Part Two
CHAPTER EIGHT

TYPES OF RELIGIOSITY

The disagreement of mankind is caused by names:
Peace ensues when they advance to the reality (denoted by the name). ¹

Errors of judgement often occur when a single term carries multiple meanings or a single meaning goes under different names. Arriving at uniform judgements about these multiple meanings or making multiple judgements about that single meaning is to fall into error and go astray. And disentangling entangled terms is the duty of all seekers of knowledge. Religiosity is one such term. When we ask ourselves: “Was Iranian society more religious under the Qajar Dynasty (1779–1925) or is it more religious today? Are modern Western societies less religious than communities in the Middle Ages?” Or, when discussing the issue of secularity and secularization a bit of thought and reflection brings us to the realization that we will never find the answers to our questions unless we disentangle the different layers and categories of religiosity. It may well be that society is more religious today in one sense and less so in another. Hence, distinguishing the different layers and categories of religiosity is a must for anyone interested in theories of religion and secularization, knowledge and reform.

If we take the volume of mourning ceremonies and fasts and tears and supplications and candles and pilgrimages and bows before the clergy, then the Qajar period will seem to be in the lead. If we take the volume of critical studies and opinions and debates about religion, we are quite likely to judge today’s society more religious and more religion-minded. If we probe further and see that every category of religiosity offers different readings of God and the Prophet and sin and obedience and felicity and wretchedness, then we will grasp the gravity and sensitivity of the matter more clearly.

Categorizing religiosity is certainly not a new or innovative idea. When the Holy Qur’an speaks of the people of yamin (the ones on the right) and the sabiqoun (the vanguards), it is presenting a kind

¹ Mathnawi, 2: 3667.