D. Makboul and M. El Ghazi (eds)


The book contains the proceedings of a conference held at The National University of Ostroh Academy (Ukraine) in November 2014 regarding, as the title says, imam Abdessalam Yassine’s (ʿAbd al-Salām Yāsīn (1928-2012), founder of the Moroccan Islamist movement al-ʿAdl wa-l-Iḥsān) thought. It is a welcome book insofar as it shows critical awareness of the complexities of modernity in an epoch wherein Islamic thought—and especially the so-called fundamentalist and/or radical Islamic thought—too often oversimplifies theoretical and practical issues as well (it could be enough to remember the Muslim Brotherhood’s trivial slogan al-Islām huwa al-ḥall). Islamic thought needs courage and openness and this book demonstrates that new trends are emerging and developing.

The book is edited by Driss Makboul (CRMEF of Meknès) and by Mohamed El Ghazi (Ibn Zohr University, Agadir) and contains nine papers dealing with: a comparison between Yassine’s and the Jewish neo-kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen’s religious ideas at the end of Cohen’s life (ʿA. Obeid Hussein); a discussion from Yassine’s point of view of the human wisdom’s claim to escape from divine revelation (H. Muhammad Ajmal); the concept of reason in Yassine (Anouar Jamaoui); the application of reason and mind to the Qur’ān according to Yassine (Ahmed Bouaoud); a methodological critic of positivism in accordance with Yassine’s ideas (M. Sanaullah al-Nadavi); Yassine’s renewal of the Prophetic concepts (Mohamed El Ghazi); Yassine on superstition (Mohsen Nouraei and Mohammad Molavi); a comparative study of René Guénon’s and Yassine’s spirituality (François Clairval); a comparative study of Yassine’s and Maududi’s political thought (Raza Taimoor).

The book is philosophical and modern in the sense that it stays in full confrontation with the most advanced trends of (Western) philosophy. Obviously Yassine’s thought par-lui-meme and its interpretations are not necessarily the same: I mean that what Yassine truly said can be inconsistent with what is deduced by other authors from his thought. As the book’s papers are not historical but mainly theoretical, more than an overview of Yassine’s thought, we find an effort of further elaboration starting from a few basic tenets of Yassine himself.

A number of burning problems are faced in the book, but in general the focus is about the finding of a new pattern of rationality, and the contributors undoubtedly show readiness to confront with (Western) philosophy and
science, discussed through Yassine’s lens. The imagine I derive of Yassine’s thought is sophisticated, but not free from traditional inclinations. In Ahmed Bouaoud’s analysis, Yassine tried to find a synthesis between ʿaql, naql and taṣawwuf. ʿAql, “mind”, would be the reception of the realities of revelation by means of the heart. Rationality would mean that human being is subjected to a distinctive kind of normative appraisal through obligations, prohibitions and permissions. But it is clear that reason and juridical norms have no meaning if not vivificate by spirit.

As the contributors pointed out, Yassine’s commitment to mysticism is fundamental in order to enhance reason and jurisprudence and social life through spirituality, but it would be disappointing if his mystic ideas could be truly considered akin to Guénon’s ones, as claimed by François Clairval. In my view, René Guénon’s esotericism was—to say the best—synchretic and ambiguous. Sure, common themes emerge between Islamic and, say, Hindu “metaphysics” (but which kind of metaphysics we are speaking of?), but personally I do not see how the Qur’an, the monotheistic personal God and the Prophet’s sunnah could convey the same “metaphysical” concepts of Hindu Vedanta or Bagavad Ghita.

Yassine can be placed in the mainstream of Muslim reformers and revivalists. As Muḥammad ʿAbduh before him, he did not see any contradiction between reason and revelation, although reason is not able to grasp every secret of nature and divinity. This is the reason why Yassine criticized the incoherence of positivism if it means material progress without humanism. As to natural sciences, al-Nadavi acknowledges in his article that, according to Yassine, nature is a book written in mathematical language (Galileo Galilei’s precise expression), but science must be learnt for the sake of understanding God’s handiwork and for taking care of humanity’s physical and spiritual needs, and not in itself—a weak position in front of Western (Baconian) goal of dominating nature.

As to Maududi, the Pakistani revivalist was far more “political” than Yassine and far less inclined to mysticism. He is quoted in relation to democracy. Both the thinkers were ready to accept the procedural rules of democracy in Raza Taimoor’s view, as the voting system or Parliamentarism. However, according to Taimoor, Islamic šūrah is not democracy in the Western sense, because, while Western democracy began in pagan Athens and ends in secularism, šūrah had its beginning in pious Medina and keeps a religious character. Yassine’s concept of šūrah is not discussed thoroughly however.

Yassine’s thought seems often at odds with contemporary secular and scientifically-minded Western philosophy. But, apart from any consideration of content, the