioticians speak of a "destructive genesis of sense-meaning."⁶ This ambiguous formula signifies that the discourse of the human sciences resides in endlessly beginning over again. Every action by which the mind tries to rescue a neutral space is indissociably an action by which it reshapes the same space, whence the difficulty, doubtless inherent in our situation, in speaking of a place not yet overrun.

For anyone who has spent long years with the great texts of Islamic thought (after their exploitation by Western Islamology on the one hand and by the Islamic Renaissance [*Nahdha*] on the other), it appears that *the essential question* for Islam facing

⁶ A formula coined by J. Kristéva.

development—or for anyone wishing to reinstate Islam in the current effort toward human liberation—may be formulated thus:

How is it possible to assure the human spirit of the conditions and means of a permanent reconquest of its liberty even while continually going beyond the forms of structures, themes, meanings, procedures and styles which tend to constitute a tradition, that is, a place of repetition, conservation, enclosure?⁷

A philosopher's question, will come the scornful reply, or a deception; and what is worse, it is an idealistic philosopher's question! Let us not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of a hackneyed objection which proves how the mind has a propensity to take up structures already *known*, the labels established by a long tradition, so as not to abandon its habitual frontier. Let us try rather to enrich the old controversy over idealism and realism by showing how our essential question applies in the case of contemporary Islam.

Our question amounts to asking: what are the conditions and the means of a liberation of Islamic thought in the present-day world?

III. a) THE CONDITIONS OF LIBERATION

Let us choose three from among the most decisive:

—a break between the East and West;

—gain in scientific understanding of the levels of traditional Islam;

—acknowledgement of some control over the dialectic between economic and cultural development.

Taking the points in order:

1) *The East-West interrelationship*

The breaking of this relationship, which has certain historical manifestations noted above, can only occur if both parties renounce secular schemes of essentialist and substantialist thought. On the Western side, there are converging, sustained efforts

⁷ That does not mean that every tradition is necessarily a place of confinement: one must distinguish the tradition which perpetuates the witness to the spirit's great conquests of itself and of the world, as well as the vestiges of its retrained insolence; the traditions which furnish the designs of expansion for some social groups or for nations in competition with other groups or nations. See *infra* the remarks on the Koranic fact and the Islamic fact.

Islam Facing Development

underway to free science from the "Cartesian model."⁸ The progress of linguistics, psychology, historical knowledge, anthropology, and (notably) biology likewise underline the importance of making the Marxist model flexible. A living, fervent research, embodying vigilance and critical intransigence, is progressively separating the false divinities which the intelligence, in common cause with "good sense" and "common sense," has faithfully worshipped and still reveres. In place of a science divided into *a*) a theory more or less dominated by metaphysical suppositions and the paradigms of *one* revelation, and *b*) a practice left to the engineer and laborer, the orientation is towards a science of Action, that is, the mastery of the dialectical play between knowledge and *praxis*. This new position of the intellect before itself, as the power of apprehending action and the real, prescribes a re-reading of its entire history, not to repudiate it haughtily, but to understand better its operating conditions. For example, it could explain why it has linked the destiny of the human spirit to the imperialism of the *logos* which has claimed to account logically for all reality with the help of a few coherent models.

However, this effort at "de-constructing," which must precede all fundamental action, can begin only in the West itself. All the researchers have not been equally converted. And what progress has been realized scarcely even touches the immense undergrowth of scholarly culture which perpetuates in a great many points the mental energy of the Enlightenment. That is, as far as the attitude of the West is concerned vis-à-vis foreign civilizations, the decisive task remains to be undertaken. In regard to Islam, one notices in France, for example, a decline of interest lately in Arabic studies. Increasingly, it is considered sufficient merely to take note of the gap between mental attitudes and the uselessness of every effort to reduce it. In other words, the West takes a critical regard of history which surely goes beyond its own boundaries.

