

From Inter-Religious Dialogue to the Recognition of the Religious Phenomenon

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Modernity has been working since the sixteenth century in western Europe at what Mr. Gauchet has described as the "exit from religion," adding that Christianity alone has been able to gain the historical position of "the religion of the exit from religion."¹ It is indeed the case that the other great religions have not felt, as Christianity has, the intellectual, political and legal necessity to revise their theological foundations radically. Islam in particular has not only been shielded from the fundamental criticisms of intellectual and scientific modernity, but the managers of the sacred have formed alliances with nationalist movements engaged in the anti-colonialist struggle to legitimize wars of liberation and post-independence one-party states. It is true that Islam's mechanisms of state control first came into play in the period of proselytism of the new religion, chiefly between 622 and 632; but state control turned into the complete takeover of the irreducible autonomy of the religious domain (the spiritual sphere) by all the states that emerged after the 1920s (Ataturk's radical experiment) and even more so after the post-1945 liberations.

In any discussion of the way Islam is perceived by the other religions and vice-versa it is important to take the full extent of this major historical development into account, since we are all now expected to conduct our thinking within the *philosophical perspective of the reciprocity of consciences*. That in any event is the position I have always adopted and stubbornly defended as a teacher and researcher in the field of Islamic thought. I have always rejected the discourse of victimization that was *de rigueur* during

and after colonization for all peoples within all the cultures which since the nineteenth century have indeed suffered intolerable oppression; the continuing stress on victimization (media hostility toward Islamic fundamentalism, false image of the "Orient" constructed by orientalists, racist rejection of immigrants, geopolitical control of the world map by the great imperialist powers, and so on) radically distorts what I shall call the *religious question*, which has to be dealt with in the all-embracing universal *question of meaning*. Before the advent of modernity religions have always and everywhere constituted the indispensable framework of all of humankind's humanizing activities, governing the perception, the representation, the formulation of the real in ritual, artistic, conceptual, and institutional terms, the passage to action, in a word the production of what we call cultures and civilizations. That is why one cannot know or recognize a religion without going through the language or languages, the culture or cultures, which it has shaped over the centuries. Before modernity such a process inevitably ended up in conversion, since all interpretations of the world, of humankind, and of history are necessarily linked to the ultimate, unique, fixed and necessary Truth, expressed in and by the "*true religion*" (*din al-haqq* as the Koran puts it, in order to rework and appropriate unto itself a concept already put in place by the two preceding rival religions).

The lesson of modernity was that the structure of truth thus constructed and inhabited was *dogmatic* in the sense that it rested on external factors shielded from sovereign critical reason. This definition precipitated a crisis in the very notion of truth and inaugurated a new regime of cognitive activity; on the threshold of the twenty-first century we can discern the outlines of meaning of a third posture appropriate to what I have called *emergent reason*. This magnifies and deepens the emancipatory struggle led by Enlightenment rationalism in western Europe from the eighteenth century onwards; it rejects the positivist postulates and metaphysical positions that continue to set up an opposition between so-called scientific reason and religious reason; it acquiesces in the practice of the pedagogy of a fruitful educative tension between a *religious reason* reactivated by the monopoly of legal violence acquired by the modern state, a *scientific teletechnological reason*

which determines the restrictive frameworks of all human existence as religious reason has always done, and a *philosophical reason* that itself too rediscovers a favorable context for legitimizing its preeminence with respect to religious and scientific reason in order to protect and enrich interpretative pluralism, to reach out to all the already available worlds of meaning, and to offer possible fresh directions for the pursuit of the never-completed, ever-renewed search for significance.

We know that outside laboratories and teaching and research institutions the interaction between the three types of reason that articulate the history of the contemporary human order is all too frequently experienced in the form of racial exclusion, violent rejection and destructive totalitarianism; emerging reason has the responsibility for managing the violence inherent in the structures of truth promoted and defended by the three historically present postures of reason: the (theologico-ethico-judicial) religious posture, the scientific teletechnological posture that manages globalization, and the philosophical posture still in the grip of the postulates of the modernity of the classical age. It was in order to make the reason operating in the social sciences descend to all the sites where the warring dialectic called *Jihād vs. McWorld* (see the book published under this title by Benjamin R. Barber) manifested itself that I have defended since the 1970s the scientific practice of an *applied islamology*. The fact that my appeal and the odd researcher's example have on the whole been ignored attests to the methodological conservatism and indifference of scholarship to radicalize a critical anthropology of the cultures of the world.

The aim of all these observations is to warn us against any drift toward those sterile and frequently alienating debates about identities trampled under foot, cultures denied recognition, appeals for the restoration of lost "values," oppressed national figures, or forgotten golden ages; mindful of the Algerian example, I am not saying that the struggles of dominated peoples should be abandoned or ignored, but I am saying that those engaged in them must, in their legitimate demands, aim at horizons of meaning shown henceforth by emerging reason, and I am not forgetting either that the expected conversion of dominated minorities is itself only possible if the reason enjoying a position of hegemony

in the great contemporary geopolitical spheres rallies to the strategies of the search for meaning proposed by the emerging reason.

Let us now turn to the examination of the conditions which make possible *Islamic reason*, taken as one of the manifestations of religious reason today, to recognize through the diversity of rationalities shown in the history of cultures the necessity of participating in the struggles of emerging reason; inversely, what conditions must be fulfilled by *hegemonic reason* in today's world to broaden and enrich the questionings of the emerging reason?

Islamic reason and hegemonic reason

I will not repeat here all my definitions and analyses relating to the concept of Islamic reason, but will merely clarify a few points needed to make the concept of hegemonic reason viable in the present context. What I mean by this concept is that all exercise of reason aims at attaining a procedural and cognitive sovereignty able to resist all denials and make itself indispensable for all time to every human intelligence. This quest for a durable and inescapable cognitive validity which applies to everyone is psychologically legitimate: it conveys at once the desire for eternity, the nostalgia of being, and the desire to know, which haunt every human being; but it becomes hegemonic when reason imposes through political, economic and social constraints cognitive systems beyond the reach of free criticism. Where the psychological motif and the will to power coincide, this gives rise to forms of hegemonic reason that are then called Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Western, Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, French, and so on. Islamic reason imposed its hegemony from 660 to about 1200 over the whole Mediterranean basin on which Hellenistic Greece and Rome had already left their mark; it even extended that hegemony to vast areas of Asia and Africa and rooted it in the Arabic language, in the Caliphate and the regimes that replaced it, in works of civilization, and in an anthropology and a metaphysico-religious framework experienced as an imaginary and cultural extension of the Koranic textual corpus. The hegemony thus exercised during the medieval period should not be confused with the ideo-

logical resistance of an Islamist reason faced with the hegemonic strategies of "Western" reason. Islamist reason is more reactive than creative and explorative; it exercises ideological pressure without accompanying its activities with the quest for meaning and the critical spirit that preoccupied medieval Islamic reason.

