PART THREE

PIETY, IMPIETY AND RELIGIOUS DISSENT
CHAPTER SEVEN

PIETY

True piety (birr) is this: to believe in God, and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the Prophets, to give of one’s substance, however cherished, to kinsmen, and orphans, the needy, the traveler, beggars, and to ransom the slave, to perform the prayer, to pay the alms (zakāt). And they who fulfill their covenant, when they have engaged in a covenant, and endure with fortitude misfortune, hardship and peril, these are they who are true in their faith, these are the truly godfearing (al-muttaqūn). (Qur’ān, 2:177).

Up to this point, we have investigated four arenas of public religious activity. Based on these investigations, and on additional material highlighting various aspects of private and public conduct of individual Muslims and their ideas of religious devotion, I will examine, in the first section of this chapter, the perceptions and practices of personal piety in Zangid and Ayyūbid Syria. Here, I have found it necessary to treat men and women of different social groups separately, and to accordingly formulate several role models of piety and righteousness: those of the pious ruler, the pious emir, the pious scholar, and the pious ‘ordinary’ Muslim (as constructed from bits and pieces in the multiple sources used in this work). The discussion of each model is an attempt to decipher the various meanings attributed to specific practices that were held to express religious commitment and feeling, and includes an analysis of their social functions. The final part of this section is a discussion of the two trends I find to have been the most influential in shaping perceptions of proper belief and righteous conduct in twelfth–thirteenth century Syria: moderate Sufism and moderate Ḥanbalism.

The second chapter of this part deals with contemporaneous perceptions of impiety and dissent. While it would be inconceivable for us to put ourselves in the position of the inquisitor and make a positivistic catalog of ‘practices of impiety’ (parallel to the catalog of pious practices, which emerges quite readily from the earlier discussion), other strategies are hampered by the fact that the direct voices