How then do we consider these problems in turning our attention toward what we continue to call, very incorrectly, the "Orient" to maintain the superficial antithesis between the

⁸ R. Bastide has lately drawn attention to the ill-fated persistence of this model in *Anthropologie appliquée*, Payot, 1971.

source of light and its setting? In restricting ourselves to the Arabic-Islamic domain, let us say that the ideology of combat reinforces precisely the interrelationship which is to be broken. Even when combatting the false representations imposed by colonial science, even when forcing themselves to recover an identity suppressed by the colonialists, a great number of Arab intellectuals are not able to fend off a methodological and epistemological mimeticism. Whether their work be on modern lines or traditional ones,⁹ all of it generally relies on the same postulates which, in the West, have nourished "bad conscience." Let us recall these briefly:

—there exists a sovereign subject-individual, capable of independent judgement, of free choice between True and False, Good and Evil;

—the sovereignty of this subject is acted out on a level of clear and distinct consciousness, the highest instance in which he enunciates judgements of ontology, morals, logic, politics, etc...

—this results in a genetic, universal, categorical, normative deductive, objectivist, essentialist, substantialist science;

—by integrating the scraps of Marxist science (the total absence of Freudian, Nietzschean, Lukacsian, etc..., critiques will be noticed), Islamic scientific procedure becomes, furthermore, positivist, historicist, and, by extension, dialectical.

To support such postulates, one could easily construct an "individual personality," recover a "lost identity," restore "essential values," designate *Maux-substances*, write a national history describing objectively the continual march towards Progress. All these themes are heavy with *converging* sediment of classical Islamic culture and Enlightenment philosophy. And the moment when the West recognizes its shortcomings and errors, Arabic thought assures it a clamorous survival. In other

⁹ Deliverance from this opposition which implies an arbitrary value judgement about the scientific validity of the two lines of procedure is becoming urgent. What matters for Arabs and Westerners is that the opposition from now on must be made between the classical structure dominated by the Platonic-Aristotelian model (even as revised by Descartes and Kant) and the modern structure which incorporates the *philosophie du soupçon* (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud), the "dimensions of historical consciousness," and the semiological and semiotic science presently being worked out. Certainly, one must add here the philosophical implications of the exact science (biology, astrophysics, mathematics).

words, the epistemological split has never been so profound between two very similar worlds until now.¹⁰ This split, it is true, reflects the distance between post-industrial societies and societies which still conserve large archaic sectors.

That means that the East-West interrelationship will be broken only over the long term. One can only hope to hasten this separation within the Islamic world through the downfall of ideological empire.¹¹

2) *The levels of Islamic tradition*

One of the most significant examples of the epistemological break is found in the present-day attitudes of Christians and Moslems toward their respective traditions. Christian thought is in the process of making the best possible use of the positive contributions from the human sciences. The Bible, the Evangelists, the great canonical texts are becoming the object of a fundamental reexamination which, despite some reticence and timidity, is oriented toward a redefinition of the role and significance of religion. If traditional religious sensibility has undergone a distinct regression in the collective Western consciousness, one can also observe a change of tonality, mode of expression, and even destination¹² within the mass of believers, as well. Thus, once again, the notion is verified that culture and, consequently, its interdependent religion, follow the destiny of the global structure: they reflect and lay the foundations in turn for each stage of civilization.

The same clearly follows for Islam: the permanence of a religious sensibility of the messianic and eschatological type in a large sector of society indicates a level of civilization or development, as we say nowadays. One hears it often repeated that "modern" Islamic thought is disconcerted even at raising crucial questions about the Koran and the tradition piously handed on to our time. This is true: but one must add there is neither a public capable of integrating these questions in its vision of the

¹⁰ See the note above and my study, "Logocentrisme et vérité religieuse dans la pensée islamique" (to appear in *Studia Islamica*, XXXV).

¹¹ That would necessitate finding a language which would take into account the functional necessity of ideology in the phases of the struggle against exterior and interior repressions while completely denouncing its misdeeds.

¹² An examination of the important work on evolution by Christendom, especially since Vatican II, would be necessary here.

present world, nor spiritual authorities both respected *and* capable of conceiving such questions. This is why this point is listed as the second *preliminary* condition for the total liberation of Islamic thought.