It will be accepted that the terms *Western* and *Islamic* applied to reason refer to the particular rationalities that are constructed and succeed in imposing themselves more or less durably in changing linguistic, social, cultural, historical and anthropological conditions. Relating these conditions to the activities and constructs of reason is a recent methodological preoccupation, not yet sufficiently widespread, of the intellectual historian. Where the example of reason in Islamic contexts is concerned, the viewpoint of the history of ideas considered as substantial entities endowed with their own power of existence and influence still continues to dominate to an excessive degree research, teaching, and everyday discourse. That explains the disproportionate weight brought to bear by politico-religious discourse since the so-called Islamic Revolution on the social imagination and the whole body of interpretative production in which self-satisfaction, self-advertisement and self-legitimation predominate. It is understandable that a reason reduced to such kinds of discursive do-it-yourself to ensure the survival of precarious values that are doubly decontextualized – in relation to the "original" Islamic contexts they are supposed to refer to, and to the contexts of modernity they explicitly reject – can lay claim only to an ideological type of hegemony.

The same cannot be said of reason in "Western" contexts. I draw my reader's attention to this plural which makes it possible to avoid the excessive generalizations of the manichean contrast between "Islam" and the "West," two ideological entities hypostasized by capitals. Just as the Indonesian, Pakistani, Moroccan (etc.) contexts have to be distinguished from the Turkish, Malayan, Senegalese (etc.) ones, so the conditions in which reason is exercised in the USA, Brazil, France, Switzerland (etc.) need to be examined. When political analysts, journalists and politicians well-known through the media speak of "*our Western values*" threatened by the *non-values* of other areas of civilization, they are succumbing to the same constructions of imaginary systems of

mutual exclusion as the medieval theologians who preached the dogmas of the chosen people, of the Church outside of which there is no salvation to be hoped for, of Islam as the last version of the "true religion" approved by God and taught by the "Seal of the Prophets" (*khâtam al-anbiyâ*). It is clear that the work of deconstruction of the systems of representation and of the frameworks of thought inherited from the respective pasts of cultures struggling for survival in the face of an increasingly hegemonistic culture has hardly started to be felt necessary even at the level of researchers and teachers. Reason as exercised in the various Western contexts is knowingly hegemonistic; it does not impose only its economic, monetary, institutional and judicial paradigms; it is the supreme, indispensable authority for the sanctioning or invalidation of all scientific or cultural production. It thinks it can compensate for this inescapable hegemony by showing itself "liberal" with respect to the "right to difference," to the identity strategies and refuges demanded by minorities, by peoples too visibly oppressed, and by religions newly established in the political space in which the intellectual sovereignty of "Western" thought is exercised. During the 1973 oil crisis the Belgian government hastened to recognize Islam as an official religion whilst President Giscard d'Estaing launched the setting-up of the Institut du Monde Arabe in the heart of Paris. Such initiatives are not devoid of all importance; they are promising milestones on a long and difficult road that should lead to the general adoption of the positions, of the cognitive strategies, and of the methodologies appropriate to emerging reason.

The role of inter-religious dialogue

Inter-religious dialogue became possible only after World War II, the wars of colonial liberation, and the emergence of sovereign states where the churches, in alliance with colonial regimes, had been working for the conversion of Asia and Africa as they had done in the Americas from 1492 onwards in historical conditions everyone knows about. Vatican II was the first official theological manifestation of the acceptance by the Roman Catholic Church of

some of the scientific and philosophical acquisitions of Enlightenment reason. Big strides have been made since the 1960s by theological research in the Catholic and Protestant churches associated with the development of critical thought in western Europe. The fact that the Orthodox church has stood back from these developments and that since the foundation of the state of Israel Judaism has been obliged to limit its own critical investigations serves merely to emphasize a sociological and historical truth which the most open theologies have not yet fully taken on board: if one cannot subscribe to the idea that the religious is a simple social fact among others, it is undeniably the product of a constant interaction between the social, the political, the cultural and the economic; in this sense the religious represents the ideological factor and the question arises of the reduction without remainder of the religious to the ideological or of the distinction within the ideological, and of the function of *ideation* carried out by prophetic discourse or that of intellectual criticism and *systems of representation* underlying everyday discourse and mobilizing the social imagination in the production processes of society codified in all possible regimes as a *system of inequalities*; the activity of *ideation* thus maintains the function of contestation and if necessary of revolutionary upheaval when the balance of forces within the system of inequalities is upset.

This historical and theoretical outline will help us sketch the limits of the inter-religious dialogue as it has developed throughout the world since the 1960s. A *World Conference of Religions for Peace* was launched in 1973 at Kyoto; the Ecumenical Council of Churches also hosts throughout the world a number of meetings in which several religions are always represented; and the Vatican has created in Rome a secretariat for relations with non-Christian religions. I myself have taken part in a very large number of meetings throughout the world; on the basis of a fairly long and varied experience I am able to make the following observations.

The Islamo-Christian dialogue has been particularly active; for well-known political reasons, the Judeo-Islamic dialogue has practically not started; worse still, the presence of Judaism in the Islamo-Christian meetings is always desired but unfortunately systematically deferred. It is true that the points of disagreement and the common references are different and necessitate bilateral

face-to-face discussions; despite or perhaps because of the Holocaust tragedy the Judeo-Christian dialogue has been able to make more tangible progress than the Islamo-Christian one; Christians and Jews are familiar with the whole of the Bible, whereas Muslims do not always agree to make the educative effort to read the Bible and the Gospels outside the polemical framework in which the Koran has fixed representations on the issue of the "distortion" (*tahrîf*) of the scriptures of the peoples of the Book (*Ahl al-kitâb*). I have always denounced the unequal situations which have condemned the Islamo-Christian dialogue from the outset to stay imprisoned either in the polemical framework of the old heresiographic literature, or else in the sort of cant that uttered only the bland formulae of mutual respect, or again in an illusory consensus on the "common values and beliefs in the same God."

