MYSTICISME ET DÉVELOPPEMENT

Un dialogue entre la « Vivification des sciences de la foi »
(Ihyâ' 'ulûm al-Dîn) de Ghazâlî et une «Vivification des
sciences du monde» *(Ihyâ' 'ulûm al-Dunya)*?

PAR

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Le titre de ma communication est «Mysticisme et développement».
Le sous-titre pourrait être : «vivification des sciences religieuses», ou
«vivification des sciences du monde». Alors, je vais entamer un
dialogue avec Ghazâlî étant donné que je fais partie de la tradition ; je
ne suis pas un occidental, je ne suis pas un savant exogène de la
tradition, mais je suis une partie de la tradition ; je sens la
responsabilité d'un *Ihyâ' 'ulûm al-Dîn* au même titre que Ghazâlî.
Ghazâlî et Ibn Sînâ sont, peut-être, les deux auteurs les plus vivants
dans les rues de Damas, du Caire, de Bagdad, de Téhéran et partout ;
je sens donc la responsabilité et le poids de l'histoire. C'est pour cela
que je m'excuse de mon ton un peu oratoire, un peu mondain, pour
simplement vous communiquer quelques idées. Dans quelle mesure
peut-on reconstruire le mysticisme étant donné que notre génération
est une génération de développement, de progrès? Nous tâchons de
réformer nos sociétés, nos institutions, nous sommes la quatrième
génération du réformisme, mais quand même, comme al Afghâni l'a
fait et Mohamed 'Abdou dans *Risâ'lat al-Wâridât*, qui a essayé de
réformer le mysticisme, de le récupérer en le mettant de nouveau au
monde.

Voilà le sens de ma communication de ce soir.

I. Introduction

Mysticism is an integral part of Islamic culture. It is one of the four major traditional *(Naqli)* rational *('Aqli)* sciences. After al-Ghazali's attack on rational sciences such as philosophy which with Mu'tazilit theology embodied Islamic rationalism through four centuries, from the second till the fifth centuries of *Hiǧrah*, mysticism intertwined with traditional theology, namely Ash'arism, took over all Islamic sciences in the following seven centuries and during the Ottoman Empire till the modern Reformist movement[1].

II. Historical birth of Islamic mysticism

Mysticism entered the Islamic world and became a permanent and absorbing part of its cultural life with the political division between Ali and Mu'awiya, that is, between prophets and state, between idealists or compromisers. Radicals took the part of Ali representing legality, authenticity, piety, truthfulness, austerity and the defence of general interests *(Masâlih 'Amma)* of the community *(Ummah)*. Realists, compromisers, careerists and opportunists took the part of Mu'awiya representing the opposite value-system: illegality, inauthenticity, power-politics, persuasion, seduction, avidity for the new accumulated power and wealth, and in defence of a rising middle class and a future state apparatus.

Since the defeat of radicalism and the victory of careerism, piety returned to its own origin in the human soul. The individual, instead of being in the world withdrew from the world. The majority, instead of rallying to unite the ideal with its price of sacrifice and martyrdom, left the arena choosing the pratical life, leaving the cause as a nice dream and abandoning it as merely wishful thinking. The self, being incapable of saving the other saved itself, and instead of moulding the external world withdrew to the internal

(1) *Al-Ihyâ'* begins the first section on rituals *'Ibâdât* (1st chapter) by a classification of sciences (the virtue of science, teaching and learning) linking mysticism with the science of *Tawhîd* and the science of *Fiqh*, in order to give both science of beliefs and actions a mystical foundation. The second chapter deals directly with articles of faith *Qawa' al-'Aqa'id*, exposing the Ash'arite theology, theory of essence, attributes and acts. From *Sam'iyyât*, he chose only one: faith and action. Prophecy and *imamate* were dropped. Eschatology was integrated with the fourth section on the saviours *Munjiyate* (10th chapter).

world. Since the world became refractory to the will, the will dropped the world thus leaving its natural field of action void of content. As a subject, it created from itself its own object, becoming at the same time subject and object.