We shall have to manage here with a quick enunciation of three priorities of tasks which ought to prepare Islam as a religion for its decisive confrontations. We must (1) initiate a re-reading of the Koran; (2) recover the *exhaustive* Islamic tradition; and (3) struggle against damaged or damaging traditions.

In a text which is disagreeably short and, consequently, provisional, we have already sketched out the main lines of a re-reading of the Koran.¹³ It is not a matter of adding an *interpretive* reading to all those which have already been hitherto attempted by Moslem commentators but a *plural* reading, as Roland Barthes suggests.¹⁴ The interpretation would lead back to the primary sense (which the Arabic word *ta'wil* denotes exactly), already given, which is knowable and definable as a model of significances elaborated by the human mind. This is why all traditional readings of the Koran utilize either deduction (*instinbât*), logical inference (*istidlâl*), mental projection reaching for the hidden sense (*bâtin*), or, more commonly, lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical analysis. In every case, the reading is linear: it has a *point de départ*—theological or philosophical postulates—and a *point d'arrivée*—one meaning linked to the sense.

The plural reading, by comparison, opens up all possible senses by linking them to the immanent structures of the language, on the one hand, and to the existential order articulated in this language, on the other. The reading simply considers the language

¹³ Cf. M. Arkoun, *Comment lire le Coran*, in *Le Coran*, tr. Kasimirski, Garnier-Flammarion, 1970.

¹⁴ Cf. *S/Z*, ed. Seuil, 1970. It is interesting to note here that all the author's critical and analytical ingeniousness in defining a plural reading of a novel by Balzac is not indispensable in the case of the Koran. For example, his arbitrary division of the text into *lexies*, to effect a "broken text" and thus open up several "entrances" within it, has been done for the Koran from the time when it was collected in an official "vulgate." Commentators have emphasized the *lacunae* in the text before, while still taking into account presumed intrusions, as well. In due time, this point will be taken up again in our work-in-progress, *Pour une relecture du Coran*.

Islam Facing Development

in its operation as a *double articulation*.¹⁵ On these grounds, the reading ought to utilize the considerable contribution of classical commentaries but only through divesting them of all their presuppositions. It thus permits us to restore all the living aspects of the *definitive* tradition, which will be defined next,¹⁶ into present-day understanding.

The re-reading of the Koran is, in effect, an intellectual and, if possible, an existential regaining of control, not only over the revealed text but over the totality of historical conditions and applications linked, on whatever grounds, to the fundamental Word (called *kalâmu-llah* by Moslems). This complete integration obviously remains an ideal toward which the historian *ought* to aim while never able to attain it. But by upholding the demands of this ideal, he contributes to the orientation of research toward knowledge of the definitive tradition and, by the same token, to the discrediting of the damaged or damaging tradition. It is only by this latter refutation that history can escape the ideological use to which it has been put within each culture's confines. For every tradition, in the course of its development, exerts a pressure on itself for selection; according to the needs of the group and the demands of the moment, it accepts or rejects new elements, it emphasizes or represses antecedent applications, it approves or contests the established powers, etc... Thus, Islam's split into several traditions—Sunnites, Shi'tes, and Kharijites, all mutually hostile—has brought about such ravages in Koranic education for each of them that it is at once presumptuous and useless to pretend to pose and resolve correctly, for example, the problem of Islam facing development. And yet, there is no lack of audacious minds who boldly advance on such an obstructed road! The intellectual with scarcely a smattering of historical and philosophical culture, the militant fed on massive certitudes, the fervent believer, the *za'im* overwhelmed with responsibility—they all follow the same pattern: Islam is a perfect religion; it largely anticipated the socialist and democratic experiences which Europe came to more

¹⁵ On the definition of this idea, cf. A. Martinet, *Eléments de linguistique générale*, A. Colin, 1969, and *La double articulation linguistique*, in *Travaux du cercle linguistique de Copenhague*, 5 (1949).

¹⁶ From this perspective, Ṭabari's commentary (m. 310/923) comes closest to a plural reading.

lately; nothing in its background denies economic or social development; historical accidents and, notably, imperialism have hindered the complete fulfilment of all its spiritual and temporal wealth!