The scientifically reliable literature on Islam and the Muslims is infinitely more varied, widespread and widely read in Christian circles than the literature written for Muslims in the Islamic languages on Judaism and on the three great branches of Christianity. This imbalance reflects less, of course, a congenital indifference on the part of Muslims with respect to the two religions referred to so constantly in the Koran than the combined action of two determining and more general factors: on the one hand, the theological effort of a modern re-articulation of the Islamic faith has been practically non-existent since Muhammad 'Abdu's modest and notoriously inadequate essay; on the other, the whole of Islamic thought has remained aloof from the great cognitive and epistemological changes which Christian thought has had to confront in western Europe since the sixteenth century. There is a book which is a forceful illustration of my argument: it is the "Actes du Troisième Cycle de Théologie Systématique des Facultés de Théologie de Suisse Romande" published by Pierre Gisel and Patrick Evrard under the very eloquent title of *La Théologie en post-modernité* and it invites several remarks that will help better assess the explicative potential of the concept of historical, intellectual, and cultural discrepancy that I have already used in dealing with the religious phenomenon within European thought, and with Islam's situation vis-à-vis modernity and the two other religions of the Book. Let us note, firstly, the discrepancy arising in Europe

from the different answers given by the various states to the question of what only the French call *laïcité* (secularism): all other European states have maintained the teaching of theology in public universities in the same way as they have the teaching of philosophy; only the French Third Republic chose to banish theology from secular, free, and compulsory education in order on the other hand to back a philosophy curriculum that would justify the doctrine of religious “neutrality” adopted by the state. I have already alluded to the intellectual consequences of this policy with regard to the religious phenomenon that I differentiate from the “orthodox” teaching of particular religions. However, all the European states have agreed to finance only the teaching of Catholic and Protestant theology; Islam is relegated to departments of Oriental Studies in which instruction is given in the “oriental” languages and literatures; Judaism, jealous of its theological autonomy, has chosen to develop its own institutions, but it is very present – more than Islam – in departments of the history of religion where such exist (here too France maintains itself as the exception).

Let us bear in mind, secondly, that instruction in the *comparative history of the theologies* of the three religions closest to each other by virtue of their linguistic, cultural and symbolic references exists nowhere as an officially declared and applied curriculum. There are some open-minded teachers and scholars who venture along this path on an individual basis, but they are still very much the exception. In departments of the history of religion, instruction in the non-Christian religions is purely narrative and descriptive; no intellectual responsibility is taken for any of the great *loci* of theology, indeed there is overt reluctance to get involved in problems which are the sole concern of the believers of the religion that is supposedly being taught. The reader of the contributions to *La Théologie en postmodernité* experiences first of all constant intellectual pleasure by entering into immediate and profound communication with that category of authors whom I call *scholar-thinkers*, since all the propositions of the critical theologians of today are accompanied by the same intellectual and scientific vigilance one associates with the most exacting of philosophers. They thus contribute to the consolidation of the cognitive activity in the crucial domain of the quest for meaning, that is of the deconstruction

both of the mechanisms of the production of meaning (as distinct from the effects of meaning) and of the agencies governing a sacralized, transcendentalized, ontologized meaning shielded from all subversive scientific intervention. The consolidation signifies the end of the ideological opposition between philosophy and theology, and the complete opening-up of the latter to all the gains both of the human and social sciences and of the exact sciences, with the necessary preparation for embarking upon a fruitful discussion on ways of reducing, dissolving, indeed negating the human subject (the proclamation of the death of the subject after that of the death of God). The rehabilitation of theology as an indispensable intellectual discipline will in my view only be achieved when critical theologians take on board the question of meaning, not merely in the living tradition specific to their respective communities but in the entire body of religious traditions, in order to link up – always bearing their particular demands in mind – with the work being done by critical philosophy, and by anthropology in its role as a critic of cultures.

The question remains as to when and at what price Islamic thought will welcome and encourage a critical theology comparable to that affirmed with such clarity, rigor and promise in *La Théologie en postmodernité*, which is only one example among many in the domain of Christian theology. As long as this approach is rejected in principle, its necessity denied, and its most instructive productions ignored on the grounds that Islam must reject “Western” science and draw instead its conceptual resources and its processes of argumentation from the Koran and the teaching of the “Pious Elders” alone, Muslims will go on seeking in the discourse of victimization alibis for the deficiencies of a thought paralyzed by its own scholasticism. I strongly reiterate that the protagonists of the Islamo-Christian dialogue who suppress these truths in the name of the necessary mutual “respect” between “believers” delay the advent of the ineluctable critique of religious reason in taking account without polemics and without intellectual timidity of the questionings, transcendings, and displacements carried out by emerging reason. I reiterate too that the “democratic” Europeans who ease their consciences by granting freedom of worship to the Muslims settled in their midst without ever bothering about the

intellectual and cultural indigence in which they are kept unwittingly foster Islam's drift toward political violence that is then stigmatized in inadequate terms, indeed in a contemptuous spirit.

In the last thirty years or so inter-religious dialogue has certainly helped increase awareness – to a greater or lesser extent depending on the level of culture and spiritual expectation of the people involved – of the need to transcend all the issues connected with traditional “professions of faith.” The limits are beginning to be perceived of a dialogue in which each protagonist sees the measure of his or her powerlessness to get the other to shift from the strategy of dogmatic refusal in the name of the “certainties of faith” to an area of critical intelligibility in which the dogmas involved may be transcended. Many religious leaders agree to such a shift during exchanges sanctioned by the context of a successful colloquium; but they return to their orthodox sermons once they find themselves back in front of their congregations.

There would be evidence of more rapid progress and of more tangible changes in outlook if those responsible for research and teaching, both public and private, were willing to accord awareness of the *religious phenomenon* the place it deserves. It is certain that the practitioners of the social sciences do not yet have at their disposal a theoretical framework of analysis and interpretation which is any more reliable than that of the theologians, the most liberal of whom are still at the stage of clarifying the problems of belief, faith and action. A book edited by J. Delumeau and published under the promising title of *Fait religieux* (Fayard, 1995), and an *Encyclopédie des religions* edited by M. Meslin (Bayard 1997), reveal to what extent people remain imprisoned in a representation that juxtaposes the mytho-ideologico-historical “great stories” hollowed by every orthodox tradition, and confirm too the inequality already noted between a Christianity that has benefited from the researches of critical historians and the other religions kept in the precritical conceptualizations perpetuated by their accredited administrators.

What, at the present historical juncture, are the issues involved in a recognition of the religious phenomenon transcending all the centuries-old conflicts that have isolated, weakened, and often discredited the *comprehensive boldness* put forward jointly by religious

reason and philosophico-scientific reason in the most varied cultural and historical contexts? What possible escape is there, from the prisons of dogma erected over centuries by religions claiming universality, without succumbing either to the misleading and in some cases destructive alternatives of history or to the so-called return of the religious, of the sacred, and of a vengeful god?