Since radicalism, becoming mysticism, had lost its legality in the world, it tried to find a substitute legality in the origin of political thought, in the legal code itself, namely the *Qur'an*. It began to interpret the origin itself, not the world, as the source of mysticism. The psychological situation of the present projected itself on the code of the past while the partial historical situation imposed itself on the universal model of human conduct. The *Qur'an* became mystical reading; the Prophet was cast as the chief of mystics, his companions forming the first mystical order[2]. The manipulation of the letter by the impious pushed the mystics towards a new reality beyond the letter through the image. The fall of the material and visible world into the hands of the impious motivated the mystics to look for another sensible and material world from a higher order, that of the spirit. The *Ta'wil* was a tool by which mystics realized a certain conciliation between themselves and the world, switching from losses to gains from nothing to everything and from despair to hope. The texts were psychologically recuperated, returned to the emotions and to the lost value-system of the abandoned struggle: patience, reliance, austerity, piety, resignation, asceticism, acceptance, etc. This was the origin of the mystical "steps" *(Maqama)*. Political defeat in history was transformed into a spiritual victory outside history. The opposition between the ideal and the real became unity between God and the world; the absolute separation between truth and falsehood became an absolute unity in everything.

Is the struggle between legality and illegality today a hopeless case as it was in the beginning? How many martyrs fallen in our times equal those of early times? How many revolts occurring in our generation equal the early ones, *Khurûj*, since the time of Hussein? Is it possible to restore the ideology of struggle by returning to the external world instead of being only active in the internal world? Is it possible to reconstruct the mystical value-system steps *(Maqama)* and states *(Ahwâl)* as a real ideology in a total struggle, for development and progress?

Since mysticism was born in given historical circumstances to overcome political and military defeat, to sublimate the defeat of the body in the victory of the spirit, can mysticism now help in

(2) *In Ihyâ'*, the first section, 8th chapter, is on "good manners *(Adâb)*" in reading the *Qur'an*.

overcoming the military, economic and socio-political defeat of our time called underdevelopment? Is it possible to reconstruct a mystical value-system, moral steps, psychological states and an absolute unity to help modern generations face their challenges? If through mysticism they succeeded in obtaining victory, unobtained by previous generations, mysticism would return to its original setting of struggle between truth and falsehood, between legality and illegality, and between piety and impiety.

III. HISTORICAL REASONS FOR THE MYSTICAL OPTION

There are no rights and wrongs in historical movements but only social forces, power politics and conflicting hierarchies of values. The fifth century for which al-Ghazali wrote *Revivification of religious sciences (Ihyâ' 'ulûm al-Dîn)* was characterized by:

1. Pluralism of truth, of approaches, of methods, of premises and of conclusions which was pushed to the extent of equating argument and counter-argument, the thing and its opposite, the proposition and its counter-proposition. Pluralism ended in scepticism (everything is equal to everything) and relativism (everything is partly right and partly wrong). Islamic sectarian theology pushed this pluralism to the maximum. Since the spirit of the culture is based on the existence of a universal truth which does not vary from one person to another, a reaction to this pluralism was necessary to defend the unity of truth, vision and reality. A call to return back to the source was made, to approach the cultural periphery to the revealed centre. That is why in the first section of *Ihyâ'*, the last three chapters are on *Qur'anic* and prophetic recitations.

2. Reason became a source of knowledge parallel to revelation and even identic to it. In the case of opposition between the text and rational evidence, the text its interpreted according to reason. Eschatology became mere images for more spiritual values such as happiness, joy of knowledge and beatitude. This danger came from Mu'tazilit theology as well as from philosophy. A reaction was necessary to maintain revelation and textual arguments and to defend the correspondance between revelation and reality beyond and over rational evidence. This explains why *Ihyâ' 'ulûm al-Dîn* adopted scriptural arguments in all its four sections and forty chapters even with week narratives.

3. The five pillars of Islam were transformed into pure ritual forms without content, movements without meaningful articulation, without spiritual elevation. The *Fiqh* that means legal acts in

conformity with the law dominated motivations and final causes. That is why in the *Ihya'* the whole first section is on rituals *(Ibâdât)* giving their internal reasons in order to counterbalance external forms.

4. The Muslim world at that time reached a high degree of prosperity and wealth. The accumulation of capital through trade was tremendous. The style of life was characterized by opulence, pomp and worldliness as a continuation of the victory of impiety and the defeat of piety in the first century. Against this worldly and materialistic trend, mysticism reacted in order to overweigh the balance of the spiritual world or at least to make it even.