This pattern has an undeniable pragmatic value; it satisfies the emotional need for harmony between the "principles of Islam" and the inevitable upheavals which follow development. But, at the same time, it diverts us from all scientific reflection about the *real* rapport between religion and development. Such thinking ought to concern itself initially with the recollection of Islamic knowledge *by passing over, for the first time in the history of Islam*, the damaging notion of orthodoxy. Even today, the Sunnite, and Shi'ite, traditions continue to live separately, ignoring each other, and even fighting among themselves with the same arguments as in the Middle Ages. The ecumenical movement, so promising in regard to Christendom, is unfortunately non-existent in Islam. It is not a question of a sentimental reconciliation which would reinforce the ideological and romantic climate of contemporary Islamic thought. What we are all praying for and trying to impose is a *re-connaissance* in the literal sense, that is, *a birth repeated*,¹⁷ according to the founding intention of the Koranic message and according to all the attempts at actualization and historical incarnation of this intention. The theological anathemas that the "doctors" have hurled at each other during the centuries and which their direct descendants—the ideologues—continue to hurl have finally obscured the fundamental distinction between the *Koranic fact* and the *Islamic fact*. The Koranic fact is the appeal addressed to the human conscience (the Koran always says, "O mankind") to adjust it to the existential conditions of its rise and flowering. This appeal is heard within *one* language and *across* the political, economic, moral, and social experience of seventh-century Arabia. The passage from the Koranic fact to the Islamic fact which is its concrete historical projection was effected in the Arabic language and the contingent support of the Revelation. Increasingly, under the combined pressure of historical necessity

¹⁷ This is the true sense of the verb *'ql* in the Koran, incorrectly translated by "reflect" or "reason about" in conformity with its late entrance and dissemination throughout philosophical literature.

Islam Facing Development

and diverse currents of thought, the Islamic fact usurped the sense and the import of the Koranic fact by an arbitrary—or rather ideological¹⁸—progression from the immanent to the transcendental, from the historical to the transhistorical, from the *existentiel* to the *existential*,¹⁹ from the law to the spirit, from the closed code to the open Message. One could place the first appearance of this substitution at the triumph of an official Islam with *Mu'awiya*. Doubtless, the desperate struggles between the various politico-religious parties will again sustain for some time a fruitful dialogue between the Koranic fact and the Islamic fact; but the spirit of orthodoxy finally interposes itself each time that a group succeeds in imposing its powers in a specific political area.²⁰ These orthodoxies have been solidified in the same way that Islam today draws from the individual national parties, so that, when one speaks of Islam, one is referring, in fact, to an abstract entity whose real content varies with each culture and its ethno-political situation.

All these damaged and damaging traditions must be passed over by modern Islamic thought by the process of integrating within its vision the *true* history, not only of “Islam’s dwelling-place” (*Dar al-Islam*) but the entire geopolitical area in which Islam has felt the rapport of influence or competition. Just as in the nineteenth century (in the case of the *Nahdha*), there are today some Western Islamologists who are presently putting in motion this effort of revision, enlargement, “de-construction,” and reconquest of the past. During this period, the Moslems themselves have been dominated by the task of definition, defense, and illustration of their respective “national” personalities. In this light, the example offered by the three Maghreb countries

¹⁸ We want to underline the functional character of all the doctrinal elaborations indicated by Islamologists: cf. H. Laoust, *Les schismes dans l’Islam*, Payot, 1965, and M. Arkoun, *Contribution à l’étude de l’humanisme arabe au IV^e-V^e siècle*, ed. Vrin, 1970.

¹⁹ This important distinction owes to R. Bultmann. The existential order refers to the kind of universal structures of existence which are postulated by revealed texts and great philosophies—thus, the kind that exhaustive analysis can open up (as N. Chomsky does with syntactical structures) for concrete existence as inspired by these texts or philosophies. That is to say, how fruitful is the existential idea for the exegete, in particular.