Toward a redefinition of the religious phenomenon

Given all that has been said so far about the changeable and varied positions of reason to produce more or less universalizable rationalities, it can be laid down that there already exists a community of scholar-thinkers (intellectuals, artists, writers, specialized researchers, teachers, and so on who try to apply the rules of what F. Dosse calls a “grammar of intersubjective communication” beyond the constraints of systems of representation and of values belonging to the geohistorical areas identifiable under the name of civilizations. The reference to an intersubjective communication is essential for the successful operation of a mutual recognition of cultures – and therefore of the religions that feed them – which so far is without historical precedent. We are familiar with the disputes aroused by orientalist scholarship over the issue of confining of Islam within periodizations, categorizations, and divisions that are even called into question where the study of so-called Western societies is concerned. The practice of intersubjective communication has the advantage of integrating subjectivities in the processes of analysis and interpretation instead of ignoring and dismissing them explicitly in the name of a cold objectivity that has turned out to be illusory and dangerously reductive where everything that determines perceptions, receptions, rejections, and lived solidarities is concerned. Roland Barthes taught that all writing – and I would add every kind of statement – is an act of historical solidarity; the writing of the history of others is far from having taken on board this linguistic constraint of immeasurable epistemological consequences.

It is incontestable that it is in the geohistorical and geocultural space of the West – in the open sense established above – that the

operation of awareness has a chance of succeeding in the foreseeable future; it is here that are concentrated at one and the same time the greatest leaders of the community of scholar-thinkers, the most advanced scientific and cultural resources, and the democratic values guaranteeing the liberties necessary to the opening and the systematic conduct of debates on those subjects most hallowed by time and most subversive in the eyes of the powers that be. To get the measure of the importance of this observation it need only be noted that in many Muslim countries "infidels" are still denied access to the holy places, there is ignorance of the comparative history of religions, the teachings of religious anthropology are rejected, apostasy and blasphemy are punished, and laws on the status of the individual are passed that prohibit even the philosophical discussion of the notion of the person outside the limits (*hudûd*) laid down in the Koran. Hermeneutics as the art of questioning, and the educational value of the clash of hermeneutic systems, are not on the agenda – nor is the educational value of research and teaching (with a few exceptions due to the courage of certain leading figures who have constantly to be discreet), and, even less, of daily exchanges subject to the exclusive control of the dominant religious and/or political orthodoxy.

It should not be concluded from the recognition of these advantages of the Western geohistorical space that everything there is set up to facilitate the mutual recognition of cultures/religions; the militant secularist position of reason has implanted prejudices and even postulates held to be scientific that have spread the culture of unbelief through even the educational system. In *bien-pensant* intellectual circles, within the corporate body of the university, in alliance with the state frequently tempted by a secularist policy, people have to avoid speaking of religion other than as a social phenomenon and as a political factor in history. In France, choosing biblical and gospel texts as subjects for literary study or research in cultural anthropology unleashes suspicions that clerical forces are being reactivated. One comes up against an institutionalized ignorance that since the nineteenth century has generated an immense "unthink" in the religious domain. In such an "intellectual," "scientific," "modern," and "democratic" context, the violence with which contemporary Islam expresses itself

(similar reference to Jewish violence is studiously avoided, so brainwashed is everybody by their obsession with antisemitism) can only serve to confirm the necessity of strengthening secularist defenses in the anticlerical struggle. The teaching of the *comparative* history of religions certainly has a higher profile than in the Muslim and non-Western countries as a general rule, but its intellectual and cultural relevance with respect to the mutual recognition of living religions even in European societies will remain feeble as long as teachers and researchers confine themselves to a descriptive, cold, reductive presentation of everything that constitutes the essence of the spiritual experience of the divine.

So battle has to be joined on all fronts: in the West and outside the West; in the institutions of research and in the institutions of teaching; in the methodological strategies of the social sciences, their carving up of objects of study, and in writing as a space of articulation and communication of learning; at the level of states and in civil societies; and in the religious institutions themselves, and among the staff who hold the monopoly of the management of the sacred as much as states reserve for themselves the right to exercise legal violence. There are too many inheritances to be revisited, traditions to be deconstructed, institutions to be subverted, actors to be confronted, cultural and sociological deadweights to be shifted or bypassed, too many political forces to be delegitimized when they themselves go all out to manipulate the "sacred" in order to make good their legitimacy deficit.

In the face of so many contrary forces, so many tasks so long neglected or deferred, so many vistas of significance offering a history in closer conformity with the general desire for peace, for emancipatory creativity, and for participatory knowledge, there is no lack of good will, generous spirits, human resources, humanistic visions, and humanitarian enterprises. It has to be acknowledged, however, that the historical failures of a large number of countries in what was called the Third World have given religions new reasons for an artificial survival that betrays the workings of an "opium of the people" denounced by Marx far more than it reveals specific dimensions not replaced by modernity, and this sociological and historical fact of the second half of this century makes one wonder about the relevance of any search for a mutual

recognition of religions. Will religion hold onto irreplaceable functions and values when the peoples who today are the victims of a system of exclusion and of elimination are able in their turn to enjoy optimal conditions for the production of their own history? In other words Marx's question, enriched by contemporary sociology and anthropology, remains; and all the lessons have not been learnt from the instrumentalization of religion by political militancy after the proclamation of the death of God and the triumphalist expansion of the "culture of unbelief."

I have just defined the new directions in research and the requisite scientific culture for a recognition of what is at stake for the religious phenomenon in the current emergence of a new human order. Let us try and identify these issues more precisely so as to make the concept of religious phenomenon more operational.

I shall take as my starting point a few indications from social psychology and cultural sociology: the recent publication of best-selling titles on religious, philosophical or economic subjects, such as the new catechism, biographies of Jesus, Moses, and Mohammed, *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarders, the *Petit Traité des grandes vertus* by André Comte-Sponville, *L'Homme-Dieu ou le sens de la vie* by Luc Ferry, and *L'Horreur économique* by Viviane Forrester. There are no doubt other books, in other languages, that I do not know about, but I will mention in passing that the notion of bestseller is still unknown in the Arabic-speaking world, geographically extensive though it is; what is against it is the combined censorship of states and of public opinion with its corollary: self-censorship by authors, inadequate resources for publishing and distribution, the high prices of foreign books allowed in by the censors, ignorance of foreign languages, and the rarity of reliable translations; the lack of libraries, the limited nature and number of milieus capable of following major debates started in the West, and the priorities imposed locally by the sociological expansion of populist milieus and the demagogic discourse of "leaders," and so on; a serious sociology of scientific, literary, and artistic production and reception is lacking. Just as advanced research in astronautics, virology, biology, and chemistry can only be carried out in the best-equipped laboratories, so access to the relevant debates on knowledge of the religious phenomenon is condi-

tioned by factors difficult to assemble where religions continue to dominate all moments, all levels, and even the interstices of individual and collective existence.