5. In the face of the external threats and military invasions of the Mongols from central Asia or from the Crusaders from Western Europe, this returning back to one's soul or folding up on one's self was a defensive mechanism against the outside world. This is also behind modern fundamentalism in the Muslim world which faces threats of military, economic and cultural invasions from across its borders. Social customs and manners have to be protected against imitation of outsiders and in defence of specificity in praxis as it is clear nowadays in the upsurgence of Islamic ritualism. The second section of the *Ihyâ'* is an affirmation of Islamic customs *('Adât)* relating to social relations and practices *(Mu'âmalât)*.

Nowadays, some of these reasons are no longer present. The historical situation has changed and a new situation has arisen:

1. Pluralism, which was one of the glorious moments of Islamic culture in its golden age, was behind the Islamic classical renaissance. Since this pluralism disappeared, Muslim societies have been reduced to the most horrible unilateralism represented by one System, one Thinker, one Ruler, one Truth, one Hero, etc. The actual crisis of political opposition in the Muslim world comes from the absence of an intellectual justification for it, given the absence of alternatives in the wake of unilateralism as a historical continuum. Pluralism now is not a vice as it was in the time of *Ihya'* but a virtue. The mystical option aimed at bringing back the whole Muslim world and culture to the source was a virtue and may be now a vice if it means unilateralism and textualism. A pluralistic universe in which all options are proposed again is much more useful for the Muslim world nowadays than the old unilateral option.

2. The sway of reason which lead in the time of *Ihyâ'* to scepticism, relativism and agnosticim is nowadays an urgent need for the Muslim world and a high virtue. All reformist movements

struggled for more rationalism to counter-balance *Fideism* such as M. 'Abdou in *Risâlat al-Tawhid*, switching from Asha'rism to Mu'tazilism if not in the name of union at least in the name of justice *(Adl)* by recognizing the rational and universal judgements on good *(Husn)* and bad *(Qubh)*. Nowadays, one of the major obstacles to development is illiteracy, the mythical world view, depending on miracles, overwhelming emotionalism and rhetoric. The reconstruction of reason is more necessary today than the destruction of reason in classical mysticism.

3. Ritualism, nowadays, continues as it was before, pure forms void of content, appearances without reality, and divorced from articulations final cause. The old mystical solution was the spiritualization of rituals, interiorization, the transformation of the acts of the organs to acts of the heart. In development, what is needed is social action, the transformation of rituals to social contents as they were originally conceived in the law; the expression of unity through political opposition by the double act of negation *(La Ilâha)*, and of affirmation *(illa Allah)* included in the witness *(shahâda)*; prayer aiming at social action and the symbolic redistribution of wealth; fasting as social co-hesion; pilgrimage as mutual community consultation and the unity of the *Umma*.

4. Nowadays, reaction to accumulated wealth by denying it is almost impossible, impractical and a purely individual option. Ethical exhortations are even used to justify the joys of life or the enjoyment of legal earnings. Such renunciation is usually recommended to the poor and oppressed classes as compensation for their misery. A social reaction to this worldly and mundane trend would be the engagement of the whole society in the national cause of development. The commitment of the whole nation in development as a national project would prevent it from falling into this dualism between materialism and spiritualism.

5. A reaction to military invasions of the Muslim world from the West or from the East can cause a certain kind of a folding-in of the self, returning to its origin, holding to its own voice and finding refuge in the unconquered soul. This is natural and normal but not as a definitive reaction, since this step-back is only a prerequisite for a second step-forward. A counter offensive to external invasions, mobilizing all its powers, physical and moral, material and spiritual would be also nowadays a natural and normal reaction. This would prevent the Muslim world from falling into another dualism between mysticism and military professionalism.

In the Muslim context, the criteria of global development can be summarized in seven points:

1. Liberation of the land from external domination to complete the process of total decolonization, began in the 1960's (Palestine, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Erytreia, Mindanao, etc., in continuation of the huge reformist movement initiated by al-Afghani) as well as the liquidation of all military bases and the cancellation of all military pacts treaties.

2. Liberation of the peoples from the internal oppresion of dictatorships royal or military, from the usurpation of legal power and the rule of the law in defiance of mass consent and people's delegation of power.