²⁰ We would need to recall here all the “dynasties” which have ruled Islamic territory at one time or another: cf. H. Laoust, *op cit.*; and C. Cahen, *L’Islam des origines à l’empire ottoman*, Bordas, 1970.

since their independence is particularly significant: it seems that the effort toward open Islamic thought must pass through a phase of rigid "national orthodoxy." One can only hope that this phase is short and does not leave too deep traces which would compromise the chances of intellectual liberation.²¹

3) *Economy and culture*

All the reflections above do not overlook the fact that the economy and culture condition each other reciprocally in a positive or negative way. It is evident that if the Koranic fact indicates a horizon of the human mind, its realization in the Islamic fact renders it responsible for economic and social development. Conversely, the thing is not inert; it mediates a human rapport—hence, a content of conscience which assigns it a status (*hukm* in Moslem law) with the help of some religious categories made explicit in an ethic, a law, a culture.

It is because this reciprocal conditioning is itself becoming permanent—the thing or the pattern ceaselessly threatening to impose itself as the intangible criteria—that alertness is necessary to safeguard the rights of a free culture facing the threats, so often described but scarcely avoided, of reification, alienation, and the "crisis of civilization." The problem, it is true, is no longer posed in these terms for Third World countries in general. Too many delays remain to be made up; too many miseries to be alleviated; too many gaps to fill. However, some socio-economic structures have been noted which tend to brake the movement of an emancipating culture by imposing forms of particularistic culture. Thus, those directly responsible for economic development would be either foreign technocrats rebaptized as advisers or local experts educated in Western universities: in both cases, these men are blissfully ignorant of all the problems posed by history and the present renaissance of Islamic culture. Confronted with this official force, a refusal is hurled back, more or less "coordinated" by the governments, some partisans of a "pure Islam," and by the simplistic opposition between spiritualism and materialism. This group combines the drawbacks of a romantic representation of Islam and those of an equally

²¹ National orthodoxy is evident, for example, in the obligation felt by young Tunisian researchers to choose a "Tunisian" thesis subject. This attitude is justifiable so long as there are, in fact, large areas as yet unexplored; but, eventually, there are dangers, from a strictly scientific point of view.

Islam Facing Development

blissful ignorance of political economy. Between these two movements which animate two antagonistic literatures, the public awareness is situated, solicited by the themes of an ideology from a higher level. Islam assures this public moral comfort, spiritual refuge, and a psychic compensation in the face of the upheavals which affect the traditional equilibrium.

One sees that the difficulty lies in freeing a line of thought which, by completely accepting these sociological givens, effectively controls the dialectic of the economy and culture. It does not appear that some isolated initiatives which already exist would be able to counterbalance the spectacular effects of the three present socio-economic forces. The necessity here is the engaging of an entire political will which agrees to employ the means of liberation now to be described.

III. b) THE MEANS OF LIBERATION

If the above analyses are accurate, it will be admitted that every action in the liberation of Islamic thought must utilize three kinds of means:

- a strategy of development;
- a recognized priority of scientific research;
- an information policy.

One might consider the last two means as part of a *global* strategy of development. This is where we must concentrate the entire analysis.

The guiding idea here is that the difficulty is greater in ensuring an intellectual structure for the community than an economic structure. The illusion of quantitative education and instruction must be discarded: a badly-conceived and badly-administered system of instruction could ensure cultural regression, mental disorganization, and tragic social confusion. The educationalist culture, especially, because of its excesses of simplification, constitutes an ideological mould from which all minds do not easily free themselves. This is why, in the case of the Islamic countries today, the question of knowing whether secondary and higher education or scientific research ought to have priority is raised. Certainly, the ideal consists in coordinating closely all three activities. But it is a fact that in the Arabic-

Islamic countries, for example, scientific research is very little favored by comparison with the immense tasks which urgently need to be accomplished. Let us make clear that the exact sciences are not in question here; the financing necessary to construct a modern laboratory would put too harsh a burden on greatly limited budgets. On this point, countries with poor resources can bring international solidarity into play without endangering their personalities.