A new policy of research in the social sciences would consist of opening up to the greatest number of researchers the richest fields which, because the local regimes forbid or severely control access to them, are the least explored, a situation that weighs heavily on much research whose authors feel obliged to make obeisance to local "identities" or keep silent in ways similar to those I have observed among protagonists of the Islamo-Christian dialogue. The solution to this essentially epistemological problem depends, clearly, on intergovernmental negotiations and agreements on the liberties of the researcher, thinker, and writer. I have many detailed examples to illustrate the cant written by French scholars on North Africa and particularly Algeria soon after independence; then it was a question of "respecting" the newly-won political sovereignties; nowadays the right of "Muslims" to assert their "values," their "identities," and their "authenticities" to produce their own history is defended; what thereby gets evaded is the ineluctable probing into the cognitive status of religions, into the social construction of all belief, and into the ideological drift of the imagination under the aegis of the forces of state religious control.

So as to make progress toward social science research taking the religious phenomenon under its wing, and toward a consolidation of critical thought in which theological and philosophical perspectives could complement each other, and stimulate instead of attacking one another, I shall take as my point of departure the example I know best : Islam.

Problematization of the religious phenomenon

Modern culture in its different aspects – scientific, philosophical, literary, and artistic – makes us more and more allergic to the founding themes of the monotheistic religions, such as prophetic function and discourse, revelation, God's intervention in history, Holy Scripture, the Book as receptacle of God's word, living Tradition, pious Ancestors transmitting God's teaching via the prophets,

the mysteries of faith, and eternal life. The philosophers lionized by the media are those who declare themselves agnostics or atheists and stress that all theological themes are an anachronism, while continuing to speak of a secular spirituality and of “great virtues” in the vocabulary of modern rationality. Between on the one hand the efforts of theologians trying to insert religious experience into that modernity most disconnected from the religious, and on the other a materialistic philosophy which bases its credibility on the aesthetic contemplation of the universe or the palpable, material, personally experienced reality of love, that inexhaustible locus of drives and passions in which a neoreligious person who refuses conspicuously to be tied to the obsolete beliefs of another age can take refuge; and between on the one hand satiated societies in which citizen-individuals enjoy every comfort, every protection, and the resources necessary for the exercise of their choices, commitments, gifts, and vocations, and on the other deprived, oppressed, and exploited societies in which the very notion of human person remains subject to the play of blind forces – where is one to situate the indispensable work of elucidating the confusions, contradictions, and arbitrary positions in which the new managers of symbolic goods involve us and themselves?

The advantage of the concept of symbolic goods is that it sidelines the parabolic, metaphoric discourse of faith and opens up new possibilities for the symbolic function that resists the dispositions of desacralization, demythologization, disqualification, marginalization, and rejection manipulated by disposable thought. From now on account will have to be taken of this disposable thought, which has become a determining dimension of the culture governed by teletechnoscientific reason. Thanks to media orchestration and to marketing and management techniques the productions of disposable thought are enjoying stunning, albeit ephemeral, success; the productions of a more critical, denser and more durable thought are getting thin on the ground and lack effective means of putting themselves across; hence the fact that the extensive literature on the religious phenomenon remains unknown by the so-called educated public and circulates largely among specialists when they agree to give up a little of their time to reading and discussing long theoretical and methodological papers.

Let us try despite these obstacles to restate the value and scientific necessity of demarcating clearly the domain of the *religious phenomenon* so as to alter the writing and discourses of presentation of the religions that refuse to rethink their conceptual apparatus, their doctrinal constructions, and their "orthodox" truths, which is obviously the case with contemporary Islam.

Let us take as our point of departure a heuristic definition: the religious phenomenon is the entirety of distinctive characteristics that make it possible to identify the *specificity of the religious authority* in relation to the political, cultural, judicial, ethical, esthetic, and economic authorities. It is because the forces of secularization have prevented the completion of this work of identification of the religious authority that we still live in judicial compromises more or less relevant where the separation of the religious and political is concerned. Scientific theories on the essence of the religious have exhausted neither the differentiation of the religious and the political as practices and institutions for managing the private space of the person and the public space of civil society on the one hand, nor the necessary articulation of the spiritual, ethical, intellectual, and scientific on the other. Under urgent ideological pressure republican jurists legislated for the emerging secular state on the basis of philosophical postulates that could not be checked as long as the anthropological and historical data was lacking, not only on the two versions, Catholic and Protestant, of Christianity present in Europe, but on the other great world religions. Philosophers pride themselves on basing their critical reflection on facts established scientifically by research: it can still be seen today that they all – including a thinker like Paul Ricœur, a man of uncommon intellectual generosity and spiritual richness – confine themselves to the example of western Christianity; so-called eastern Christianity is itself relegated to the alien otherness of a constructed Orient!

Western European thought today exercises a de facto hegemony in all realms of knowledge and decision-making; it still however overlooks the need to take account of the religious and ethno-cultural pluralism of the societies it is supposed to manage. Paul Ricœur had no hesitation in saying in an interview in *Le Monde* that insofar as Islam shares the religious symbolism and theological categories common to biblical monotheism, it is not

irreducibly relevant or necessary in any philosophical re-examination of the religious phenomenon on the basis of the Judeo-Christian experience of religion and the divine. The social sciences today barely concern themselves with the scientific and philosophical relevance of the Islamic example to redefine the religious phenomenon within the global cognitive perspective that I am trying to introduce here.

I must make it clear, once again, that in seeking to introduce Islam as a relevant example I am not defending any position of an apologetic variety, or simply of a theological kind in the sense of the "orthodox" reaffirmation of an irreducible faith; I have always called, in vain, both among Muslims and among western islamists, for the opening-up of a new field to probe at one and the same time an anthropology of the cultural, ritual, symbolic, and conceptual foundations common to all religious constructions manifested in history and, in the theoretical framework thereby set up, a comparative history of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theological systems from the Middle Ages to our own day.