3. Equity and social justice in the distribution of national wealth to solve the problem of accumulated capital in the hands of the few with the expansion of poverty among the majority, and to implement socialism, an urgent need of our time.

4. Reunification of the Muslim world after its dismantlement by foreign powers which imposed artificial borders thus initiating wars between enemy-brothers.

5. Affirmation of identity against all forms of alienation especially Westernization, against remnants of colonialism at the level of culture and social behaviour.

6. Global development of societies to improve production, self-sufficiency in food, industrialization, public services and to build the necessary infrastructure for the satisfaction of basic human needs.

7. Mass-mobilization to promote the people's participation in political, economic and social development and to counter-balance centralization and bureaucratization.

Can mysticism help us today to face these major challenges of our time as it helped as a self-defence mechanism against internal and external threats of the old times?

Since mysticism is an ideology of inverted struggle, of the internal and spiritual victory of the self against the other by abandoning the world of defeat, it is easy to bring it back to the real world and to switch again from the vertical to the horizontal, from upwards to downwards, from passive values to active values.

Since mysticism as a road *(Tariqa)* contains three phases, the moral phase, the ethico-psychological phase and the metaphysical phase, is it possible to utilise these phases and their major

components in the process of development[3]? Is it possible to switch the components of the moral phase from the soul to the body, from interiority to exteriority, from individual ethics to social politics, from secluded meditation to open action and from mystical orders to socio-political movements? Is it possible to change the components of the psychological phase from passive values to active values and from ethico-psychological states to social struggle? Is it possible to reconstruct the metaphysical phase from the vertical dimension to the horizontal dimension, from moral steps to periods of history, from the other world to this world and from imaginative unity to realized unification? If this is done, the old *Mahdiyya* and *Senousiya* will return. The *zawiya* and the *ribat* will recuperate their militant functions. If mystics and mystical orders were capable of propagating Islam in earlier centuries, they are capable of defending Muslim societies in this century.

IV. RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MORAL PHASE

In the moral phase, mysticism appeared as an ethical science aiming at the moral perfection of the individual. If society is lost, at least the individual can be maintained. The question now is: Is society lost for ever or can it be recuperated? Development begins by the assumption that a society exists and that its development is possible. The question is how to shift again from the individual to society and from ethics to politics?

1. *From the soul to the body*

Since one early crisis from which mysticism originated was caused by the avidity of the soul, the ambition of the will, the destruction of values, the impurity of the heart and the corruption of behaviour, mystics reacted positively and returned back to purify the soul by spiritual exercises, the refinement of morals, the cure of "heart diseases", etc. Nowadays, the ills of the body are not less important than those of the soul: organic diseases, hunger, malnutrition, lack of

(3) The same three phases appear in the historical development of mysticism: the moral phase in the first three centuries (the early ascetics and weepers in the first century. Rabi'a al-'Adawiya and al-Hasan al Basri in the second, and al-Nun and al-Junaid in the third), the ethico-psychological phase in the fourth and fifth centuries (al-Hallaj in the fourth century and al-Gazali in the fifth) and the metaphysical phase in the sixth and seventh centuries (al-Suhrawardi, Ibn al-Farid and Ibn Arabi in the sixth and Ibn Sab'in in the seventh).

decent clothing and housing. If the problems in the past were related to the soul, the problems of the present are often related to the body[4].

2. *From interiority to exteriority*

Since old mysticism opened a new world of interiority as compensation of the material world of exteriority, everything was interiorized, text, language, phenomena, truth, etc. Everything had a double-meaning since reality has a double-face. If social and political powers usurpated the external, mysticism maintained the internal, something similar to modern political jargon often heard after 1967 defeat: our arms are defeated but our will is not; we lost a battle but not the war. In development era, what makes a problem is the external world, rural as well as urban development, industrialization, exploitation of national resources, digging for new sources of underground water to solve the problem of drought, "bonification" of land constructing houses, building roads and creating a whole infrastructure for public services. Socio-political powers controlling the external world can be changed since there is no development without power.