On the other hand, scientific research in all the human sciences appears vital for these same countries. Is a global plan of development conceivable without an adequate linguistic instrument? We well know the difficulties against which the politics of Arabization, especially, collides, precisely for want of a linguistic research worthy of the name. Some isolated efforts turn up from time to time; but, as in other areas, the problems are badly framed and the language is left to caprices of usage or the timid intervention of a few professors. For an historian of Arabic thought and civilization, it is saddening to record that neither the Arabic academies nor the governments have succeeded to this day in setting up a scientific common front to resolve a *common* problem.²²

The progress in linguistic research conditions the progress of thought in the other sciences. At the risk of being accused of the worst intentions, we shall venture to observe that "contemporary Arabic thought"²³ exists. Much good will is needed to evidence Arabic philosophical thought in the sense in which it existed in the Middle Ages. Philosophy is the lucid awareness in a civilization: that is all the more so because modern philosophy is expressed by the words of the linguist, the historian, the psychologist, etc... These are the disciplines which must be developed in the Arabic language, at once by a concerted program—in an *international* Arabic center for scientific research—of

²² Some appeals in this direction have been sent out, nevertheless, by such prestigious personages as Taha Husayn. The Arab League founded a bureau of Arabization at Rabat which does commendable work; but it apparently has no connection with the academies of Cairo, Damascus, or Baghdad, themselves isolated from each other! For the priorities of effort to be undertaken in this area, cf. our remarks to the colloquy of Mohammadia (Morocco), in the *Actes du colloque in Etudes philosophiques et littéraires*, Rabat, 1971.

²³ The title of an anthology recently published by A. Abdel Malek, ed. Seuil, 1970.

Islam Facing Development

translations and by autonomous research projects (ethnography, anthropology, sociology, history, geography, dialectology, Islamic languages, foreign languages, the arts).

The *true* culture thus set free by active scientific²⁴ research will then be diffused by secondary and university education and by researchers (i.e. instead of an official ideology) who should reach the greatest number of people. Just as the engineer's inventions are disseminated into the most humble homes in the form of useful objects, so the liberating notions uncovered by research ought to be put at the disposal of all minds. To gauge the import of this idea, it suffices to compare, in France, for example, the teaching of literature and history given in the *classe de première* and that which the best doctoral theses propound. One can also consider the use made of the mass media in this same country which, nonetheless, boasts an appreciable number of top researchers.

These points will seem too summary. In fact, it is very hard to step into the place of all those who dilute a real power by expatiating at length on the modalities of far-reaching action. And one stands firm against all threats of intervention in a domain bristling with obstacles. We know that, for millions, the first question is clothing, food, shelter, and learning to read and write. What authorizes and even obliges the voice of free thought to make itself heard is that among these men stripped of everything, there are others who enjoy privileges of possessions and power without utilizing them for the ends of liberation. In the Islamic countries, as elsewhere, this situation reduces the intellectual to timidity and silence.

* * *

Islam, like all religions, is a recurrent *force* which calls attention to the "situation-limits" of the human condition. Men have believed for a long time that it was possible to capture this *force* and make it incarnate in durable forms. But it is clear that the *force* surges back with an unsuspected vehemence, that the most sacred forms are being smashed, and that it is necessary to

²⁴ Certainly, artistic creation (cinema, television, theater, etc...) should be added here which ought to enrich the information programs in the highest sense.

reconceive and construct from the beginning. Which ones? And how? In the name of whom or of what? This account proposes a possible route as far as Islam and its historical experience are concerned. It will have been noticed that the ordeal of development confronts the Moslems with a well-known alternative: either they choose to adapt some liberal or socialist models to their situation; or else they make an original effort amounting to integration of *all* of their history and *all* the sociological and cultural realities of each country by aiming at effectiveness, above all. In one case, they can obtain a relative affluence and some partial success at the price of a cultural levelling and a rapid disintegration of religion. In the other, they would recover, by the most extensive means, the old debate perpetuated by all religions and philosophies between Being and Possessions. This same debate is imposing itself forcefully on the "developed" countries, so that the real choice for Islam comes back to attaining the stages of economic growth without regard for human cost or building the economy in those stages by turning it, from the outset, into the humanist path already explored by a number of its intellectuals. Actually, the answer to the question thus formulated is easily understood; but it is a matter of rationally formulating the choice and making every effort toward standing firm there.