One of the convenient summaries of current research into the identification and scientific analysis of the distinctive traits of the religious phenomenon was published by Michel Meslin in 1988 under the title *L'Expérience humaine du divin* (Cerf, 1988). It is true that Meslin still gives pride of place to the Christian example in his effort to reach a theoretical anthropological level, but it is to his credit that he problematizes the permanent elements common to all human experience of the divine, of which all religions before "death of God" present culturally differentiated areas of deployment. The whole book falls within the province of historical anthropology and does not include recent theoretical revisions concerning the secularization of modern societies. The contrast made since the eighteenth century between a secularization interpreted as a progressive rationalization scientifically rooted in historical action on the one hand, and a religious phenomenon that locks the human condition in a dogmatic straitjacket and a model of imaginary production of its history on the other, is rejected following the exhaustive analyses of civil religions (such as the work of R. N. Bellah on the American example, and of J. Baubérot, J. P. Willaime, P. Michel, D. Hervieu-Léger, and others on the "paths of

meaning" and the myriad forms of belief in secular societies). The very definition of the religious is back on the stocks; two approaches are still in direct opposition: the affirmation of a substantive rationality guaranteeing the continuity of a living tradition in the manner of the traditional theologies and of classical metaphysics on the one hand, and submission to the formal, operative, empirical, pragmatic, and functional rationality of teletechnoscientific reason on the other. Those who try to escape from this dilemma which perpetuates the old confrontations between faith and reason, and science and religion, no longer want to talk either about the debasement and loss of traditional religious feeling brought into disrepute by modernity, or about the latter's failure in its aim of converting humankind to a rational autonomy, ethically and civically responsible; but at this juncture the position of the scholar in search of an inclusive theory of the religious, the political, and the social confirms and coincides with that of the political decision-maker in a liberal democracy: by extending an equal welcome to all the forms, varieties, and levels of belief thrown up everywhere by a liberalism distinct from any emanation of authority based on a shared collective memory, the human condition gets trapped in the uncontrollable proliferation of creeds and in the impossibility of differentiating, sociologically and philosophically, the irrational postures and alienating shifts of the individual and collective imagination from the emergence of new "paths of meaning" bearing a history more effectively freed from semantic disorder.

It is for these very contemporary reasons that I would like to put an end to the discourse of victimization of an Islam "exiled" in a modernity that it is unable to think at the same critical level, with the same demands for freedom from the human condition threatened both by the return of a religious sense totally manipulated by predatory agents (I am thinking of the politico-financial mafias multiplying under all regimes) and a modernity that disintegrates and trivializes all forms of legitimacy and all quests for meaning. During the Algerian war of liberation, faced with activists fully aware of what was at stake in the ideology of combat of the time, I was defending the primacy of a critique of Islamic reason whilst recognizing the historical priority of the lib-

eration struggle. That is how I learnt that even in times of peace the social forces in competition for the conquest of all forms of power do not tolerate this idealistic position of reason struggling for a constant articulation of the primacy of the rights of the spirit and of the ideological priorities imposed by historical necessities. The second civil war that has been raging in Algeria since 1992 tragically illustrates the philosophical relevance of the position easily dismissed as dreamy by the predatory agents.

So here we are, placed before a conceptual, sociological, and historical complexity that stresses the urgency of a definition at least operative and heuristic of the religious phenomenon today. D. Hervieu-Léger recently hazarded the following attempt at a definition:

From this standpoint the process of the imaginary constitution of the belief tradition and its social realization in a community (or a population of communities) is precisely what constitutes, *sociologically speaking* [my italics], the "religious": any mechanism – ideological, practical and symbolic at one and the same time – by which individual consciousness of belonging to a particular belief tradition is constituted, maintained, developed, and controlled, can therefore be defined as "religion."

I believe it necessary to discuss the heuristic import of this definition presented as the conclusion of a long-term research program by Hervieu-Léger into the recurrent theme of Christianity in the face of modernity here widened to the theme of belief in modernity.

If it is agreed that belief and understanding define the dialectics of the hermeneutic circle – to understand in order to believe, to believe in order to understand – within which all activities of the human mind find themselves enclosed, it is needs to be made clear that what distinguishes the status of belief in the religious domain from that found in the scientific, political, and economic domain is neither its process of imaginary construction nor its social realization in a community. The rationalizing activity of the spirit defined as the indivisible whole of the faculties that are intelligence, reason, imagination, and memory is never wholly independent of the imagination and of individual and collective memory; it is an imagination of rationality produced and cultivated by the quibbling reason which has ended up imposing, since the old discussions on *logos* and *mythos*, denunciations of the

imagination, the Enlightenment's epistemic sovereignty of reason, and the supremacy of the prejudice of pure rationality. The imaginary construction of belief governs all discursive productions, no doubt at varying degrees according to the types and levels of culture at which the dialectic between reason and imagination, rational and imaginary, is exercised. The concept of belief tradition does not suffice either to identify the specificity of the religious phenomenon; in the history of the sciences and philosophy we know that there are also belief traditions that perpetuate through generations of disciples a taking-as-true of theories that are only abandoned after decades, even centuries of scholastic reproduction. The example of the theoretical positions on the subject of secularization as rational, scientific alternative to the aberrations of the religious imagination is a good illustration in contemporary European discourse of the omnipresent role of the belief tradition.

Is it enough to stick to the level of sociological manifestation to define the distinctive trait or traits of the religious? The question is valid for all the divisions operated by the social sciences to define their objects of study in spite of the unanimously accepted idea that they involve cultural productions of *humankind by humankind for humankind on humankind*. Thus the linguist discovers distinctive traits in religious discourse; the psychologist and psychoanalyst pursue an exploration that is very controversial, so delicate and new is it; the historian has hardly begun consolidating a continuous reality that he helped break up by creating arbitrary divisions; and the anthropologist has not yet been freed from the different outlook of the ethnographer and ethnologist. And what can be said about modern hermeneutics, which is becoming the locus of questioning continually resumed and enriched so as to harness, within a single movement of thought, meanings forgotten, repressed, evaded, eliminated, implicit, overvalued, hallowed, mythologized, transfigured, and held in the unthought. The religious is a domain of totalization of reality insofar as it is always mediatized by the perception, reception, and verbalization of human beings for human beings.

L'Encyclopédie des religions has attempted to thematize the totality of forms and contents that define the religious in the ten following chapters:

1) The religious traditions; 2) The divine; 3) The cosmos; 4) The human being; 5) Evil, salvation, ethics; 6) Death and the beyond; 7) Religious practice: rites, sacrifices, and the construction of the sacred; 8) Religion, politics, and society in Europe; 9) The languages of religion (myth, symbol, the supernatural, sacred arts, parable, metaphor, and metonymy); 10) The experience of the divine.