3. *From individual ethics to social politics*

Since one of the major reasons for the birth of the ancient mysticism are the corruption of individual ethics, a natural reaction was to promote an individual morality and to create a new ethical code. In *Ihya'*, six chapters of ten making the 3rd section on Muhlikate disapprove individual vices such as anger, rancour, envy, avarice, avidity, hypocrisy, conceit, arrogance, and seek to purify the heart from the love of wealth and material things.

4. *From secluded meditation to open action*

After the defeat of piety and the victory of impiety, after many unsuccessful efforts to restore the world to the control of law and truthfulness and in spite of the numbers of fallen martyrs in every generation, meditation was the only way left for the pious to express their anxieties, sorrows and hopes. Reflection on the present

(4) In classical treatises on mysticism there are always chapters on the soul, the spirit and the secret, but rarely on the body as in the writings of jurists, theologians and philosophers (Kushairi: *Risala*, p. 44-45, Subeh library edition).

situation, lamenting the lost piety of early generations and precipitating the coming of future glory — all occurred in seclusion. But now, in spite of the importance of individual thinking and reasoning, open action is necessary for change. A people's participation in development is as important as social planning. Spiritual development is not an alternative for social development but complementary to it.

5. *From mystical orders to socio-political movements*

When the pious returned to their homes after their defeat and isolated themselves from established society, they formed their own closed societies within their own practices, rituals and orders. Today, mystic orders all over the Muslim world are better organized even than modern political parties and enjoy the trust of the masses. Is it possible, in this era of development, to switch from closed mystical orders to open social groups that participate in socio-political development? It has been successfully done, e.g. *Senousiyya* in Lybia, *Mahdiyya* in Sudan, etc. The stumbling block for all social movements and political parties, namely the lack of lass-participation, can be avoided in these socio-mystical groups since mystical orders, at the core of religious movements and activities, enjoy mass-trust and are already present in the streets and market places.

V. RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ETHICO-PHYSHOLOGICAL PHASE

The second phase is the ethico-psychological phase in which mysticism progresses from practical morality to individual psychology, from a behavioural science to the pure psychology of human passions. Mysticism does not deal with external behaviour but with internal acts of piety. The focus is no more on the members of the body but on the acts of the heart. Mysticism now is the science of the secrets of the heart[5]. This science is composed of two sections: moral steps *(Maqama)* and psychological states *(Ahwâl)*.

From passive to active values

Most of classical moral steps *(Maqama)* and psychological states *(Ahwâl)* were passive as a last resort against the victorious enemy

(5) In *Ihyâ'*, the third section on Dangers *(Muhlikât)* begins by explaining the wonders of the heart (chapter one) and by the education of the soul, the refinement of morals and the cure of diseases of the heart (chapter 2).

(political evil) and rely on the inner good. Moral steps such as repentance, patience, gratitude, poverty, asceticism, reliance, acceptance, are conceived as defensive mechanism against world avidity and concupiscence. Such moral steps intertwined with psychological states are saviours *(Munjiyât)* from avidity, wealth and concupiscence of the flesh[6] which are mortal dangers and causes of perishment *(Muhlikât)*[7]. These passive values aimed at the protection of the few pious people from degeneration and corruption. If the world cannot be saved, at least the self can. If the impious is avid of the whole world let it be. What will man take if he wins the world and loses his self? The pious, namely the mystic, prefers poverty against the wealth of the impious, asceticism against avidity, reliance on God against dependence on political power, giving against having, accepting the minimum against asking for the maximum. How far has the present situation changed? A review of these moral steps makes the answer possible[8] [...]

VI. RECONSTRUCTION OF THE METAPHYSICAL PHASE

Once the mystic crosses the heartland of the mystical road, the middle stage, he arrives finally at the last stage which does not require all the previous efforts since the mystic already has passed all hurdles with great success. The third phase, the metaphysical one, is indeed the fruit to be collected, the result to be obtained and the reward to be received. However, even this phase needs to be reconstructed in order that development is achieved on earth.

