CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MORALS AND SOCIAL LIFE

In this second chapter dealing with the ideological characteristics of the MB, we will discuss thematic connections that are associated, to a greater extent, with Sayyid Qutb. Besides the intensive use of his Koranic exegetis, his impact is perceptible in many public speeches, sometimes in a quite explicit way. We give here several examples that are to be placed in relation with themes that come out of the *Zilāl* of Qutb as analyzed by O. Carré [Carré, 1984].

The themes discussed in this chapter (as well as in chapters 14 and 15) cover the areas of morals and social, community-related, civilization-related, and political considerations. The positions adopted are sometimes manichaean in nature,¹ and sometimes subtle, inviting the reader to reflection and introspection. They have proven to be particularly important, because they are more concerned with social life; they directly imply certain modalities of intra-communitarian living together, and even more.

The themes developed by Sayyid Qutb have come once again to match the tastes of the present day, developed and even amplified as concerns their consequences. They are given interpretations that are more differentiated than those initially put forward by Hassan Al-Bannā; the variations of opinion therein are more diversified or discreetly polemical.

Throughout these chapters, the theme of individual responsibility is continuously sounded, although in another sense it is constantly placed in a relation of tension with regard to the idea of a responsibility toward the collectivity. In fact, although the theme of individual responsibility does concern the interpretation of Islamic texts, the area of social practices, and also the project of proper management of the Earth (*khilafat*

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¹ In this regard, O. Carré described as ‘grotesque’ the idea of reproaching Sayyid Qutb with having a manichaean vision of the world, in which every non-Islamic society is designated as a ‘society of error’: according to him, and with reference to Max Weber, this is part of any ‘ethics of conviction’ [Carré, 1984:73]. In the light of contemporary discussions, we have observed that the Qutbist analyses of Western dynamics are sometimes easily transposed onto a European context.
al-ard), in the final analysis what is valued most highly is the duty of seeking to honor the initial pact that exists between God and human beings. Since they are given the use of creation in exchange for their submission to divine commands, it is always the management of responsibilities that are both individual and collective that is at issue.

1. Three approaches to the theme of jihad (and the theme of sacrifice)

These two themes are part of the ten pillars of the Brotherhood, fundamental principles developed by Hassan Al-Bannā, around which the life of militants is to be organized. Founding his argument upon several suras, he established the centrality of the pre-existing Islamic concept of jihad. He puts new life into it, giving it a higher value and a practical scope as well. Hassan Al-Bannā developed the idea according to which it is important for a Muslim Brother to concretely seek to satisfy God: he must lead a virtuous life, persevere in the effort to accomplish his objectives, engage in a permanent struggle against his own ego, and make an effort to preach. In itself, the practice of faith thus becomes completely fundamental. Faith without works is not sufficient: for the Brotherhood, a Muslim worthy of the name must respect the five pillars of Islam, but must also practice filling the various aspects of his life with the spirit of jihad.

At the center of his Koranic exegesis, Sayyid Qutb declares himself in favor of “the spirit of combat on behalf of God” [Carré, 1984:123–142] against any absolute sovereignty (hākimīyya) on the part of human beings, of any type. According to him, the struggle to obtain proper guidance (qiyāda) for humankind, in the sense put forward by Islam, begins with education (tarbiyya) in the community, “for this should allow men to attain a level never before attained”; it is not a matter of forcing people to embrace Islam. Beyond the effort one is obliged to exert upon oneself, also called the jihad of souls (or the greater jihad), Qutb puts forward the idea of physical combat on behalf of God (also called the lesser jihad, or the jihad of the body). These two complementary dimensions can converge and rejoin each other.

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2 S. Qutb, *L'islam par le martyr*, Riyadh, International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1999, pp. 143–150. We do not know that S. Qutb wrote a book with that title, but the IIFSO circulates it as such, and it was probably put together from excerpts from another book (whose date we do not know).