In accordance with a strategy of archeology of meaning the contents of these ten chapters can be redistributed in the following cognitive order that makes more explicit the processes of construction of religious belief and of complexification of the religious phenomenon:

1) *The languages of religion*. It is through the oral and/or written memory that the religious emerges, develops, is transmitted, and revives; it is therefore necessary to begin with the exploration of the linguistic, semiological, and gestural expressions of this memory to reach the belief traditions that constitute the living traditions. What distinguishes these belief traditions from those we have noted in the other fields of existence as knowledge and action is the continuity of the strategy of integration or rejection of new facts in the living tradition. The tradition is called living on three counts: there is *continuity* of the look upon the real and of the criteria of interpretation, *stability* of the principles of identification and categorization, and *existential recurrence* of the values capitalized in the tradition. That assumes too a stability of the definitions governing the relationships between language and thought; when modernity upsets these definitions by introducing propositions like "language is a system of signs," or "religious discourse is entirely a structure of myth," all rules, all procedures, and all frameworks of production, dissemination, and legitimation of the formerly dominant meaning lose their relevance as the memory of the interpreting community allows itself to be left behind by the new discursive strategies.

2) *Religious truth and closed official corpora*. This theme is not included in the *Encyclopédie*; it represents nonetheless a locus of undeniable relevance for an anthropological problematization and, within the same critical trend, a theologico-philosophical reappraisal of two constituent characteristics of the religious phenomenon: religious truth lived in the form of the taking-as-true of beliefs and non-beliefs recorded, transmitted, and reexamined in

closed official corpora. I have discussed this last concept at length on the basis of examples from the Koran, from the prophetic and imamian traditions (*Hadith*), and from the *corpus juris* canonized in Islam.⁵ I have shown the anthropological and philosophical significance of the truth regimes before and after the establishment and closure of the corpora declared authentic in contrast to the traditions and writings rejected as apocryphal by the official administrators of the religious Truth accepted for the credo of the faithful. A recent study by Pierre Gisel on the respective status of and relationship between canonical and apocryphal texts⁶ confirms the operative bearing of my analyses for a new theological investigation transcending the particular cases of Islam and Christianity. The artificial ideological barrier between the religious regime and the secular regime of truth can even become blurred; not only do the constitutions of contemporary political regimes function like closed official corpora of untouchable propositions whose interpretation and application are entrusted to a restricted college of experts, but the scientific theories controlled by a scholastic reason oblige one or more generations to inscribe their cognitive elaborations within strictly respected orthodox limits; when an inventive mind comes along and transgresses them, it is at first ignored, derided or openly condemned.

3) *Religion, politics and society*. It is understandable that in an encyclopedia produced in France this chapter centers particularly on the European example in order to bring out the historical and philosophical singularity of the European route since the sixteenth century for recomposing the relationships between the three major competing agencies for the production and handling of meaning. As I have said, giving prominence to this singularity must be a point of departure for a general inquiry into the religious phenomenon, not to confirm its *de facto* hegemonic status (especially in the political sphere), but rather to subject it to a critical reevaluation in the light of the other historic routes ignored or marginalized up till now by the Eurocentrism of the cognitive and philosophical activity. Depending on whether the historical and anthropological inquiry confirms or invalidates the philosophical and institutional relevance of the European route, it will be possible to advance with greater confidence toward ways of overcoming

ing decisively the crisis of the credible that henceforth affects politics as much as religion. As long as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and the African cultures can brandish, as they have done since the anticolonialist wars, the irreducible "authenticity" of their respective historic routes in order to "legitimize" the rejection of the Western model, there will be cultural clashes but not a philosophical transcendence of the question of the human condition's common foundations, the deployment of which is carried out in the three agencies, *religion, politics and society*.⁷ I do not think that the social science of religions can take this problem of philosophical transcendence on board as long as it sticks to the descriptivist and historicist approach to religions in general, ignoring the privileged position of Christianity in which theologians and philosophers undertake a critique of the religious not yet available to the other religions.

4) *The human experience of the divine*, or the old and new dynamics of construction and recomposition of the religious and the political. Mr. Meslin has rightly pointed out that French uses the same word, *expérience*, which German distinguishes by *Erfahrung* (knowledge derived from practice) and *Erlebnis* (any event or fact lived and experienced by the human subject, which is particularly the case with the sacred which structures and underpins the beliefs in the religious subject). I would add that Arabic too distinguishes *tajârib* (plural of *tajriba*) for *Erlebnis*, and *ikhtibâr* for *Erfahrung*. When approaching the religious phenomenon, to take as one's point of departure the concept of human experience of the divine, is to place oneself on the concrete terrain of psychology, linguistics, sociology, and anthropology; one can thus show that the *implicit lived* by the subject in this *Erlebnis* is always more extensive and too intimate to be able to pass to the *known explicit*. That explains why the believing subject remains unsatisfied and can even feel rejected and woundingly misunderstood when it hears its *Erlebnis* handled coarsely with the vocabulary and the argumentational and demonstrational techniques of the experimental method. This fundamental divorce lies at the heart of the epistemological arbitrariness that separates not only religious experience from experimental knowledge, but even mytho-poetic knowledge of the Platonic kind and the logocentric speculations governed by the long imperialism

exercised since the Middle Ages by the Aristotelian corpus and buttressed by the hegemonic position of Enlightenment reason, whose baton has now passed to teletechnoscientific reason.⁸ The entire history of thought in the Mediterranean historical area – in which the contrasts, the creative tensions, and the misunderstandings between mytho-poetic knowledge and logocentric knowledge have weighed heavily well beyond the Middle Ages on all discourse about monotheistic religious experience – has to be rewritten in the light of the epistemological revisions being carried out thanks to the contributions of the linguistics of discourse and of anthropology as cultural critique.