1. *From the vertical to the horizontal*

Since mysticism directed itself upwards and since the world after being usurpated by the will of the impure was refractory to the will of the pure, it is no longer easy to bring it back to earth. Present generations, at least four, have tried to cope with the world again. Huge efforts were previously made for decolonization and nowadays for development. But these efforts appear limited because they have evaporated, spent somewhere else. However, if the

(6) *Ihyâ'*, Section IV, on Saviours *(Munjiyât)*.
(7) *Ihyâ'*, Section III, on Dangers *(Muhlikât)*.
(8) The number of moral steps varies, from a mystic to another, between seven, nine, eleven or thirteen. The order also changes from one treatise to another, with a general agreement on repentance as the first moral step and *Fanâ'* as the last psychological state.

vertical is transformed to the horizontal, these efforts may be conclusive and productive. If the movement of the mystical way is from the exterior (moral phase) to the interior (ethico-psychological phase) to the superior (metaphysical faith), the movement in development is from the superior (planning) to the interior (managing) to the exterior (achieving). If mysticism lost the world and was compensated by Heaven, nowadays developing countries are trying to conquer the Earth again. God is at the same time God of the Heavens and Earth. Land whether for decolonization or for labouring has become paramount.

2. *From moral steps to periods of history*

Since moral steps are periodic phases in the ascendant road, is it possible to conceive these moral steps as successive phases in development or as progressive periods of history? In mysticism, there is exactly what development requires: mobility, change, progress, periodization, perfection, sense of direction, the return to sources, finality, passion, commitment, struggle, hope, sense of victory, etc. It is only a matter of switching the relation between two parts of the equation, from the vertical relation to the horizontal. The superior in mysticism becomes progress in development and the inferior in mysticism becomes backwardness in underdevelopment. Development till now has not been conceived within the framework of history. Political development was extracted from the historical consciousness. The accurate and achievable plan is that which fits the transitional society from a historical period to another.

3. *From the other world to this world*

Since mysticism in its origin was a reaction to the defeat of piety and truthfulness in this world, it oriented itself towards the other world as a final refuge, unreachable by the impiety and falsehood of this world. When life on earth was impossible, the pious having died in martyrdom, eternal life after death became possible. The *Ihya'* ends by the description of eternal life after death[9]. Is it possible to bring life back to this world leaving the dead to bury the dead? One

(9) *Ihyâ'*. Section IV, chapter 10; given its importance, it is the only chapter in section IV divided into eight other internal chapters and is consequently the longest one.

development goal is the satisfaction of basic human needs: physical, psychological, moral and cultural in order to maintain life on earth individually, socially and culturally.

What is the purpose of all this detailed description of death and life after death, the final part in *Ihyâ'*? All depends on narratives, not on reason. The descriptions are purely hypothetical and sometimes frightening, especially the narratives relating to "Tortures in the grave". What is the purpose of describing agony in detail, or the scenes of the last judgement such as: scale, *stratus*, pool, paradise walls, lands, trees, rivers beds, covers, sofas, tents, virgins and boys? To frighten and excite are two ways in the logic of persuasion. However, development thinking is concerned with life rather than with death, with living people in urban areas in big cities such as Cairo and not with those in the grave.

4. *From imaginative unity to realized unification*

Since the defeat of piety and the victory of impiety, a separation between the ideal and the real was made. The unity between both became a mere hope within mysticism. Mystics used several images to express this unity between God and the World, truth and reality, spirit and nature, etc. The aim of mysticism and its final goal is unity as process, namely unification which corresponds to the active noun Tawhid, the corner-stone in Islamic faith. Why not switch from an imaginative unity between the ideal and the real to a realized unification of Islamic societies beyond artificial boundaries imposed on them as a left-over from the colonial era? The metaphysics of unity in mysticism can play an essential role in the achievement of unity as a political goal. The revivification of worldly sciences can be restructured as a conceptual framework for Pan-Islamism.

V. Conclusion

It is better for the Muslim world to develop through its own traditions, including the mystical tradition. Otherwise, the Muslim world will be always torn between traditionalism and secularism, between conservation and progressism, between fundamentalism and Westernism. A change through continuity is much more durable and safe than change through discontinuity. The challenge is how to develop the Muslim world through its own traditions including

mysticism, not through the secular ideologies of modernization: Marxism, socialism, nationalism, liberation, etc. The first is deep-rooted in the heart of the masses as mass culture and mass behaviour. The second is uprooted from mass culture and can be easily accused of Westernization and alienation.

This is only an example, hastily written, of how mysticism, a legacy from the past and still living in the present, can be used to solve the drama of the present, namely development.

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