5) *Hope as force for upheaval and historic deployment of the human being.* This heading brings together the themes of evil, salvation, ethics, death, and the beyond, dealt with in the *Encyclopédie* I am concerned with, in regards to the descriptivist framework normally reserved for religions. Now the concept of hope subsumes at one and the same time the totality of visions attaching to religions under the name of eschatological hope and the new programs offered by the so-called secular ideologies to the contemporary imagination in the context of civil religions. By grouping these themes under the heading of *hope as force for upheaval and historic deployment of the human being*, I wish to carry out the shifts and transcendences imposed both by the current recompositioning of the religious and the political and by the cognitive strategies and epistemological postures necessitated by the globalization of a new philosophy of historical action. It is not enough to hold forth indefinitely about the crises of the religious, of the political, and of the quest for a meaning that can point just action in the right direction, by letting it be believed that correct diagnosis is a substitute for an effective cure; that is what the social sciences of religions and of politics commonly do. What must be debated is *a politics of hope, for all the peoples involved, based on the real historical, sociological, and anthropological state of their respective cultures, and not of the abstract and falsely universal paradigms constructed by academic elites, themselves prisoners of "solutions" which they impose on their own societies.* By scorning the concept of hope too much implied by religious beliefs, the thought that aspires to be scientific betrays an arbitrary posture that limits

everything “tainted” with the religious as it defines it to the outmoded, the traditional, the alienating, the unassimilable to a “modernity” functioning then as a repressive ideological pole which provokes reactions of rejection of “fundamentalism,” of “fanaticism,” and of the *jihād* lumped together as identificatory characteristics of the “*revenge of God*.”⁹ I could be reproached with arguing for a rehabilitation of the eschatological hope of traditional religions in the face of modernity’s failure to offer a hope bearing a new history blessed with meaning for human existence. These objections show the degree to which the culture of unbelief has made *unthinkable* the intellectual and historical possibility of transcending the ideological opposition established, by hegemonic reason, between the dreamy hope of religions and the scientific imagination of progress.

As can be seen, the more deeply the distinctive characteristics of the religious phenomenon are analyzed, the more one is led to blur the essentially ideological boundaries drawn by modern reason, in order to better exercise its hegemonic control on all the procedures and loci of the production, handling and circulation of meaning. Modern secular reason has thus been able to reverse to its advantage the hierarchy fixed by traditional political theologies between the requirements of the intellectual and spiritual authority and those of the political power (see Thomas Aquinas’s distinction between *Auctoritas* and *Potestas*, or that of Islamic theologians between divine *Hukm* and human *sultân*; then the shifts and enrichments brought about by the political philosophy of Hobbes, Locke, Spinoza, Rousseau, and J. Bodin, who have constructed the paradigm of the modern republic with its principles of emancipation, its ideological excesses and its epistemological dead ends). It has to be acknowledged too that the judicial compromises imposed by secular republics to foster civil peace have in the end cost them dear, *socially*, through political violence during their creation, and *intellectually and culturally* through the rigid ideological boundaries they have drawn in people’s minds by using their very monopoly of public instruction (known also as state education) to make the virtues of the so-called secular philosophical option prevail over the stifling dogma of the clerical regime of truth: the famous war of the two Frances – transposed

today onto ground more heavily mined ideologically like Iran, Algeria, Turkey, Pakistan, and India – is an illustration of the gesticulations of a reason doomed to improvise both with its hallowing, sanctifying, and transcendentalizing weapons and with the more sophisticated paraphernalia of the experimental method, not devoid, it is true, of technical efficacy.

In putting forward the promises of an emerging reason I am not forgetting the manifold constraints that divert the best protected and most carefully mapped cognitive itineraries toward ideological, even fantastical systematizations; all that can be hoped for is that – having learnt the lessons of two successive failures, after twenty-five centuries at least of cognitive activity and historical action under the twin aegis of the philosophical attitude taught by classical Greece and of the religious Truth proclaimed by the prophets and by the Wise Men of Asia – reason that is in the process of emergence will cultivate the humility of the saints and sages, the generosity of the greatest witnesses of the spiritual life, and the philosophical disquiet of the most fertile thinkers. It goes without saying that those cardinal virtues of the scholar-thinker required by our time – humility, generosity, disquiet – will not be drawn exclusively from community or national traditions to exalt unduly “authenticities” constructed for the needs of self-promotion. If it manages not to relapse into the habitual travesties of the real and into sermons on eternal values, emerging reason will be distinguishable by the use it makes of the workings of transgression, displacement, and transcendence, applied as much to all the cultural legacies that it is called upon to rework, as to its own cognitive and cultural productions. A large part of the vocabulary and intellectual postures that I have used will then only have value as outliers in the continually recast landscape of the spirit by the spirit for the spirit (I am here paraphrasing a fine piece of intuition of ontological import by the Muslim sage ‘Abd al-Qâdir al-Jîlânî, who wrote: *Nâza’tu-l-haqqa bi-l-haqqi li-l-haqqi*: “I have fought a spiritual fight before the Real-true with the help of the Real-true in the cause of the Real-true”).

Translated from the French by John Fletcher

Notes

1. This text is the written version of a paper presented to the Seminar on the contribution of religions to a culture of peace, held at Granada between 5 and 9 May 1998 by the Commissions of Catalonia and Andalusia for UNESCO.
2. See my contribution to the questionnaire sent in 1970 by the late lamented Father Y. Moubarak to seven Muslim intellectuals, in *Les Musulmans* (Beauchesne, 1970).
3. Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1996.
4. See "Croire en modernité: aspects du fait religieux contemporain en Europe," in *Encyclopédie des religions* (Paris, 1997), vol. 2, p. 2050-2077. This encyclopedia deserves a detailed review that would make explicit the epistemological postures governing the entire work and those of each of the authors who have written a total of 228 articles. I note already, in support of the relevance of my observations, that Christianity and the religious phenomenon in Europe are the subject of the densest contributions and the most critical ones in the sense of a theoretical advance in the knowledge of the religious phenomenon. In volume 2, devoted entirely to the thematics of the religious phenomenon, the examples taken from Islam remain very limited and are generally dealt with in the framework of a narrativist and descriptivist historiography that is indifferent to the problematics of a critique of religious reason through the example of Islam.
5. See "Le Coran et les pratiques critiques contemporaines," in *Encyclopédie du Coran* (Leiden, 1998).
6. "Apocryphes et canon: leurs rapports et leur statut respectif. Un questionnement théologique," in *Apocrypha* (1996), p. 7.
7. See my old but still relevant analyses on the same subject, dealt with on the basis of the Islamic example, in "Religion et société d'après l'exemple de l'Islam," in *Pour une critique de la raison islamique* (Paris, 1984). See too "Dîn, Dunyâ, Dawla," in *L'Islam, religion et politique* (Paris, 1986).
8. See my "Logocentrisme et vérité religieuse dans la pensée islamique," in *Essais sur la pensée islamique* (Paris, 1984).
9. Gilles Képel, *La Revanche de Dieu*, translated into twenty languages six months after its publication.